The Walk

by Persephoneshadow

Summary

NOW COMPLETE:

Castiel tells himself it was a one time thing, even if his night with a hooker named Dean changed his whole world, but he can’t keep away from the man fate keeps throwing in his path. Castiel is married and he knows his sexuality is an affront to God and everything he’s ever been told is right.

Dean tells himself he doesn’t care about the weirdo with blue eyes, but every time they meet he gets a bit closer to something like hope. Dean’s nothing but a homeless waste of space with a brother in foster care a world away and a father in the wind.
As the connection between these two lost men deepens, it threatens the carefully maintained lies their lives are built on in a story of faith, mistakes, and the journey of love.

Notes

This work continues the story begun in Hide and Seek, which I would recommend reading first before diving in here. The 5k challenge was so fun, and I set out to get as much angst into one little story as I could...and one little story couldn't contain it. So here we are.

Some notes and warnings: Cas is married to Anna in this fic and has sex with her, but the focus of the fic is on Dean and Castiel. In later chapters there will be depictions of violence, homelessness, trauma, and sex work. I will include specific warnings on chapters for content because it will get heavy. More tags may be added, and if you feel I need to add some or up the warnings on the fic, please let me know.

The title of the fic, like "Hide and Seek," is a song by Imogen Heap.

All that said, I hope you enjoy this journey.
Castiel finds comfort in routine. Not pleasure, or joy; just something resembling peace. He leaves for work every day at 7:30 am on the dot and pulls in to his parking spot outside the hospital at exactly 7:58, which gives him just enough time to make it into his office on the ground floor at 8:00 precisely. Lunch at noon. Off at 5:00. Home for dinner, chit chat, television, chores. In the evenings
he runs, showers and is in bed before 10:00. Anna makes fun of him for it, sometimes. She’s more likely to vary in scheduling. She’s always been the spontaneous one.

Castiel’s schedule leaves time for the things that don’t fit in with his life as well. Like lying awake at night, going over how today was just like yesterday and will be just like tomorrow. His whole life melting into an ocean of sameness that’s slowly downing him. The usual. The routine is complacency and numbness. Not peace. He masturbates in the shower to thoughts of strangers. One stranger. He pretends to pray. He avoids looking at the sweet picture of Christ his mother gave them that hangs in the hall and doesn’t touch the Bibles because he is unclean. He tries every week to be the husband Anna deserves. He keeps up the routine of the man he is supposed to be. He moves along in monotony and lies to himself that it will get easier.

The week has a rhythm too. Tuesdays are family night. Friday is ‘date night.’ Saturday is community service. Sunday is church, of course, and another family dinner sometimes. Thursdays, Anna has her night shift. Thursdays are the days that Castiel usually goes for an extra long run, then watches the medical shows that Anna hates for their inaccuracies. It doesn’t bother Castiel, but he’s not the doctor. She doesn’t understand why Castiel likes them. Maybe it’s because she doesn’t. But he keeps them to himself and it’s fine. Sometimes on Thursdays he’ll sneak out for a burger.

He could tell himself that’s all he did tonight. He can wash off the scent of the city and pretend it was just another dream. He could convince himself the receipt from the diner that he’s been staring at for fifteen minutes as he sits parked in the open garage is just evidence of the burger that he shouldn’t have eaten. He could tell himself a lot of things. He’s very good at that.

He doesn’t even know why he took the receipt. He paid with cash, the way he always does when he goes somewhere unauthorized. Heaven knows he doesn’t need to deduct this meal or get reimbursed. Keeping the receipt was just a habit and now Castiel is staring at it and he doesn’t know what to do. He should just tear it up and throw it away in the trash bin in the garage. Anna will never check out there. But if he throws it away, there’s nothing left to convince him that Dean was real.

Dean.

Saturdays are community service. Saturdays are when Castiel volunteers with the rescue mission and hopes to see the beautiful boy with green eyes, then come home lost in fantasies of that mouth and face. On Sundays he prays for forgiveness just for the thought.

What do you do when your sin has become more than a thought or a filthy urge? Castiel didn’t feel dirty or wrong fucking Dean. Didn’t feel guilty at all kissing him, or with that perfect mouth on his cock. It was the most intense experience of his life and at the same time it was shrouded in darkness and outside of his routine and it didn’t feel real. It still doesn’t. Except for the little piece of paper in his hands.

Castiel heaves a breath, a wave of nausea and emotion surging through him. He barely has time to make it out of the car and to the edge of the driveway before the sickness and clenching pain in his stomach take over and he heaves into the bushes. He vomits up the remains of the dinner he wasn’t supposed to eat, tears springing to his eyes; then staggers back, panting. The pain in his chest is still there, acid searing in his emptied stomach. He takes it, as usual, knowing it’s deserved.

“Fuck…” he whispers, swallowing back the bile.

Anna’s far more likely to notice that mess than the receipt that’s now sitting in the footwell of his pristine car. He can imagine the questions she might ask and he can already think of appropriate lies in response. The idea makes his heart race and his stomach churn, as if his body is trying to expel even the memory of Dean and his touch, just like the food. Something else to be discarded and
Castiel staggered back up the driveway and into the garage. Anna’s space is still empty, as it should be. She won’t be home until past midnight, as usual. If she came home early on this night of all nights, it would be a certain sign that God was punishing him. But she didn’t.

He retrieves the receipt from the car, shoves it in the pocket of his trench and heads inside. He punches in the alarm code and doesn’t bother turning on the lights. The big two-story great room of their house is cavernous and his steps echo in the dark as he carefully stows his coat, hiding his one shred of evidence like a treasure. He doesn’t want to forget. Not yet.

He shakes as he undresses for the shower, thinking back to how Dean peeled off his clothes and the taste of the other man’s bruised lips against his. His cock stirs at the thought, followed by a new surge of acrid shame in his gut. He can still smell the grease of the diner and the stale stink of the hotel room on his clothes. And Dean’s sweat on his skin. Castiel shoves his clothes to the bottom of the hamper and climbs into the shower. The water is ice but his cock stays hard, mocking. He turns the water to scalding and scrubs and scrubs. He can’t scrub out his memory, of course. He closes his eyes and sees Dean above him, smiling with bravado and so incredibly beautiful.

He takes himself in hand, remembering Dean tight and warm around him. He wanted it to feel wrong. Even when he kissed him, he prayed for disgust. It should have felt wrong because it was wrong. But just the memory has Cas biting his free hand with a groan. He masturbated to thoughts of a stranger for months and now he knows his name and how it feels to fuck him and Castiel is doomed because just the thought of how good it felt has him coming on the perfect marble tiles of the shower.

Castiel pretends the moisture on his face is just water. He pretends God is not watching.

He takes a sleeping pill, the ones Anna gives him a worried look about, but she’s not here so she’ll never know. She won’t know any of it. Ever. He brushes his teeth until his gums bleed.

Castiel dresses for bed and climbs under the covers. The orange glow of the streetlight through the tree outside casts shadows on the ceiling like a mosaic. Anna hates when he leaves the blinds up, says it’s indecent that their neighbors might see into their bedroom. He leaves them open.

Their bed is so soft compared to the hotel mattress. There was a spring stabbing his hip at some point, he thinks. He’s not sure – he was distracted. Dean seemed so grateful for a bed to sleep in. With his bruises and hungry frame, he’s probably sleeping easy for the first time in a while. Cas did that. He helped. It was the least he could do after Dean treated him so…

He can’t find the right word. He falls asleep trying to find it.

He wakes up like it’s a normal Friday. Anna is asleep beside him and the blinds are closed. The dark, shut-in space of their room makes him remember. He doesn’t get sick this time but it’s a close thing. He gets dressed too quickly, doesn’t bother with shaving and trudges downstairs for breakfast.

On Fridays, he has frozen waffles. The organic kind is all he can get away with, but since this is the one day Anna sleeps late, she’s not there to make a smoothie or dole out yogurt with granola on it. He doesn’t bother today, just grabs some fruit and a new bottle of antacid to keep in the desk at work.

He sits in his car in the parking lot for five minutes when he arrives, fingering the receipt fished from
his pocket. They didn’t give him one at the hotel. He laughs bitterly at the idea of a receipt from Dean. He could imagine Dean making a joke about that. He was witty.

Castiel finally makes it out of the car, not even bothering to lock it. He trudges down the line of near identical blue and grey and black sedans, his own silver Camry blending in and disappearing immediately. The hall to his office is similarly sterile and dark. Not in the way the rest of the hospital is sterile, but in the featureless sameness of each door and wall. The administration office always felt shoved in as an afterthought, stuck on the first floor where no light makes it in the windows because the patients need views and sunshine more.

“Good, you’re here. I thought you were dead.” Despite her small stature, Meg never fails to look imposing, glowering over her computer at the door.

“I’m only a few minutes late,” Castiel grumbles, heading directly to the office kitchenette for coffee.

“Well, you look like shit,” Meg says. Castiel can almost hear Hannah give her a glare from the other side of the office.

“Profanity, Meg.”

“Coffee, Cas,” Meg shoots back and Castiel gives her a glare as he pulls out a chipped ‘Good Morning, Sunshine!’ mug off the shelf and fills it from the pot.

“I’m putting cream in.” It’s not a good argument and his stomach protests at the threat of more acid added to the mix, but he doesn’t care. He needs it. He pours in extra half and half and shuts the fridge too hard.

“And I was making a factual statement.” Meg looks smug as Castiel passes her to get to his office. It’s too early for arguments.

“Castiel, are you alright?” Hannah asks from the desk across the office. Next to her Alfie looks worried too. Castiel wonders how bad he must look for this level of concern.

“I’m feeling under the weather.” It’s not really a lie. “Stomach. Again.”

Hannah gives an earnest nod and Meg glares at the coffee in his hand. She’s usually the one that brings it to him and hides his mugs when Anna drops in. It makes no sense that she cares now.

“I’ll be fine, let’s just get to work.”

“Take your medicine!” Meg yells after him. He washes down a double dose of Prilosec with the coffee and appreciates the irony.

Castiel dives into his usual sea of numbers and claims. Black and white and orderly. His mind doesn’t drift too much, just when he stops for sips of coffee or to look out the sliver of a window at his glimpse of sky beyond the shrubs. He allows himself flashes of Dean’s face, painted red by the neon of the motel sign or awash with pleasure beneath Castiel and his guts twist and his heart races.

He means to skip lunch but Meg barges in with cottage cheese and an English muffin at two. He gathers from her expression that his appearance hasn’t improved.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Meg asks, obviously waiting to see if he eats before she leaves.

“I’m fine. I told you.”
“Are you and Anna fighting again? Is she pushing on the-”

“Meg, I’m fine.” It comes out much harsher than he meant and Meg draws back. Castiel chews his lip and tries to breathe.

Maybe Meg would understand. She’s his only friend that doesn’t go to his church, or go to any church. She sneaks him coffee and donuts and makes off-color jokes. She watches the movies the pastor tells them to boycott and votes blue. But talking about it makes it real and that’s too much right now. Just the thought of putting it into words makes Castiel dizzy and cold.

“Busllshit, you look like you’re about to pass out,” Meg pushes and Castiel can barely glare at her.

“I’m…” I’m sick because I fucked a man for the first time last night and now I know what I am and…

“Castiel?”

The both look up at Hannah poking her head through the door. “Y-yes?”

“I just wanted to say goodbye.”

“Goodbye?” Castiel blinks at her.

“I’m spending the rest of the afternoon and tomorrow with my cousin and his family, remember? They fly out tomorrow late so I won’t see you downtown either.”

Hannah volunteers at the mission on Saturdays too. She bags the sandwiches. Castiel imagines going there tomorrow and the possibility of seeing…

“I won’t be there either. I may actually have acquired an illness. I think I’ll take the day to rest.”

“Feel better soon. We’ll add a prayer for you.” Hannah means so well but it makes Castiel feel worse. He looks up at Meg and her face is smug.

“Good thing you’re married to a doctor,” Meg says.

Castiel considers not going home. It’s a nice day, he could go to the park or walk but he fears that if he lets himself stray he’ll end up back downtown. When he walks into the house, with the summer sun streaming though high windows and the bright green of the garden visible out the back door, there’s comfort to it. It’s a lie, he knows that in his soul. But it’s a beautiful one.

It’s been so long since he’s seen Anna painting. When then sun catches her red hair and she turns to smile at him, in the moment before her face fills with concern; he remembers when he’d find her in the studio in school. He remembers the sun in her hair the day they got married and all the hope he felt then.

“Hon, what are you doing home? Are you okay?” Anna asks, dropping her brush in a cup by her easel and rushing towards Castiel. “You look awful.”

“I think I’m coming down with a bug of some sort, decided to come home.”

Anna switches into doctor mode instantly, hand on Castiel’s head first then checking his pulse. “You are warm, but that could just be the day. Is it your stomach? Have you been—”

“I’ve been nauseous on and off since last night, nothing too bad.” Again, not a lie.
“Is that why you skipped your run?”

Castiel goes pale and shaky. He nods. “Yes. I came home late and I got sick in the bushes.”

“Cas, babe, why didn’t you tell me?” The way she rubs his shoulder, the concern in her face and voice. He doesn’t deserve it but he takes it, leans in towards her and sighs. “I don’t know if tonight I can…”

“Don’t worry. We can stay in, watch a movie. No pressure.” Her response is instant and her smile is kind and genuine. “You’ve probably got heat exhaustion from wearing that damn coat in July.”

“I like it,” Castiel mutters as Anna strips it off. For a second he panics that she’ll go through the pockets, but he took care to store the receipt carefully at the back of a drawer at work. Just like the memory of Dean is tucked away safely, unable to do harm.

Castiel is pliant as Anna leads him to their big white coach and pushes him down. “You want pink stuff or white?”

“Neither.” It’s a useless protest, because when Anna decides she’s taking care of someone, there’s no point in fighting. He’s been told many times that he’s a terrible patient, usually because he doesn’t want people to bother, but today he doesn’t want to feel better. He shouldn’t be allowed to.

“Cas.” Anna waits, looming above him with an eyebrow raised. He knows that look. He remembers her in college, before they started dating. He remembers how she’d make him go home from the library and bring him pastries and tea in the morning. He remembers the first time she tried to cook for him because he said he missed his mother’s meatloaf and the terrible disaster it had been. He remembers her helping him to breathe and stem his panic before exams and how she was the one there to celebrate with him when he aced it.

“White.”

“I’ll make you some tea too.”

He feels better by the time they’re in bed. They watched some old movies (a date night staple when they don’t feel like going out) chomping on popcorn and curled together on the couch. No salt or butter of course, but it was fine. He plays with Anna’s hair as she rests her head on his chest while they watch the ten o’clock news. It’s peaceful.

Anna kisses him gently before turning out the light and Castiel’s calm vanishes.

“Are you still feeling sick?”

“Yes,” Castiel stammers, panic rising. “I don’t think I’ll even be up for going downtown tomorrow.”

“That bad?” There’s disappointment in her voice, and resignation.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Next week.”

Castiel nods in the dark.
For a guy with a car, Dean sure walks a lot. He has to be careful with the Impala. The fake tags are up to date, but if he ever gets pulled over he’s completely fucked. It’s not like she’s got registration and something tells him none of his fake IDs are gonna cut it with an actual officer of the law. Gas is so expensive and mileage on the old girl is so bad that the only real action she gets is moving from one parking space to another. Dean tries to keep her as far away from the shitty parts of town as he can. Hence the walking.

His boots are old, but they’re army surplus so they’re still in okay condition. He has one other pair in the trunk, shoved in with all his other crap, but there’s a crack in the sole of the right shoe and one wrong step in a puddle means a wet foot all day. The shoes and Baby get him from point A to B and today point B is downtown. Dean’s a regular in the shittiest part of the city, where the color has drained from everything, leaving faded, dirty buildings and people. He blends in to the wash of brown and gray like another piece of trash discarded on the street. He likes it that way.

Coming down here on Saturdays is never about business, considering it’s daylight and not too many people here can afford what Dean’s selling. This is social time, mostly. He knows a few folks in the camps and other spots that he likes to check on. Main reason for the weekly visit is that the shelter up on Massachusetts Avenue has free phones and Saturday is his call with Sam. No way in hell he’s missing that.

So what if he hits the area early today and has an extra eye out for the flash of a trench coat? He’s hungry and curious. And fuck knows he doesn’t have anything better to do. He watches the regular crowd of volunteers trickle out of the mission, puffing on a stale cigarette that some john handed him with his cash a week or so ago. They all look so out of place in their nice clean windbreakers, khakis, and sensible shoes. He wonders if Cas will be in his trench today. It’s pretty warm, but Dean’s got his leather jacket on, so he can’t judge. Wearing as much as you can is a habit you get into when you don’t have a closet.

No one he really recognizes and definitely not Cas. He drops the cigarette butt to the sidewalk, giving into disappointment, so he’s not paying attention when some blonde chick shoves two sandwiches in his hand. They’re just bread and cheese, not PB&J, and the woman looks straight through Dean. Guess that answers how Cas coped with his first fuck.

He heads back towards the park. He has better things to do than dwell on some fucking closet case anyway. It’s been a while since he’s actually spent the night in the tent city in Constant park, but he visits often enough. He finds Martin in the back, the marine insignia on his cap is obscured by grime and the green of his old fatigues is fading, but he jumps up to attention when he sees Dean.

“Morning, Major!”

“Martin, how many times do I have to tell you, I ain’t my dad.” Martin’s eyes focus better on Dean and a genuine smile spreads across his face. Good. Dean’s not gonna have to explain again how they’re not in the army anymore and oh yeah, Dad’s fucking gone.

“Hey, Dean, how’s it going?”

“Just about as good as you’d think.”

Martin’s eyes fall on the still-healing bruises on Dean’s face. “Hope you gave as good as you got there, son.”

“Oh, you know I did.” The fake bravado is always easy for Dean. It’s a mask so worn and comfortable it’s part of his skin. No reason for Martin to know about him spitting out blood on a dirty
bathroom floor or the cracks still healing in his ribs. Dean hands Martin one of the sandwiches, avoiding the beady-eyed glare of the guy who camps next to him. “Scram, Kubrick, nothing for you.”

“You can’t afford to buy something for your friend? Gotta bring him the free stuff?” Kubrick sneers back. “Cocksucking not paying out this week?”

“Fuck off.” Dean turns his back to the other guy, hiding the twenty he slips Martin. “Get a shower, okay, man?”

“Yes, Sir,” Martin says with a salute that makes Dean’s skin crawl. He walks away, taking a different route than he came by, through the winding muddy paths of the camp. He sees a few other faces he knows: Wally, Roy, Caleb. He doesn’t know if he’s relieved or worried that he doesn’t see Lee and Krissy. Maybe they finally found a shelter. That would be good news, streets are no place for a kid, even one as smart as Krissy.

“Yo, Rufus, you got the time?” Dean asks the grizzled man at the makeshift desk at the front of the camp. Rufus keeps the whole place running. He deals with the police and takes the donations from nice, clean folk that hand off their half-finished party platters to the camp so they can feel better about themselves.

“10:47. Ain’t you got some place better to be than annoying my black ass?” Rufus shoots back.

“That I do.”

Dean sighs and heads towards the shelter. He avoids the stern eyes of Ellen behind the front desk and heads to the phones, thankfully there’s not a line. Sometimes he misses having a phone, but it’s real hard to pay a damn cell bill when you don’t have an address. And it’s not like he really has anyone to call. He thinks of Cas’s number wedged neatly in his wallet and shakes his head. The sap is probably safe back in his closet somewhere in the suburbs. He’d never answer if Dean called.

Dean has the number memorized and Sam picks up after one ring.

“Dean?!”

“Who else would call your lame ass?” Dean smiles into the phone. It feels strange, because this smile isn’t quite real either, and Sam can’t even see it, but it’s a different lie for a different reason today. “How are things in Cleveland?”

“Boring,” Sam sighs, sounding put upon and petulant as only a fourteen-year-old can. “I’m already done with summer reading, so I’ve been hanging out at the library and looking at the junior curriculum stuff.”

“Nerd. It’s friggin’ summer, you should be hanging with your friends.”

“Yeah, sure. All those friends I made in the last month of the year at a new school.” Dean hates the bitterness in Sam’s voice. “No one wants to hang out with the foster kid anyway.”

“Fuck anyone that says that. You’re a dweeb, but you’re cool enough.”

“Thanks, Dean.”

“They treating you okay? Mr. and Mrs. Hess?”

“They’re fine. I get fed, they get their checks, nothing new to report.” Dean doesn’t like what Sam’s
not saying. And he really doesn’t like how helpless it makes him feel.

“You need anything? I’m working on the coat.”

“I’m fine, Dean. You don’t need to worry. And you know-”

“I’m your big brother, worrying about you is my job.” Dean tries to keep the smile in his voice.

“I checked out that Vonnegut book you were talking about,” Sam says, ending the discussion. Dean keeps up his attention as they chat about books and movies and nothing for a while, but the smile fades. The call ends the same what it always does. With Sam suddenly having to hang up and Dean telling him to watch his back. He doesn’t bother with the “see you soon” lie anymore.

Dean hangs around downtown for longer than usual after the call is done, feeling unsettled and antsy. It’s probably because he hasn’t worked for a few days, thanks to Cas over-paying. Dean’s ribs still ache and there’s definitely pain if he moves the wrong way, but his face looks fine now, so he can probably find something or someone to do. Even with that thought in his head he sticks around the area, walking bored laps around the mission and past the soup kitchen. Nothing.

He walks past husks of abandoned buildings, empty windows and rotting wood over gaping doors. The smell of piss and exhaust and dust stings in his nose and no one looks at him as he walks by. He ends up at a bar near the river late that night, then fucked hard and fast in the stall by a bear of a guy. It gets him enough cash for seven shots before he stops counting and stumbles back to his car.
Chapter 2

Castiel’s legs still ache from his Thursday run when he walks to his car after work on Friday. He kept going for miles longer than usual, unwilling to turn back home and face the empty quiet of the house. He didn’t want to think of how easy it had been to drive downtown. How Anna hadn’t noticed. How simple it would be to find Dean again. He had to put as much distance between himself and that temptation as possible because it was done. He’d sinned and learned how deep the crack in his soul went, but he couldn’t do it again. He wouldn’t. So he ran and ran and ran, and he can still feel the tired twitch of over-exertion in his legs 24 hours later. He wonders how long the ache will last, maybe all the way until Church.

Services last Sunday had been particularly dull and condemning, but the drudgery of the week had been a balm. Each day he thought about Dean less. He was getting close to removing his name from his thoughts. Thinking of him as ‘the prostitute.’ Soon he would just be a mistake in the back of Castiel’s mind. He tells himself that over and over as he drives home. He has to forget Dean now. Right now, because tonight was date night. That probably has something to do with why Castiel sits frozen in his car again, dreading the walk inside.

Tonight, it’s Anna’s turn to plan things. They alternate, but her ideas are always better. She’s the one that finds new restaurants or plays or fireworks or any manner of amusements appropriate for a young married couple. Castiel always enjoys those, or tries to. It’s easier if he puts the rest of the evening, or life, out of his mind and stays in the moment. He’s become very good at that. It’s when they get home and get upstairs that it goes wrong.

It’s been two weeks since the fight. Since Anna tearfully asked again if it was her or if there was something wrong with him. She begged Cas to talk to the pastor or even a doctor. As if this was something that could be cured or prayed away. So he’d tried to prove to himself one last time that he wasn’t the thing he already knew in his heart he was. And look where that had got him. At least he knows he doesn’t need a doctor.

“Welcome home!” Anna’s bright voice cuts off his thoughts at he enters the house. The table is laid with candles and food and there’s even cupcakes visible on the counter. “I thought we could just stay in tonight, since you’ve been so worn out this week.”

Castiel smiles. He never has to tell Anna when he’s feeling bad, she just knows and gives him what’s best for him. “Where did you order from?”

“The natural market, of course, you know me. I got you that macaroni salad with the garlic you like so much. And…” Anna pulls a DVD out from under a napkin. “Sunset Boulevard, Blu-Ray special edition. Do you remember watching this together at the old Paramount in college?”
Castiel remembers going home after with impure thoughts of William Holden in his head. “You thought it was supposed to be a musical.”

Anna grins.

Dinner is good. The movie is as beautiful and tense and tragic as Castiel remembers. Norma Desmond, desperate to hold on to the one person that makes her feel wanted, is as haunting as ever and William Holden is still handsome and acerbic and doomed. Castiel tries to keep his breath steady when Anna excuses herself upstairs. He’s expected in five minutes.

All those years ago, he’d driven Anna home, his thoughts distracted. He’d been thinking of William Holden when she kissed him. Her hand had found the bulge in his jeans and she’d gasped. The shock of her unzipping him, pulling his hard member free and stroking him with an unsure hand had been exciting. The sensation was good and he was young and when he came with a cry he was able to tell himself that it was her hand on his cock that he liked, not the visions in his mind.

That’s how it works, usually. Or it did. Castiel’s skill at summoning up a dream faded over time as fantasies were replaced with cold reality. That was fine, he told himself he didn’t need a fantasy. Shouldn’t need it. And he’d tried so hard to do it right. But for the last year sex was worse each time they tried. He never knew what was more painful: his shame at his failures or his guilt for the heartbeat on Anna’s face.

Castiel finds himself in their room, barely aware of coming upstairs. Anna is there in lace, the lights turned low. She’s beautiful and perfect and against his will Castiel’s mind fills with the image of bruised ribs and a healing lips and green eyes. His stomach churns and his skin prickle as Anna approaches, eyes hopeful and seductive.

“Is there something you want to try tonight?” she asks uncertainly. He wonders sometimes how far Anna is willing to go. Lingerie is one thing, but there are a few ’martial aids’ they’ve experimented with. More for her than him. But there’s too many things that come too close to admitting there’s something wrong beyond Castiel’s lack of arousal. “I can try using my mouth again…”

“No.” Castiel says it too fast, his pulse already racing. But the sense memory of another mouth on his cock, however briefly and sinfully, has him hardening is his slacks. “Just…us tonight.”

Anna nods and Castiel closes his eyes when he kisses her. Her mouth is softer than Dean’s, her kisses wetter and more tentative. But it’s heat and a warm body and in his mind he’s standing in a dingy hotel again. Dean is in front of him. The hand at his crotch is Dean’s and he can nearly hear his laugh. Anna keeps touching him and he remembers everything. He remembers how strong Dean was, how that ratty coat had hidden firm arms and trim waist and the way his ass had felt in Castiel hands and the smell of his come in the stale air of that room....

“Oh my God,” Anna whispers, palming Castiel’s weak but growing erection with trepidation. “Oh my…”

“We should…in the bed…” Castiel manages to say. They move fast, Castiel stripping off his clothes. He fights to keep Dean in his mind and not let fear and shame and disgust chase the blood from his cock.

It’s always dark when they have sex anyway, but Castiel keeps his eyes closed when they kiss again. He takes his place between his wife’s legs and she’s the one to guide him inside her. Her hands are small and delicate and none of it is the same as how Dean sank down on him, hot and slow. No condom. Wet and pliant and warm and wrong. Still, he lets his body take over chasing the memory of the fire Dean kindled under his skin. He pushes away the sound of Anna’s gasps of pleasure and
does his duty. His hands find her breasts and recoil, then settle on her hips and the mattress. He bites back Dean’s name and buries his face in his wife’s shoulder and comes quick and weak inside of her.

He should have lasted longer, should have tried to bring her some pleasure too, but at least she smiles when he pulls back. That’s something.

She smiles for the rest of the night as they wash, and change, and get back in bed. The endorphins and pleasure fade and a new kind of shame takes their place. More than when he actually fucked Dean, this feel like a betrayal, like a complete lie. It weighs on his chest when they turn the light out and Anna settles to sleep curled around him. He did the right thing the wrong way, again. But it has to count for something that he was able to do it. It has to.

He thinks of praying. Asking God for the millionth time to make him in to the man he ought to be. A good husband, a good Christian, a good man. But God doesn’t grant help to sinners, he’s quite certain of that. Tomorrow he’ll be volunteering again. Saturday used to be a beacon to him, a break from the grinding sameness of his routine. It was the day he might see the beautiful man with green eyes. Now even the prospect of going downtown is terrifying. Maybe he can get away with staying inside helping in the kitchen.

Or maybe he’ll be fine. It’s completely possible that if he sees Dean he won’t be filled with lust, just appropriate pity or concern. He did just manage to make love to his wife after all. Maybe things are turning around. Through God all things are possible, don’t they say? If only he was willing to ask for the help.

Dean gets so fucking tired of being tired all the time and of the constant shift from one type of pain to another. In a week his ribs have stopped torturing him, but now his foot is doing something awful and his back rebelling against sleeping in the car one night too many. Sometimes, very rarely, life tries to test how stubborn and stupid he can be. He’s got other fights to wage and it’s not like her has a surplus of dignity, so he gave in.

The showers at the shelter are crap, and spending the night there cost Dean work, but sleeping on one of their cots and feeling something like clean for the first time in over a week is fucking worth it. He’d done good business on Thursday anyway, camped in front of the strip joint and bar again. No Cas – not a shocker – but he’d gotten enough other work that his jaw and knees ached by the end of the night. And spending the night there meant he was closer to the phones, good thing because there was a fucking line today. And he’s got important shit to talk about.

“How you doin’ on shoes?” Dean asks Sam when there’s a lull in the conversation. “I’ve got enough for you for the fall coat. I think. Do you need shoes too?”

“I’m fine, Dean. You don’t need to waste money on that.” Dean hates the tension in Sam’s voice.

“It’s already done okay. I just need the address to send the money.”

Sam is silent and Dean imagines him looking across some dirty room to a foster parent staring him down. “Dean, you know I can’t tell you that.”

“Dude, it’s not like I’m going to come and snatch you! How many times-”
“I have to go, Dean. I need to get a book back to the library.”

“Sammy, come on.”

“Use the money for you, please. Bye, Dean.”

The line goes dead and Dean stares at the dirty wall ahead of him until the dial tone comes back. He'd been so sure Sam would tell him this time.

“Fuck,” Dean mutters just as a stranger shoves at his shoulder.

“Hey, buddy, you done? Other folks are waiting!”

“Yeah, I’m done,” Dean growls, slamming the receiver down and pushing past the line of grimy faces. He stalks out of the shelter, waking fast just to be moving and ignoring his foot and ribs and back and anyone that gets in his way until he crashes straight into some idiot wearing a knit cardigan in July and sends a box of sandwiches spilling onto the side walk. “Shit! Sorry!”

The dude gasps and Dean knows why the instant he looks up into blue eyes. Of course now he runs into the fucker, just when he doesn’t want to see or talk to anyone. He turns on his smile like a weapon and watches the guy go pale. Fucking with a closeted weirdo is probably not the best way to process his rage, but it's all Dean's got.

“Fancy meetin’ you here, Cas.”

Castiel’s eyes dart to a woman with dark hair and cuffed jeans further down handing a bag of food to someone huddled on a doorway then back to him. Someone would think he just got caught with a murder weapon. “Dean.”

“Oh, you remember?”

“Yes, of course, I…” He keeps glancing at the other volunteer. He looks like he's about to tear himself apart through sheer force of competing paranoia and lust. "I..." Shit, the guy actually looks sick. This was all too easy and it's not even fun.

“You see me around all the time.” Dean puts him out of his misery and kneels down to pick up the scattered sandwiches. “Missed you last weekend though.”

“I was ill.”

“Uh huh.” Dean piles the sandwiches into the flimsy box Cas still holds before taking two for himself.

Cas squints at him. “You never take a sandwich.”

“Well, I figure we’re friends now, I don’t gotta play hard to get,” Dean smirks and enjoys the way the last color drains from Cas’s cheeks. Dean licks his lips, just to watch how Cas’s eyes follow the movement then tear away. “What? You gettin’ shy on me now, hot stuff?”

“I…” Cas looks again to where his fellow volunteer is walking away from them. Even separated from Cas by a few feet Dean can feel him coiled like a spring, everything barely held back, tense and tight. Cas’s pal disappears and Cas relaxes, just slightly.

“Anyway, I got some acquaintances that could use these,” Dean says, holding up the sandwiches.

“They’re for your friends?” Cas blinks, looking wounded.
“People round here don’t have friends.”

“That’s very sad.” He looks down at his lumpy pile of sandwiches, chewing his lip and clearly fighting a bad decision. “Can I buy you something hot anyway?”

Dean smirks. “Buy me something hot or buy you-” Dean catches his breath at the glare Cas gives him. Okay, he found the line. Good to know. “Fine. There’s pizza a few blocks away.”

“I should hand these out before-”

“Before you spread the gospel to me? Just drop them at the camp with Rufus, come on.” Dean starts walking, heading for the tents just visible down the street. He heads past Rufus, trusting Cas knows what to do, and stops by Martin’s corner. The guy’s face is barely visible inside his filthy sleeping bag, and his eyes are closed, so Dean just leaves a sandwich. The other ends up shoved in Dean’s deep pocket but Cas doesn’t need to know that. He finds Cas still at the front, avoiding Rufus’s eyes, but empty handed.

“How far?”

“Two blocks.”

Dean walks fast but Cas keeps up, looking around nervously the whole time.

“Are you worried about getting jumped or getting caught with me?” Dean asks before jaywalking across Illinois street to Dante’s as Cas rushes after him.

“It’s broad daylight.”

Dean guesses that’s an answer to both questions. They order three slices of pepperoni from the counter and Cas leaves a nice tip after paying in cash. Dean sets into this pizza as soon as they’re seated at a table in the corner. The chairs are wobbly and sticky and the pizza is dripping grease, but damn it’s good. Cas looks suspicious of, well, everything.

“You ain’t allowed pizza either?” Dean asks through a mouthful.

“No really.”

“Damned if that’s not the saddest thing I’ve ever heard.” Dean smirks as Cas scowls and douses his slice with powdered parmesan. He watches with interest as Cas takes a bite then groans around it. “I promise not to tell.”

Cas doesn’t respond beyond a nervous look. They eat in silence for a spell, until Dean is a third of the way into his second slice and slows down.

“Someone else might though. Tattle on you that is.”

Cas looks up from his crust in panic. “Who? Why?”

“No one specific,” Dean reassures him. “I’m just saying that if you don’t want to worry about someone getting their hooks in you for blackmail or whatever, don’t give people your real name. Or your number.”

It’s obvious that Dean has just planted a nightmare scenario in Cas’s head that never occurred to the poor guy. “People do that? How? Why would you-”

“Hey, breathe,” Dean orders. Cas looks sick again. “I’m not gonna rat you out. For anything. I’m
just telling you in the future when you go looking for fun: be careful.” Dean swallows. When did this turn into an afterschool special? “You seem like a decent human being, okay? The kind folks around here love to mess with.”

“I have no intention of looking for more…fun,” Castiel says thickly. “But thank you for the advice.”

“Oh really?” Dean very pointedly draws his thumb over his bottom lip and licks off a few drops of grease. Cas’s cheeks blaze red at the sight. “You got it all out of your system?”

“Yes,” Castiel says through gritted teeth, like he’s fighting with everything he has not to jump across the table and kiss the smirk of Dean’s face. It’s a different kind of lust than Dean’s used to. Dean knows how it feels to be wanted, but this…this is interesting. And definitely fun.

“And now you’re back to the straight and narrow?” The glare Cas gives him is frankly amazing and is all the answer Dean needs. “That’s a shame. I was hoping you’d be buying me more than pizza.”

“I need to move my car,” Cas declares, standing and managing to bang the table. Dean’s got a good idea of why he’s walking funny.

“Come on, no one is going to jack your Prius.”

“I’ll have you know I drive a Camry,” Cas snaps and Dean rolls his eyes.

“Dine and dash then, cool.” That stops Cas in his tracks and he stares down at where Dean still sits, slouched against the pizzeria wall. “So, if you didn’t want my services, why’d you buy me lunch? Still the guilt thing? Or you just don’t have the balls to misbehave today? Because I saw your wallet and-”

Cas scowls and spins, stalking away as Dean snickers.

He probably cost himself some business there, but fuck it. He liked the way Cas fucked him, he’s not denying that, but he didn’t like the way he made him feel. Or, more precisely that he made Dean feel at all. So better to be rid of him.

Dean’s able to keep up convincing himself he’s glad he was an asshole for about two minutes before the regret sets in. By then he’s walking again.

———

Castiel refuses to be sick. He refuses to let the panic and lust and helplessness swimming inside him burst out, even though he can feel the burn of it. The damned tomato sauce doesn’t help either. His hands are shaking and his pulse is racing and he has no idea where he even is. He was headed in the direction of his car, he thought, but he’s not even sure what street he’s on.

“Goddamnit,” he mutters, relishing taking the Lord’s name in vain. He feels like he’s going insane. Everything regular and comforting keeps getting upended. He was right to have been terrified of coming in today. He told himself that he could pass the test of seeing Dean and he’d failed so completely.

He’d prayed this morning, in his half-hearted way, asking God for strength and to spare him temptation. God probably knew it was lip service. Probably could see right into Castiel’s heart and
read his true, shameful desires. Just like Dean could.

The well-behaved part of his mind is praying for help now, to make this all go away, to find his car, to make it so he can undo and unknow everything for the last few weeks. His heart isn’t in that either. Neither is his cock, still half-hard just from watching Dean’s show with his mouth and eyes.

“Fuck.” Cas spins, hopelessly trying to find a landmark or even a damn street sign.

“Jesus Christ, do no tell me you’re fucking lost.” Castiel rounds on Dean, just about ready to punch him. Of course he finds him again. Of course. Castiel settles for grabbing Dean by the arm rather than punching him, though the impulse remains. “Hey, easy.”

“Dean.” The word is barely above a whisper, but Dean hears it, probably because Castiel is only a few inches from him. Far closer than is appropriate. Dean’s eyes are locked on him and Castiel prays with all his soul that right now Dean can read him. He can’t say it, but Dean has to know what he’s asking.

Dean’s eyes darken as he takes in Castiel’s face. “You got forty?”

Castiel swallows, tongue thick and heart racing so fast he feels like he might explode. He nods. Dean leads them down the street, to a building with boarded up doors in front that they don’t go through. They take the alley along the side and then a creaking door into the decrepit place. Maybe it was offices once, but in the dusty half-light Castiel can’t make out any identifying details. He doesn’t care. Dean backs him up against a wall and Cas stops caring about anything but Dean.

Dean presses against him, hands on Cas’s hips, chest pressed close. There’s no kiss. It’s a blessing because a kiss might kill him. Instead Dean’s hands move to his ass, pulling the two of them close so Dean can feel how shamefully hard Cas is and give the appropriate smug laugh. He groans as Dean grinds against him then gasps when he pulls Castiel’s wallet from his back pocket.

“Don’t worry, not taking more than I quoted.”

Cas doesn’t speak, just nods again as Dean opens the wallet and pulls two twenties out. He’s respectful. Doesn’t snoop or comment. Doesn’t entice Cas to confess that Dean could take it all and he wouldn’t care one bit. Dean replaces the wallet, grinding on Cas again. He’s hard too and Cas takes some strange pride in that. Then Dean drops to his knees.

Dean has Cas unzipped and his cock free in record time. Cas bites hard on his lip to hold back his moan when Dean mouth finds him, just a teasing lick at the head while Dean’s hands play at his hips. “You can look, you know. Watching is half the fun.”

Cas can’t resist Dean’s honeyed drawl, dark and low. He looks down and whimpers far too loud at the site of Dean’s perfect lips wrapping around his dick. It’s better than the first time. The soft flicks of his tongue at the slit, the way Dean hollows his cheek when he takes more of Cas in. It’s unbelievable. Castiel digs his nails into the crumbling wall behind him as Dean licks and sucks and drives him mad with every inch he takes. Dean starts bobbing in head in earnest and his hands on Cas’s hips aren’t a warning, they’re encouragement to move. Dean catches Cas’s eye through his lashes, then hums as Cas starts to thrust into his mouth. It’s so good he barely has words for it, or thoughts at all. Dean’s warm, expert mouth is everything. Everything he’s ever wanted for so long.

Cas grits his teeth, fighting to breathe as his pleasure spikes and sings inside him, rising to a crescendo he can barely keep back. He wants this to last, wants to stay here, hidden in the shadows with Dean swallowing him down and never return to reality. He wants this. Dean does something
bordering on witchcraft and takes all of Cas in and swallows around him as Cas gives in and thrusts into his mouth.

“Dean! I-” He barely manages the warning before Dean’s fingers dig into his hip and Dean does the thing with his throat again and it’s done. Cas comes, eyes falling closed, head thrown back and his whole body shaking as he pours down Dean’s waiting throat.

Dean pulls off with a wet noise and a filthy laugh. Cas collapses back against the wall, panting, eyes still locked on Dean as he gingerly tucks Cas’s softening cock back into his pants.

“Give me another twenty.”

“What?”

“Just trust me.”

Cas can barely make his appendages work, but he manages to fish out his wallet and fumble it open to give Dean his last bill. Dean pockets it with a grin and immediately undoes his own fly, pushing down his underwear and revealing his own leaking cock. He starts stroking himself, fast and rough and Cas hears himself groan anew. “Fuck.”

“Can’t give you this show for free, but damn…” Dean’s breath hitches as his hand flies over his cock, twisting and playing with the foreskin. Castiel desperately wants to touch, but he doesn’t think it’s allowed and he’s too dazed to be of much use anyway. “Never get this turned on giving head; you know that?”

“I…” Cas doesn’t think what he has to say matters. He’s too mesmerized and high on his orgasm to really speak anyway. Dean jacks himself faster, biting his lips as he stares at Cas, not blinking until he comes, spilling white over his hand and onto the dirty floor.

Dean looks peaceful and pleased as he comes down. “Damn…” He produces a napkin from who knows where and wipes his hand then tosses it to the ground.

“I didn’t plan…” Cas doesn’t know why he’s trying to explain himself to literally the only person that doesn’t care.

“Yeah, yeah, you didn’t start your day thinking of paying to get your cock sucked,” Dean sighs.

“No. I did.”

Dean looks up at Castiel, impressed.

“I wake up every morning since that night and think of you,” Cas confesses, his focus intent on the toe of his shoe. “I thought about you when I was with my wife, last night.”

“With her like with her? Wow.”

“Still, my plan today wasn’t…this.” He shakes his head. “Things weren’t supposed to be like this.”

“Things are what they are, man,” Dean says. “I don’t know what else to tell you. Some shit you just have to go with.”

“So there’s no point in fighting?” Castiel finally looks up at Dean.

“Depends what you’re fightin’, I guess.”
Castiel nods and straightens up, beating the dust from his sweater. That’s a good enough answer. “Can you help me get back to my car?”

Dean blinks. “Uh, sure. You okay?”

“No, but I’ll manage.”

They don’t talk as Dean leads him back out into the daylight. Dean gets him to Massachusetts street, in front of the shelter and within sight of the mission. “Thank you,” Castiel says, because he’s still polite, even in crisis.

“Seriously, are you gonna be alright?”

There’s real concern in Dean’s eyes when Castiel meets them. Every time he looks at them he’s amazed by how vivid the color is. Everything about Dean is beautiful. “Are you going to be at the same place on Thursday?”

Dean looks surprised at that, but doesn’t hesitate “Outside the bar or at the diner?”

“What matter?”

“Waiting around at the diner is a hell of a lot more comfortable,” Dean says with a shrug. “Specially after dark.”

Castiel doesn’t know how this man he’s spoken to twice understands his thoughts and plans so well, even before Castiel does. “That would be…good.”

Dean nods slowly in understanding, licking his lips. “See you round, Cas.” Dean doesn’t wait for a reply, just turns and walk away, a bow-legged shadow cast behind him.

Castiel forces himself not to dwell on it. He just did something horrible and then made a definite plan to do it again. But it didn’t feel horrible. And if this is what he is, if he’s doomed and damned already, why even try to fight? He does all sorts of things that are bad for him because they feel good, but he does so much more that’s good that feels terrible. It all must even out. The equation balances eventually. The voice inside him making this argument sounds suspiciously like Dean’s.

Anna is in the garden when he gets home, pulling weeds from the raised beds they built together a few summers ago.

“Hey, babe,” Anna calls, peering out from under her sun hat. “You wanna take off the Mister Rogers sweater and help out?”

“You bought me this sweater.”

“Which is why I don’t want you getting it dirty.” Anna beams, having clearly won the argument. Castiel squats next to her, idly pulling a weed from the base of a thriving cherry tomato bush.

“The tomatoes look very good this year,” Castiel says, plucking a beautiful ripe one from the vine and popping it into his mouth before Anna can stop him.

“Cas! You know that’s not good for your stomach!”

Castiel smiles at her, lips together as he chews and the acid bright flavor explodes in his mouth. It takes like the sun. “One won’t hurt me.”

“No, but you never eat just one.” Castiel rolls his eyes. “Hey, I don’t need that sass from the guy
who ate fifteen burgers in one day.”

“They were on sale.”

“Uh huh.” Castiel moves to grab one more tomato and Anna playfully smacks his hand away. “Get changed and maybe you can have some more.”

“Yes, Ma’m.”

Castiel changes quickly and pops a few antacids before heading back outside. If he’s careful, he’ll be fine. He can enjoy the sun and the tomatoes and all sorts of things, if he’s just careful. Some shit you just have to go with.

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
- Heterosexual sex (Cas and Anna)
- Oral Sex for money (Cas and Dean).
- Unsafe sex.
Chapter 3

Dean spends a day or three ignoring the little electric charge under his skin each time the thinks about Cas. He refuses to give it more than a passing thought, afraid he’ll chase it away or it'll fade from overuse. So he doesn’t think about it. He hangs out at the library, sees a movie, services an idiot in a back alley who’s so drunk he pays Dean twice, and he doesn’t think about Cas. He walks by a church on Sunday, listens to the muffled warnings of fire and brimstone and sinners in the hands of an angry God or whatever bullshit they have on tap and instead of that tingle he gets a pit in his stomach. He walks faster.

It’s stupid, really. Cas is just another John, another source of cash. So he’s hot and his dick is nice and he overpays? He’s also a mess. But there’s just something about him, something Dean can’t turn away from. He’s had his share of repeat customers, even has a few guys that’ll seek him out. They know his face and all have different names for him, none of them real. He knows what they like, the kind of show to put on, and what he can get out of them. Cas is in a different world from those assholes, but Dean’s not gonna waste his energy figuring out how.

Maybe it’s to remind himself of what his regulars are supposed to be like that Dean ends up at the Rack. It’s a shitty bar and a shittier roadhouse, but it’s close to the Big Rig Paradise so it gets its share of truckers and other sorts just passing through; willing to drop some cash and blow off some steam. It’s also a main hangout for the Hell Hounds. Hell's Angels was obviously taken and there's nothing angelic about the men (and a few women) in black leather with hard eyes, loud bikes and heavy boots. Dean thinks they may own the place. Probably a front for other ventures including moving drugs. He doesn’t pay much attention. They know what Dean is and they don’t make him cough up a percentage for the privilege of doing business there, so it’s not his problem. One of the high-ranking guys has a thing for Dean, maybe that’s why they let him around.

They’re all in the back half of the bar tonight, shooting pool, grabbing at the waitresses and going through booze like it’s water. Dean sees a few of them snorting something else once in a while then whooping in glee.

“Hell of a party for a Tuesday,” Dean says to the bartender, throwing back a shot.

“Oh, it's an official, one of their bigwigs just got out of the joint,” Casey purrs smirking as she pours him another.

Dean likes Casey. She’s hot as fuck and takes no shit from anyone. She also happens to be banging a Hell Hound or three so she’s got job security, as you might say. “Well, I guess that’s something. Who’s the guest of honor?”

“Short hair, back corner.” Dean follows Casey’s gesture to an older guy in the same black leathers as the rest. He’s watching the party with a detached, knowing smile, his face half in the dirty light so that his eyes look almost yellow. He also looks so fucking much like someone else that’s been gone for a long time that Dean has to blink to clear his vision. “Nickname is Azazel.”

“He’s with the Topeka branch,” a lilting, nasal voice interjects from behind Dean.

“Speaking of nasty mouthfuls,” Dean sneers back as he turns to face the pale, cruel-faced biker that decided a few months ago he liked nothing more than seeing Dean hurting in the vicinity of his dick. “Howdy, Alastair. Set any kittens on fire lately?”

“That how you talk to your meal ticket?” Alastair looks over Dean from head to toe and it makes Dean’s skin crawl.

“Is that what you are? ’Cause after last go around I had to heal for three days and that cost me some goddamn meals.” Dean’s snarky but he doesn’t raise his voice. He’s a punk but not suicidal. Much.

“Now, sweetheart, don’t be testy.” Alastair chides. He always calls Dean saccharine names like that, ’cause Dean’s never has or will give any of these bastards his real name. “We both know you wouldn’t be here if you weren’t open for business.”

“Maybe I just like shitty whiskey.” Dean stares Alastair down. They guy knows Dean hates him, which is why he’ll pay twice the going rate to fuck Dean rough and hard. He’s the kind of client Dean hates and absolutely deserves.

“Hey, I resent that,” Casey says, clearly trying to break the tension.

Alastair doesn’t blink. “Anyway. I’m thinking of something less intimate tonight, if that eases your poor, wounded heart.” He nods towards a tangle of his compatriots in the corner, nursing whiskeys and licking their lips as they look at Dean like he’s the next item on the menu.

“I don’t do group shit,” Dean lies. He does, or he has, but not with a group like that.

“Nothing like that, dear boy.” Dean hates that way Alastair’s reedy voice sings the offer. “Just want to set you up in back, got a whole line of cocks to fill that pretty mouth of yours. And then maybe after…”

“No after.” Alastair raises an eyebrow. It’s not amused, it’s dangerous, But Dean’s not backing down. “I’ll suck off you and as many of your friends as you like, but nothing else. Not tonight.”

“We’ll see.” That’s the end of the negotiation it seems, as Dean’s not so much led as hoisted off his barstool and through the party. He ignored his rule about being sober-ish for work and his head is swimming already. That's good, it keeps him from thinking too much about not being a mess for Cas in two days...or what Cas would think of him right now.

“What the fuck is that?” The question comes from the corner. The new guy. Azazel. The fact that he makes Alastair blanch and drop Dean’s coat from his hand is pretty terrifying.

“Just a party favor a few of us are taking out back,” Alastair says, uncharacteristically placating.

“You gotta pay a little faggot to suck your cock, Al?” Azazel asks. Closer up his face isn’t quite Dad’s but it’s close. The voice sets of alarms too, or maybe it’s the way the slur sounds in his mouth. So familiar. “You run out of real whores to rough up?”

“Like it when they fight back a bit and this one’s got chutzpah,” Alastair shoots back. “You want a piece?”
Dean rolls his eyes and gets a rough shake for it. He meets Azazel’s jaundiced glare and a chill goes down his spine.

“I got enough of that on my extended vacation,” Azazel says. “Think I’ll sample something from the bar tonight. Don’t think Gil would mind.”

Dean doesn’t let the tremor that goes through him show, or he masks it under the shudder he gets when Alastair hauls him off again.

“Come on, little whore, get to work.”

And work he does. He manages five customers before Alastair, so his jaw is aching and his throat is sore when the fucker finally takes his turn. He’s rough and terrible as usual, offers Dean double to let him go bare, which Dean turns down. It’s already awful enough, but Dean just shuts it down. It being everything. All the feelings from disgust to horror and even anger. This is where he belongs, in the dark on his knees next to a dumpster. Alastair pulls his hair and mumbles about fucking Dean raw and all sorts of other bullshit. Dean wants to take a bite out of him, but he just shuts his eyes and thinks of England or whatever and soon it’s done. Alastair throws the money on the ground for Dean to scramble after while he takes another bump of something. He doesn’t even have the decency to offer Dean a hit. Asshole.

The taste of latex permeates Dean's swollen mouth, but he stumbles out from the back of the Rack with close to three hundred in his pocket. Not bad for night’s work; not that Dean’s keeping much of it. Some is earmarked for the bottle of rot gut he’s gonna buy to wash out the taste and the rest of the night. Maybe that Taco Bell by the liquor store on tenth is still open. It’s a good idea, one that keeps him moving back toward Baby as he massages his aching jaw.

“Thought Al would convince you to bend over for him.”

Dean stops stock-still at the voice, every instinct telling him to stand at attention. Azazel takes a long drag of his cigarette, the ember glowing in the shadow beyond the reach of the street lights. He’s leaning against Baby and it feels like more of a violation than anything that Dean’s endured for the last hour.

“Told him I was closed for business,” Dean says, wary.

Azazel hoists himself off the side of the car, stomping his smoke under the steel toe of his boot. His eyes are cold and cruel as he steps into the sulfur yellow circle under the street light. “Really?”

“Still closed, just so we’re clear.”

“Nah, I know your type, it’s all about the right price.” Azazel looks back over his shoulder at the Impala and Dean suppresses a shiver. “The guys were going on and on about what a nice ride the cocksucker in the alley had.”

“So they aren’t complete idiots, what’s your point?” Dean draws himself up to his full height. Azazel is big but not quite as tall as Dean. But he’s also got the lean cut of prison muscle about him.

“I need me some new rainy day wheels. How much you want?”

Dean blinks. This just got weird. “She’s not for sale.”

“You are. Why not your ride?”

Dean flinches as Azazel takes another step towards him, hands going to his pockets. Dean carries a
knife sometimes, but of course tonight it’s sitting in the truck of the car that this guy may want to kill him for. Azazel just pulls out another cigarette and a lighter.

“No. She ain’t for sale and she never will be so back off,” Dean snarls and Azazel throws his head back in a smoky laugh.

“You are feisty. We’ll see how you feel next time.” It’s as clear a threat as Dean’s ever heard. Azazel saunters past Dean with a too familiar pat on the shoulder. “Or maybe I’ll just sample your other wares. See you soon.”

Azazel disappears into the dark and Dean scrambles for his keys. He floors it when he gets on the interstate, driving all the way across to the other side of Lawrence until he finds a place he can buy a bottle of something brown and forget the whole night.

It doesn’t work. He huddles in the back seat, parked under a nice quiet overpass and drinks and drinks and still he can’t wash the memories out of his head. Not Azazel, not really. A different face, older and more familiar and twice as frightening. Dark eyes. Dark hair.

Somewhere along the way the eyes turn blue. The thought Dean’s been successfully chasing away all day and night rushes back.

Castiel Novak, he of the heavy coats in summer and serious expression and repressed desire. He would never treat Dean like any of those monsters tonight. And not because he's trying to get into heaven or because he drives a sensible Camry and pays his taxes. Because he's the kind of person that's incapable of cruelty like that. Dean could see that the first time he tried to offer him a sandwich. Cas would probably be repulsed by Dean's night, he can’t kid himself. But right now in the dark, in the wash of memory and old misery, he wants to pretend he would look past it. He knows its a dream but he wants that little scrap to hang onto before Thursday comes and reality sets it on fire.

Dean doesn’t fantasize about specifics, just the way Cas looks at him. The way he always looks at him from the first time up until the last. The way he might still look at Dean in a few days if neither of them chicken out. Like he’s something good, or beautiful. Something worth saving.
He passes the strip club he never went in. It’s a helpful landmark to find the diner. For the first time
he notices the name, the Moonlight All Night. It’s one of those places that must have been a draw in
the fifties, but now it’s glory days are long gone. The chrome trim is scratched, the vinyl on most of
the chairs and booths is torn, and the pictures on the walls are all crinkled and faded. Even the bell
above the door is old, and the dull sound it makes barely registers with the three or so patrons seated
at the counter. The only person that looks up is sitting in the farthest booth.

It’s a movie again, but this time it’s that scene from *The Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy walks out of
her black and white world into glorious technicolor.

Dean smiles and Cas knows he must be making some ridiculous face. He doesn’t care. He doesn’t
care about the terror at the back of his mind or the voice of conscience he’s muted all day that’s
trying to scream at him from far away. Dean is there. Tonight, Dean is here for him.

He ungracefully takes a seat in the booth. He has no idea what’s appropriate in this situation.

“Hello, Dean.” It’s as good a start as any, though Dean smirks at the formality. “I’m glad you came.”

“You thought I wouldn’t show?” Dean’s eyebrow is raised high as he takes a sip of the coffee in
front of him.

“I…”

“I had you at about a sixty-forty chance of going through with this. Never know about you careful
types.”

Cas appreciates Dean’s discretion, as it were. “Have you been waiting long? You said after dark.”

“Not too long. They got decent coffee so,” Dean shrugs. He moves easier than the last few times Cas
has seen him. He’s still too thin and too pale, but the bruises are gone from his face.

“You haven’t eaten.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “You don’t gotta buy me dinner every time.”

“Are you saying you’re not hungry?” Castiel fixes Dean with a look, the kind of glare he usually
only reserves for Meg. Dean seems impressed.

“Yeah, I am, but…”

Cas doesn’t wait. He waves down the waitress as Dean shakes his head. “A cheeseburger, please.
No tomato.”

“Same,” Dean grumbles. The waitress leaves and silence falls between them. Dean squirms, looking
irritated. Unsurprisingly, it’s a good look on him. “You stare a lot, you know that?”

“It’s been mentioned.” Cas pointedly doesn’t look away.

“Okay then. Well.” Dean casts about, color rising. “So, uh, fuck, I don’t know how to do this?”

“Do what?”

“Normal human conversation or whatever,” Dean replies too loudly. “What are we supposed to do?
Talk about our shitty weeks? Because I really don’t think you wanna know that.”

“My week wasn’t that shitty,” Cas shrugs and Dean raises an eyebrow. “I knew I was coming here.
It was exciting. Motivating.”

Dean looks at him carefully, expression softening. “You seem less nervous this time.” It’s the first time Dean’s allowed a crack in his armor to show. Cas appreciates it.

“I’m sure it will come.”

“Well, as long as you’re sure you’ll-” Dean stops himself before finishing the obscenity, probably thanks to the shock on Cas’s face. “See. Can’t talk like a human.”

“It takes practice. Or so I’m told. I’m…working on it too.” He can see Dean holding back another smartass remark. That’s progress. “Was there any part of your week that wasn’t shitty?”

Again Dean opens his mouth as if to shoot down the question, then snaps it closed, eyes intent on Cas. “I saw a good movie, I guess.” Cas nods, letting Dean continue. “You know the old Paramount theater over by the university? They do vintage night. They had Notorious playing Monday.”

Castiel’s mouth twitches in a sad smile. “I know the theater. That’s a good movie.”

“You seen it?”

“A few times. It’s one of my favorites.”

“Man, Ingrid Bergman was hot. And Cary Grant.”

Cas looks around, wishing their food was here, or even that he just had some water for his suddenly dry mouth. Dean is curious when Cas dares to look back at him. “I…always liked Claude Raines.”

A grin spreads over Dean’s face. “Respectable choice.”

“He was always so elegant. I liked his voice.” Dean nods, a glint in his eye. “I’ve never told anyone that. I mean. I have but they-”

“They just thought you wanted to be him, not that you wanted to be with him.”

Cas nods, his cheeks hot. Thankfully, the waitress chooses that moment to arrive with their food. Despite his protests, Dean looks more than happy to see the meal and they both tuck into their burgers without any ceremony. It’s not until they slow down halfway through that Cas works up the courage to speak again.

“What other movies do you like?”

It turns out the answer is all of them. Though Dean doesn’t say as much, movie theaters are apparently a sanctuary for him. It makes sense: some place secure and temperature controlled where he can disappear for a few hours. Dean will see just about anything, and starts in on an extended monologue on the virtues of the Marvel Cinematic Universe versus the DC one, and then has to explain the whole concept of movie universes in general to Cas, to his great frustration.

It’s…normal. Relaxing. Enough so that when Dean nods for them to leave, that feels normal too. Cas keeps the receipt again. The man at the front desk of the motel is the same as before. Heavier; glasses. Dean calls him Frank and he doesn’t look up from his newspaper when he hands Dean a key and takes Cas’s money. He pays for the full night.

The nerves set in when they close the door and Cas sees the bed and the dirty walls and rough brown carpet. This isn’t normal. This is a premeditated crime on both their parts, a betrayal of everyone that
has ever had faith in him to do the right thing or…

“Hey, ground control to Major Cas.”

Castiel blinks. Dean is there, standing closer than he was before Cas fell too deep into his thoughts. “I’m sorry I…”

“It’s okay, you said you’d get nervous. It don’t matter to me.” Something has changed in Dean’s demeanor. It’s softer, warmer. Enticing. He licks his lips and Cas’s heart starts to pound.

“You’ve seen it all, I gather?” Cas tries to keep his breathing even, keep up the small talk. It’s not just fear he’s drowning in, it’s excitement. The softness in Dean’s eyes only serves to stoke the fire.

“Something like that.”

Finally, Dean touches him. He runs a hand over his cheek, into Castiel’s hair and pulls him into a kiss.

Technicolor bursts in his mind, all over again.

Dean kisses him, gentle and slow. Skilled lips taking Cas apart bit by bit. It’s unhurried, like Dean is savoring the contact as much as Cas. That seems impossible, but Cas will take the dream. Dean pulls back and Cas feels dizzy, fighting the urge to tug Dean back to him and simply kiss him forever.

“I…uh…” Dean swallows, looking nervously at the door. No, the rickety dresser by the door.

“Oh. Yes.” Castiel nods. Can’t forget the protocol. He pulls out his wallet and sets out the bills. It doesn’t make him feel guilty, oddly enough. Just confident, in a strange way. The deal is done, the die is cast. For the rest of the night, Dean is his.

“That’s really more than-” Dean’s words cut off with a small intake of breath when Cas pushes back into his space, one hand on his shoulder, another on his lips. Dean is the one staring now, examining Castiel’s face with what one might call wonder if he didn’t know better. “Fuck.”

“Is something wrong? Should I not have–” Dean stops his mouth with a kiss. It’s more intense now, and Cas’s mouth is frantic in return. He’s never been kissed the way Dean kisses him, and never wanted to lose his entire self in lips and teeth and tongue the way he does with Dean.

Dean’s the one that starts taking off clothes first, peeling off his frayed canvass jacket and another shirt underneath so that he’s just in a tee. He turns his attention to Cas’s jacket and button down, something Cas is infinitely grateful for. He’s sure his hands would shake if he tried.

Dean licks his lips when Cas’s chest is revealed. Then his lips are on Cas’s skin, a gentle noise catching in his throat. Emboldened, Castiel tugs at the hem of Dean’s tee. He lets Cas strip him, revealing warm skin and cocky smile. The bruises are gone, though Cas images he can still see traces, like the ghost of writing that’s been erased. He still touches Dean gently, too gently for Dean’s taste it seems. He pulls their bodies flush and caution dissolves into wonder and desire so deep and sharp it hurts like a physical thing.

Dean’s hand finds its way to Castiel’s thickening cock, rubbing him through his pants so that Cas groans and Dean replies with a lewd chuckle. “Getting nice and hard for me?”

Cas can’t manage words in reply, just a frenzied nod and another kiss. He groans as Dean continues his attention, backing Cas up towards the bed then pushing him back onto it. Dean falls right after him, pressing his weight onto Cas and grinding their hips together. The friction of their clothed cocks
“Mmmm, hard for you too,” Dean mutters as he kisses down Castiel’s neck. Castiel knows it’s a show, or he thinks it probably is, and he doesn’t care. Even the thought that Dean is interested enough to pretend, that his body responds back to Castiel’s is intoxicating. They fumble at belts and flies between them and too soon, Dean slides off, but he tugs Castiel’s pants and boxers with him. Dean starts to pull his pants off and Cas feels like another force moves him. He finds himself kneeling at Dean’s feet, batting his hands away and pulling the last of his clothes off so that Dean’s beautiful cock springs free.

Castiel has been drunk a few times in his life. He wasn’t a complete shut-in in college, no matter what some friends claimed. He remembers the way his head spun, like his mind was loose from his body, traveling at a different speed. Now, kneeling before Dean, he feels the same: dizzy and unmoored. And free. He’s never been in this position outside of his most secret dreams; never been so intimately close with a cock not his own. Now he’s here, overcome by the salt tang of Dean’s scent, the heat of him radiating towards Castiel’s lips, just an inch away.

“Cas, you don’t have to…” Cas gives his first experimental lick at the tip, catching a bitter drop of precome on his tongue. Not so bad. He licks again, slower, then wraps his mouth around Dean’s girth and earns a moan. “Oh God…”

Cas wishes he had the presence of mind to remember what things Dean had done to him before, but it’s all a blur. He knows he has no technique or finesse. This isn’t about that. This isn’t even about making Dean come. This is about having something that was always impossible, the taste and weight of it on his tongue. He sucks and licks and holds onto Dean’s hips for dear life, each sound and shudder he draws from him a triumph. On bended knee before the object of his sin, it’s a strange sort of worship.

“Cas you…fuck…I need you to…” Dean pants, his voice breaking.

Cas pulls off, amazed to see how flushed and wanton Dean looks above him. “What do you need?”

“You need to be fucking me like, yesterday.”

That’s an order Castiel is happy to obey. He stands as Dean stumbles away, grabbing something from his pants. Lubricant and a condom. Of course.

“Do you want me to…or do you…?”

Cas draws a shuddering breath. “I’d like to. If that’s acceptable.”

“Yeah. Fuck. Sure.” Dean is flushed and breathless as he hauls himself back onto the mattress. He scrambles back on his elbows and Cas follows, magnetized. Dean presses the condom and lube into Castiel’s hands as he kisses him again. “Come on, show me what else you’ve learned.”

Cas doesn’t have the command of his mind right now to tell Dean that he does have some experience here, albeit illicit and shrouded in darkness and shame. But he’d become acquainted with himself in the past. It was simply a memory he rarely revisited, because it had been an empty experience that had left him with nothing more than longing for something impossible and forbidden. But not now.

The steadiness of his hands and he tears open the packet of lube and squeezes it onto his finger surprises him, and Dean too, judging by the look on his face. He watches Dean intently, leaning close and taking in every twitch of Dean’s mouth and tremor of his breath as he reaches down between them and back until he finds Dean’s hole.
“Let me know if it hurts.” It’s a simple courtesy, really; a final hesitation. But the words seem to overcome Dean more than the first touch of Cas’s slick fingertips at the furled muscle. He’s careful; not coy, but careful. Dean’s mouth hangs open and he makes quiet, pleased sounds as Cas works a finger inside. The heat of him is even more searing than Cas remembers. It rushes all through Cas, making his cock twitch with want and impatience.

“That’s good. Yeah. Like how you feel in me, baby,” Dean babbles as he opens. He takes two fingers without flinching, then a third. He gives a moan and Cas thinks he may have found his prostate. Another experimental rub inside Dean and his head falls back. “Fuck. Yeah. Right…Jesus fucking Christ, Cas…”

His name on Dean’s lips is the greater blasphemy to Castiel’s ears and he relishes it. “Dean, are you…”

Dean’s attention snaps back to Cas, as intent and serious as possible. “Get your pretty cock in me, Cas.”

“No one’s ever commented on the quality of it before,” Cas mutters and Dean rolls his eyes.

“Well, I’m an expert and it’s nice, and I want you to fuck me with it right now.”

Dean’s good at this; at convincing Cas he’s enjoying it and wants it. So much so that Cas lets himself believe it’s real, that he’s wanted like this, by this beautiful man. He rushes to slip on the condom and lube himself up. Dean helps him line up, eager and pliant, murmuring filthy encouragement in Castiel’s ear. He knows the right place to put his legs above Castiel’s hips, the perfect way to move and relax so that Cas slides into him like he’s coming home.

“God, you feel perfect. Fuck,” Castiel swears. Dean is a warm, welcoming vice around him. Pleasure and sensation overcome Castiel. A feeling of utter abandon and freedom singing through his body and veins, waves of ecstasy traveling up from his cock and his thrusts into Dean.

Dean moves to meet him, doing something with his hips and, fuck, clenching just right so that Cas feels even more like he’s losing his mind. There are mouths and hands everywhere, nails and teeth. Cas props himself on one arm and fumbles for Dean’s cock between them. Dean makes a noise of protest, but it dissolves into a far more pleased sound as Cas strokes him, trying to keep time with his thrusts. He can feel his own pleasure boiling over inside him, but the idea of making Dean come is overpowering. He wants to feel it, and see it. He drives into Dean, fast and frantic and Dean keens. He arches off the bed, clamping tight around Cas and comes, pouring over Cas’s fingers. It’s obscene and perfect and Cas follows him right over, the orgasm ripping through him like lightning.

Cas stays braced above Dean as long as he can bear it, savoring the peace and release. He finally collapses onto the rough comforter, pulling out and making the ancient bed groan at the movement.

“Fuck, I take it back,” Dean sighs, arm slung over his head, a sheen of sweat on his chest that catches the orange tinged light. Splashes of his own come mar his stomach and he’s the most beautiful sight Castiel has ever seen.

“Take what back?”

Dean looks at him, eyes lidded, breath quick. “I ain’t never seen anything like you, Cas.”

Chapter End Notes
Warnings:

Homophobic language
Dean/others - oral sex, non-explicit.
Anal sex
Mentions of violence/rough sex

Notes:

So, in this fic/my imagination Azazel looks like John...sorta. More specifically, Jeffrey Dean Morgan as Negan. I don't know why really, but that's where my brain went. Azazel DID possess John at one point so that plus bikers is where my brain went. And who knows, maybe Lucille will show up...

Casey is the demon from "Sin City."
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Hey, loves! Hope the season finale doesn't have you too down. Anyway, here's a fresh chapter full of some prime angst and a few feels.

I'm working on another project next weekend/week so I don't think there will be an update next week, but there should be one the week after (week of June 5). And it will have some serious drama! For now, enjoy some calm before the storm.

Not many warnings on this one, but I have included them in the end notes and a few other bits.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dean doesn’t have good days. He’s settled on that. He’s living on the streets, turning tricks with nothing on the horizon but a wait for people who may never come home. He has days that are less shitty than others, but he’s not delusional enough to call them ‘good.’ Or he was. He’s had a few definitely-not-shitty days in the last week or two to make him reconsider.

For instance – today. It’s sunny and he’s got a book, a good spot on the grass and an icy bottle of coke. It’s the good kind too, the shit from Mexico that still has real sugar in it. It’s the second one of the day. He downed the first with the flautas that Cas had looked at so dubiously. He’d trusted Dean when he told him the little place in the back of the tienda was the best Mexican in town, even though he said he avoided that sort of food. Dean had tried real hard not to make a spectacle as he ate, but it was a vaguely dick shaped food and he’d had Cas’s dick in his mouth 20 minutes prior so Cas blushed his way through his sores anyway. Cas paid for the food, but Dean bought his own second Coke. Sure, it was Cas’s cash, but it's the principle. It’s an indulgence but, hey, once in a while he wants something nice. Cas is getting him used to nice things.

Nearly a month now they’ve been meeting up and the weeks have fallen into a rhythm, a pattern of peaks and valleys that feels way too comfortable and stable to maintain. They meet on Thursdays and Cas fucks him, always after a meal. He worries about Dean’s weight like a mother hen. Or so Dean assumes, he wouldn't actually know. It’s been a while since he’s had anyone worry about him. Dean doesn’t mind because the money is good and the sex is better.

The sex is actually incredible. He tells Cas that, in his way, whispering into his ear about how good his cock feels in him and how hard he makes Dean come. He knows Cas thinks it’s a show, and it kind of is. But it also kind of isn’t. Cas doesn’t need to know that. The dirty talk gets him going and that’s all that matters. It gets him to fuck Dean harder, his breath going all guttural and rough as he spears Dean and it’s so good.

No client has ever done to Dean what Cas does, never laid him out on a bed and just…adored him. He’s sure there’s others out there who would, but he hasn’t met them yet. He’s just got Cas, the guy that asks what feels good for Dean and does it. And damn if it doesn’t feel nice. Maybe it’s because Cas is learning, or because he’s never had this, but everything he does to Dean, he savors and studies. It makes that something magic vibrate in Dean’s bones when he takes him apart, careful and slow.
He doesn’t tell Cas how all that shit is special, unique to him. Dean doesn’t want him getting too much of an ego. Or feeling like more of a weirdo. Cas doesn’t ask about what’s normal, of course. All part of the story he tells himself, Dean thinks. It’s that whole “boyfriend experience” thing that Dean thought was bullshit, but he gets now. Some of the time when they’re together Dean likes to pretend it’s real too, so he gets why Cas wouldn’t want to break the illusion and ask if it’s usual for a whore to make out with their customers. Dean’s not sure how he’d explain himself if he answered anyway. Cas has got to know that the blow jobs aren’t normal at least.

Dean smirks to himself as he takes a long sip of coke, the sweetness contrasting the memory of the bitterness in his mouth from Cas’s come. He likes Saturdays too.

Thursdays they fuck. After that Dean gets a night in a bed and takes a long-ass shower and eats a good breakfast. Fridays he wanders until nightfall, and he drinks and hustles pool as often as he’ll work, lately. And Saturdays Cas ditches the God squad and finds Dean near the tents. They eat again and either before or after they find some spot for Dean to suck Cas off. And then Cas returns the favor. Dean’s never heard of a guy getting paid to get blow job, but he doesn’t complain. He never comes in Cas’s mouth, only in someone’s hand, but fuck…they guy’s mouth is gorgeous and he’s getting better at using it every week.

Dean wasn’t even sure Cas would show up, after their second fuck. He told himself he had to be in the neighborhood anyway, to call Sam, and that was true. But he’s not gonna deny the flip his stomach did when he caught sight of Cas across the park, carrying his box of sandwiches. Cas has never been rough with Dean, not really. But that day he hauled Dean off to the same abandoned building they’d used before with a fervor that was pretty dang surprising. Dean had been sure he was gonna get fucked, and he was all for it. But apparently Cas didn’t have the time, or he wanted something more.

“Cas, you don’t have to do that.” Dean had said it then, and it still makes up half of their conversations since.

“I want to. Please, Dean.”

Dean’s getting paid to do what Cas wants, so who is he to say no? So Cas blew him, clumsy and frenzied and Dean had come biting his hand to keep from yelling and attracting attention while looking down at Cas worshiping his cock. Dean made sure that Cas came just as hard when it was his turn. And then they went for shitty Chinese and Dean gave Cas a hard time for his sweet and sour pork order.

Dean’s mostly quit complaining about the food thing. Again, it’s the boyfriend lie Cas wants and Dean could always use the grub. And it’s when they get to talk and he likes that. He still sucks at talking like a person, and so does Cas, but they’re getting better. Cas is weird and dorky and really fucking smart and Dean genuinely enjoys talking to him. Not that they really talk about much. Movies – Cas has barely seen anything made after 1985; Music – Dean’s learned more about Mozart than he ever wanted to but sue him if he didn’t do some listening at the library, he’s got time on his hands. Cas talks about work once in a while, though Dean still has no idea what the guy does. It’s something in an office, with lots of numbers and it sounds like Cas low-key hates it. Mot of the stories involve his co-workers. The two chicks – Hannah and Meg – are in some sort of protracted cold war of annoyance. And some poor kid named Alfie is stuck in the middle.

Cas doesn’t talk about his wife that much, but stuff slips out sometimes before Cas can stop himself. He doesn’t really complain about her, though she seems to have a lot of rules. He’ll mention a conversation they had or what she thought of a movie. Every time she comes up, Cas looks so fucking sad. It’s not an ‘I hate the old ball and chain’ sad either. It’s this mantle of regret that falls on
Cas that doesn’t fully recede until they’re alone and mouths and hands are finding cocks and skin.

Dean wonders what she looks like and if there was ever a point where she made Cas happy.

Sometimes they talk after they fuck, but not a lot. Everything is too raw and the quiet is too good to break. Each time they lie together a little bit longer and Cas kisses him a little bit deeper when he gets up to leave.

“See you soon.”

And then there’s the way he looks at Dean after. It’s so fucking intense it makes Dean squirm because what the hell is Cas looking at? Dean’s gonna need to work to keep his ego in check too if Cas keeps it up. Maybe that accounts for how the rest of his week usually goes, since Cas.

The changes aren’t big. He drinks a little less, reads a little more, lets himself be a little pickier with customers. He still works, of course, but he’s less likely to let some trucker stick it to him in a washroom when he knows he’s got $300 on the way on Thursday. He’s more likely to sit in the damn park reading in the sun and enjoying a coke.

Tomorrows is Sunday. It’s always the shittiest day. The farthest away from the next time he sees Cas. He tries not to linger on that thought. He spends the day trying to distract himself and wondering if Cas is sitting somewhere in church thinking he’s on his way to hell because of what he does with Dean. He can’t think of anyone he’s met in his entire, sorry life that would deserve hell less than Cas. He’s good and kind and Dean knows he’s tainting and destroying him every time they touch, but it ain’t because of his dick.

Dean spots a small group across the park and one of them sends him a wave. It takes him a second to recognize the dude. Last time he saw Aaron he was sporting the ugliest goatee in creation, but he’s almost clean shaven now. Floppy hair blows in his eyes as Dean waves back and he heads towards him, friends Dean doesn’t recognize in tow.

“Hey, Dean! It’s been forever!”

“Yeah, where the fuck have you been?” Dean looks at the group behind Aaron: it’s hard to miss the dude who’s roughly the size of a house, beside him is a skinny girl with black hair and a hungry look and another guy with bloodshot eyes.

“Let’s just say orange isn’t my color,” Aaron says, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“Damn, feel like I shoulda known.” Now that Dean thinks about it, he does remember some chatter about a dealer getting collared. “They really wasted a cell on a two-bit pot peddler?”

“Hey, I resent that.” There’s no bite to Aaron’s word. “We’re having a welcome home party over at my place – well, Ellie’s place for the moment – you should come.”

Dean smirks. Aaron’s couch used to be one of his favorite places to crash before things got really bad. Aaron never made Dean pay for the weed if he got a nice, lazy blow job out of it. Dean learned that there were other ways of paying for shit a long time ago. “Sure, sounds good. What time?”

“Late-ish, I gotta go have a not so fun chat with some…business associates.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. He doesn’t like the sound of that. “You gonna be okay?”

“Oh yeah,” Aaron grins and nods over his shoulder towards the hulking guy behind him. “I got some insurance.”
“Okay then, see you there.”

With a nod Aaron retreats. Dean watches him go, savoring another sip of Coke.

He’s glad they didn’t ask him to come with. He likes Aaron. He’s one of the few people Dean might actually call a friend in this sorry city. But it’s a nice day and there’s so little light and green in his corner of the world that he doesn’t want to leave it yet. Not until he just worked up to taking off his jacket. He already feels the hint of a burn on his skin, the light finally melting away the cold that settled all the way into his bones years ago. He doesn’t want to go back to the grey. He doesn’t want to go back to the dark. Not yet.

__________

Castiel never knows exactly who is coming over for Sunday dinners. Sometimes it’s his mother, sometimes on of his brothers, sometimes the pastor and sometimes just friends. It’s always someone. Anna never quite remembers to tell him and he can never quite be bothered to care, it’s not as if he has a choice about showing up. Today’s dinner is all of them. Castiel thinks Anna invited this many people over only to take advantage of the seating on the patio – a new purchase this summer - and so that enough people would bring food and all they had to do was throw meat on the grill, along with garden burgers for Anna. Castiel is glad of the task. It’s sweaty and he’s not very good at it, but it limited his obligation to talk to people. Now the food is out and he’s seated between Anna and his mother, the sweat drying under his collar and two different conversations going on at the table without him.

His mother is chatting with the pastor and Bartholomew Boyle, and it’s already become animated.

“Now, Naomi, I hope you didn’t force your lovely daughter-in-law to invite me here to give a campaign speech,” Bartholomew says with a smile as cold and sour-sweet as lemonade.

“Of course not, Bart,” Naomi replies, gently batting the blonde man on the shoulder.

“I’m sure everyone here has already donated,” Zachariah says, swallowing a mouthful of iceberg lettuce drowning in ranch too quickly. “And they’ll hear all your points when you speak at services next Sunday any way.”

“We donated?” Castiel asks Anna under his breath trying to be subtle. Mother notices of course.

Anna turns away from Daniel and Adina and to Castiel. “To what?” Cas nods down the table. “Oh. Yes. Of course. So,” she turns back to the starry-eyed newlyweds. “Where in Mexico was the honeymoon? Nowhere unsafe I hope.”

Castiel suppresses a sigh and turns back to the others as his mother is finishing. “…and I do hope that after a few terms you think about something bigger.”

“What are you running for again?” Castiel asks. Zachariah and Bartholomew give Castiel tense smiles. He should know this.

“City council,” Bartholomew answers. “I know it’s small, but as they say, change has to start on the local level.”

“Yes, I agree,” Castiel says, perking up. “There’s a lot to be done. Just the homeless situation since
the Salvation Army shelter closed is atrocious.”

“It is! You’re right. That’s why I’m advocating for a no camping ordinance, get them off the street and out of the city.” Bartholomew looks quite proud of himself and Zachariah beams at him. Castiel pushes down a surge of disgust.

“I don’t understand. How will that help?” Castiel asks.

“Well, I do also want to work with the state and county on stricter enforcement of drug and nuisance laws.”

“That’s a fine idea,” Naomi says.

“What about more funding for actual services? There’s more people in need than there are beds to give them and.” Castiel stops himself, trying to temper his anger. “And the ones they have are barely adequate.”

“Well, that’s because of that disgusting ‘non-discrimination’ ordinance,” Zachariah spits. “If the shelters had the power to turn away the deviants, they could provide more service to the deserving.”

“Yes, well. Those rules are going to be the first to go, including the employment one. Never mind sheltering them, can you imagine being forced to hire homosexuals? At a school? Or a church?” Castiel feels his like every blood cell in his body just vibrated to a stop. The heat and anxiety rises and he can feel what little food he already ate churning in the acid of his stomach.

“That’s why we’re glad we have good people like you fighting for us,” Adina says.

Castiel turns. He’d missed that the others had stopped talking. “I-I don’t think…” He doesn’t think that Bart planning to make the lives of the homeless even harder is very Christian, but the words stick in his throat.

“We’re not parents yet, but we wouldn’t want our kids around that. The media is already bad enough,” Daniel says, taking Adina’s hand as if to comfort her against the very thought.

“Are you two already planning?” Naomi asks before Castiel can think to protest. He feels Anna go tense beside him and a different, but equally familiar kind of sickness bubbles in his gut. “Not that I think you should rush. It’s important in a marriage to get to know each other. But at a certain point some people start wondering when they’ll be grandmothers.”

“You are a grandmother, Naomi,” Anna says, falsely cheerful. “Or are we all pretending little Jack and Muriel don’t count?”

“You know what I mean.” The words are kind and warm, they always sound that way, but Castiel can feel Anna going cold beside him.

“I think you have a point,” Adina says. “I’m really just enjoying married life right now.”

“It’s wonderful, isn’t it?” Bart interjects. “It makes coming home feel safe, you know? I can’t even sleep well on nights when Hael is travelling like right now. I’ll be a mess tomorrow.”

“Yes, it is hard to get used to an empty bed,” Naomi replies quietly.

“But it’s wonderful, isn’t it? Coming home every day to your best friend,” Anna says, turning to Castiel with wide, bright eyes, the sun catching in her red hair. “I’m grateful to God every day for the person I get to spend my life with.”
Castiel stares into his wife’s face and forces a smile as green eyes flash in his mind. “We’re both very lucky.”

“See, that’s what’s important,” Zachariah says, startling them. “Husbands and wives, supporting each other. That is the foundation of our country and society.”

“That’s what we need to protect,” Bartholomew agrees with a slam of his palm to the table. Castiel nods in agreement, as always.

Usually it’s easier. Smiling and agreeing and nodding along. There’s another person he becomes at home, at church, in moments like these. A stranger that steps into his skin and still feels that complete faith in the Word and the Lord. He envies that man sometimes, wishes the real him would just disappear, except when he’s tangled up in a dingy motel with a man he pays for sex.

Dinner is quick, or it seems that way to Castiel. He’s detached from it. In no time the guests are sent back to their shiny cars and he’s alone with Anna again. A weight does lift when it’s just the two of them doing the dishes and discussing what ingredients his mother shoved into the dessert she brought besides marshmallows and canned fruit and how Bart ate three servings.

“You know I didn’t actually donate to him, right?” Anna says as they close the washer on the last dish.

Castiel blinks at her. “Really?”

“Of course not.” Anna rolls her eyes. “He’s an asshole.”

Castiel lets out a thin laugh. “I thought I was the only one thinking that. The things he wants to do to ‘help’ the poor.”

“It’s disgusting,” Anna scowl. “Jesus would punch him in the face if he knew what he was using his name for.”

“I would like to see that.” Cas follows Anna to the couch and they sit together. “I can’t believe everyone just agreeing.” Anna gives him a sharp look. “Well, Zachariah I guess.”

“Hope the new assistant pastor they hired is less of a-”

“Fatuous blow hard?”

“Cas!” There’s only laughter in Anna’s voice, no anger.

“I just…” Castiel sighs, trying to be careful of his words. “I’m down there, every week, and the people he wants to drive out? They’re not bad. They’re good people that that bad things have happened to. I have friends among them and I wish I…” Castiel bites his lips. He’s not even speaking only of Dean, really, but all the familiar faces he sees each week. “I wish I could do more.”

“You do a lot, hon,” Anna says, squeezing his shoulder.

“You save people every day. I save money.” Catiel thinks about the commute into the office tomorrow and the reams of paperwork and calls and calculations that await. It makes him want to scream.

“I can only save people because I have you next to me every day,” Anna says, drawing Castiel’s attention back with a finger under his chin. “I wouldn’t have made it through med school without you, or internship, and residency is the same. You know that.”
Cas gives a weak nod and finally meet’s Anna’s eyes. “I still wonder if it’s enough.”

“Cas, come on.” He doesn’t think he deserves the kindness in her expression. “You’re a better example of doing as Christ would want than any of them. Even your mother. You’re the best person I know.”

“I doubt that, but thank you for saying it. You haven’t met you.”

Anna rolls her eyes and gives him a quick kiss. “You’re sweet.” Anna snuggles under his arm, fishing for the remote. “I didn’t know you’d started making friends downtown. Anyone interesting?”

Anna clicks on the TV without the sounds. It’s one of the news programs she likes that makes Castiel want to tear his hair out at the mess the world has become.

“There’s one young man,” Cas says carefully and he has no idea why he’s even talking. Lying would be better, but after so much it does get exhausting. “His name is Dean. He’s very caring. He’d never describe himself to anyone this way but, he takes care of other people on the street. Sometimes he helps me hand out the donations.”

“Does he take anything for himself?” Anna asks, attention already fading as she turns up the volume.

“Only when I make him,” Castiel says softly. He doesn’t add that Dean doesn’t think he deserves anything more. It would be easy to talk about, that little detail of Dean that he discerned after only a few conversations. It’s not worth discussing with Dean, as there would be no way of convincing him he deserves to be saved, especially when Castiel is in no real position to do any saving.

“That’s sweet of you,” Anna says, barely concealing a yawn. “Tell him your doctor wife says malnutrition can have serious effects paired with stress and, you know, whatever.”

“I’ll be sure to mention it,” he lies.

Dean likes it when Cas swears, and Cas swears a lot when he’s about to come. “Fuck…fuck, god yes…Dean…” the litany goes and tonight it’s fantastic. Cas has Dean’s legs wrapped high around him, so he can fuck hard and deep into Dean. His hands feel like they’re everywhere. Tugging Dean’s hair, grabbing at his shoulder and jacking his cock. Dean feels the orgasm building inside him, racing Cas to finish. He tangles his fingers into dark hair and pulls Cas to him, crashing their mouths together and groaning as he comes first. He shakes and twitches and bucks as he shoots in-between them, most of his come hitting Cas’s hands and belly. At least, he thinks it does. He’s kind of distracted, even more so when Cas pants “Dean,” one more time and comes himself. Dean pulls him back so he can watch. He used to think that everyone’s O-face was ridiculous, but Cas’s is just hot. When he loses it, when he’s free and soaring on what Dean can do to him, he’s beautiful. He almost says as much, before catching himself.

“You’re beautiful,” Cas says first, breathless as he plucks the words from Dean’s mind. “So fucking beautiful.”

“You know, the flattery is supposed to come before the fucking,” Dean smirks. Cas just smiles, blue eyes searching Dean’s face as he pushes a few sweaty strands of hair from Dean’s forehead with tenderness that makes Dean shiver.
Cas is still inside him, looking at him like there’s something else impossible on the tip of his tongue, and the last wisps of pleasure melt into something else. It makes Dean feel split right open and carved out, electric charges replacing his breath.

“Are you alright?” Cas asks, eyes darkening because whatever moment Dean is having must show on his face. “Did I hurt you?”

“I’m fine,” Dean manages to say, trying to hide that the question itself is a gut punch. “I don’t think you could hurt me.”

“I would never mean to,” Cas swallows, looking away and retreating in every way possible. He pulls out with a wet sound and moves to get out of bed. Dean’s hand moves faster than his brain to stop him and Cas looks at him with confused eyes. “The condom…”

“Throw it on the fucking floor, it ain’t like this we need to keep the place clean.” Cas looks dubious, but he obeys and moves easily when Dean pulls him back to him. He wipes the come off his hands on the scratchy sheets as he pulls them over their bare bodies. There’s still some on Cas’s stomach as Dean settles close, head on Cas’s arm. On impulse Dean runs his thumb through the mess, pressing it into Cas’s skin and earning a small gasp. “Don’t you wanna take a bit of me with you?” he jokes, or pretends to, since his voice is still shaky for some reason.

“I always want to take all of you with me,” Cas whispers back, completely sincere. Those electric eels in Dean’s stomach spring to life again at that.

“Yeah, right.”

“Sometimes I…” Cas stops himself, like he knows he’s about to say too much. Dean rubs another smear of come into his skin and he shivers.

“Sometimes you what?” Dean asks, looking up through his lashes. He knows that’s the look Cas can’t ever resist.

“Sometimes I think about staying. Here with you. After. Just…sleeping.” Cas’s breath catches again as Dean presses the last of his spend into Cas’s skin, marking him until it’s washed away and the memory shoved back into whatever convenient box in Cas’s mind he stores everything else so that he can keep up his pretending. “Waking up next to you.” Cas shakes his head.

“And here I thought you were gonna get all kinky on me,” Dean says, trying to ease the tension that’s thick in the air. It works and Cas huffs a laugh.

“I don’t think I’m capable of being very ‘kinky.’”

It’s the finger quotes that get Dean to really laugh. “Oh, I got faith in you. Just need some time.”

“Oh really?” The bashful smile from Cas is absolute gold.

“Hell yeah, we just need to work up to it, try shit out, see what you like.”

“I’m scared to ask what that means.”

Dean rolls his eyes as Cas cards his hands through his hair. “Like, other positions and stuff, dumbass.”

“Oh.” Cas looks curious but cautious. “Come on, you never wanted to get me on my hands and knees?” Dean says, turning the smolder up to eleven. “Bend me over a table or something?”
“I like seeing your face.”

Dean wishes Cas would stop doing this – surprising him at every fucking turn; reminding him how whatever they have going on is way too different and so fucking dangerous. “Oh,” is all he says. “Well, you still might like it.” It would be easier if he did, is what Dean doesn’t say.

“Maybe. Or maybe eventually…” In the dark it’s hard to see that Cas is blushing, but Dean can feel how he goes tense.

“What you thinkin’, Cas?” Cas tries to hide and a grin spreads over Dean’s face. “You want me to fuck you, don’t you?”

“I have…thought about it,” Cas says, almost too quiet to hear.

Dean nuzzles at his face, forcing Cas to look at him and see him smiling before he kisses him, slow and encouraging. “We can see about that.”

“I don’t think I’m…”

“We’ll work you up to it.” Dean shimmies a bit closer to Cas. The room is warm, the heavy August heat winning the fight against the pitiful, clanging AC under the window. He still wants to be closer, even so. “That’s what I’m here for.”

“Thank you, Dean.”

Dean blinks, running a hand up Cas’s arm. “For what?”

“For giving me something to look forward to. For…” Cas takes a long deep breath. “For getting me through the week. For getting me through.”

“Like I said, that’s what I’m here for,” Dean replies. He doesn’t repeat the sentiment. If Cas can’t guess it’s the same for Dean, he doesn’t need to know.

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
-Mentions of past Dean/Aaron
-Mentions of drug use
-Anal sex (Cas and Dean).
-Comeplay

The girl with Aaron is Ellie from "The One You've Been Waiting For."

I don't actually know much about the politics in Lawrence, Kansas, but local elections are important!
Hey! Well, I was able to get this one done faster than I thought, despite working all weekend on another thing. There is some possibly triggery/controversial stuff in this one, which I have listed in the end notes and the sad is starting. But also - porn! Hope it balances.

Anna adds extra antacids to Castiel's paper bag full of socks, peanut butter and toothbrushes. He made the mistake of mentioning over breakfast that his stomach was particularly unsettled and Anna had fussed and cooed over him all morning. She even threatened to get out her prescription pad, but Castiel thankfully escaped that. It’s not like more medicine will really fix him when the reflux comes from stress and anxiety. Sometimes Cas thinks of all the acid burning him up inside as some poison literally seeping out of his soul, then he tells himself to not be so morose and dramatic. It’s just another thing he has to live with. Some things in life are there to test you, but a few things are there to make it better and right now he’s on his way towards one of those.

The first person he sees when he gets to the mission is Uriel Wisdom. Avoiding Uriel at work is much easier than here. It’s not that Castiel dislikes him any more than the rest of the administration, but he has a special way of judging and intimidating that makes Castiel’s skin crawl. Of all the people that Castiel also sees at church, Uriel is the most obstinate in his backwards opinions. Maybe he does dislike him more. He sends the man a wave and a nod and manages to make it to the basement where they prepare the food and supply bags without any other interactions until Hannah.

The two of them have their routine down fairly well, able to churn out a few dozen sandwiches quickly and efficiently. Cas hate the flimsy rubber gloves they need to wear but it’s not bad overall. Hannah never burdens him with small talk, here or at work, which is one of the reasons he likes her. She’s somewhat severe but she’s not as straight laced as others in their workplace. Anna jokes about her seriousness but of Castiel female co-workers she likes her much more than Meg.

“Did you tell Meg that today we would be doing the amenities packages?” Cas asks as the thought occurs to him, handing a sandwich to Hannah.

“She shoved forty dollars at me and said ‘have at it,’” Hannah scowls. “I don’t know why you keep asking her to come. This is through the church, not the hospital.”

“The same church that nearly everyone at the hospital goes to and which has representatives on the hospital board,” Castiel corrects.

“Please don’t tell me you haven’t heard her complaining about that too.”

“I have. But, despite Meg’s feelings about the church, she’s still a good person.” Hannah raises an eyebrow and Castiel frowns back. “She just shows it in a different way.”

“Whatever you say. Have you ever asked Anna about coming down?”

Castiel braces himself at a flare of acrid discomfort under his ribs. “I have but, she’s very busy.”
“Sometimes I feel bad that I get to see you more than your wife does.”

“She sees me when it’s important.” Castiel keeps his attention on the sandwiches. “And it’s not the amount of time people spend together, it’s what they do with it.”

“Of course. I tell my cat that all the time.”

Castiel smiles and they fall back into their usual, comfortable silence. They divide the food and care packages evenly among all the volunteers and join in the prayer before heading out. Castiel’s heart flutters in excitement when he step out into the street, summer sun pricking his eyes. He wore a polo shirt today at Anna’s insistence, along with light khakis. It’s the most casual the mission dress code allows and he doesn’t own jeans. He’s sure Dean will mock him for it but he doesn't care. He doesn’t care about his clothes or his stomach or the bags of food and socks in his hands. He just wants to find Dean and take back up the kisses from two nights before. He wants Dean’s laughter and his cock in Castiel’s mouth and the glimmer in his eyes and the weight of his him in his arms that make him feel whole and real.

“Castiel?” He turns to see Hannah at his elbow, looking slightly more concerned than usual. “Would you like some help with those today? I know you like to talk to people, but since we’re…”

“Heya, Cas.”

Castiel’s blood does that thing it tends to do when Dean surprises him – where it seems to jump right out his veins and vibrate slightly to the left. Dean for once is not wearing the old leather jacket. He looks smaller and younger without it but still absolutely beautiful.

“Hello, Dean.” Castiel tries to keep his voice steady, school his face into something appropriate and ignore Hannah’s confused look.

“PB&Js again?” Dean asks nodding at the boxes.

“And some other things. Socks. Ponchos. Other amenities.” Hannah answers, drawing Dean’s attention for the first time.

“Oh, nice,” Dean only gives one glance between her and Castiel. “Sorry for not introducing myself. I’m Dean.”

“So I guessed,” Hannah says, looking suspiciously at the hand Dean holds out to her. “You’re a friend of Castiel’s?”

“Yeah, we’ve been, uh…” Castiel’s stomach plummets again as Dean falters and lets his hand drop. “Talking about the good news.”

“Oh, that’s wonderful to hear.” The change in Hannah’s demeanor is as surprising to Castiel as it seems to be to Dean. “Castiel has always been shy about spreading the word, but I’m glad he’s found a willing ear.”

“Well, he buys me lunch, so…” Dean shrugs.

“Dean helps me with handing things out too, he’s very well connected around here,” Castiel explains. It seems safe enough.

“Really?” Hannah looks even more interested by this. “How do you think we’re doing? Does it help?”
Dean glances between Castiel and Hannah, mouth open as he searches for words. “Uh…people get a little tired of PB&J sometimes, I dunno.”

“Sorry, I shouldn’t push,” Hannah says. “But if you have any ideas you should tell Castiel. Or we have a meeting about how we can best serve the community after services once a month.”

“I’ll consider that.” Dean’s smile is stiff and polite, but it’s enough to placate Hannah. "Transport is an issue, you know."

"Of course, sorry," Hannah fumbles. "Still, consider it. I’ll see you later, Castiel. Nice to meet you, Dean."

Castiel waits until Hannah is half a block away before he dares to look at Dean. The sun makes his hair look especially blonde and his eyes very green.

“Sorry, about that,” Dean says, digging his toe into a divot in the sidewalk. “Got excited to say hi, I guess.”

Castiel smiles. “It’s alright. She doesn't know you were lying about not being able to get around.”

Castiel learned a few weeks into their acquaintance that Dean not only owns a car, but lives in it. Even considering that it's his home, Dean has an passionate devotion to the vehicle.

"My Baby wouldn’t fit in out in the burbs,” Dean says. Castiel still hasn't seen the car, but he knows it's big, mean and black, so Dean is probably right.

"Hannah is likely just happy to know I’m taking the cause so seriously.”

“Well, I don’t know about the good word but you are good at spreading some things.” Dean smirks as Castiel blushes.

“And thankfully you didn’t say anything like that in front of her.”

“Do you think she…” Dean looks like he’s genuinely worried.

“No, she wouldn’t suspect anything untoward going on. To her I’m just her friend and boss; another member of the church with a nice house and nice wife. It wouldn't occur to her that I could be…”

“Not straight?” Castiel is glad Dean says it for him. He nods. “God, what a boring way to live.”

“Are you hungry, Dean?” Cas asks, feeling strangely fond.

“Always, Cas, you know me.”

“Hm.”

“What do you mean, ‘hm?’” Dean asks as they begin to walk.

“You usually complain at least once before you let me buy you food.”

“Maybe I missed breakfast.”

“Or?”

“Or maybe I’m gonna make you take me to the shitty Chinese place that has a lock on the bathroom door,” Dean says as easy as discussing the weather. Cas doesn’t trip and he takes pride in that.
“I do like the sweet and sour pork there,” Castiel replies. Dean laughs and the day seems perfect already.

They move too fast and not fast enough handing out food and other amenities at the camps. Dean makes sure to get a poncho and socks for the wild-eyed veteran he always checks on when he doesn’t think Castiel is looking. He asks after people, gets satisfactory answers and waves to a crowd across the park. The time before he gets Castiel alone, after giving careful instructions of how long to wait and how to enter the bathroom, is interminable. They don’t even order food first.

Then Dean is there, locking the door and grabbing the crumpled bills from Castiel’s hand and kissing him. There is nothing in the world, even the sex, that feels as good at the first kiss each time he sees Dean. It’s always a new discovery, the different ways their mouths can fit together, the heat and desire.

“Been thinking about this since Thursday,” Dean whispers into his mouth, hand groping between them. Dean undoes Cas’s pants with practiced ease and has him hardening in his hand so quickly it’s almost absurd. “That’s right, get that pretty cock up for me, baby.”

“Just for you,” Cas breathes and Dean answers with a smug laugh. Dean jacks him slow and easy, pulling small sounds of pleasure from Castiel’s throat.

“Shhh,” Dean admonishes, pressing a hand over Castiel’s mouth. Castiel is trapped between Dean and the wall, his hands flat against the cold, sticky plaster. “Got a job for that mouth.” Two of Dean’s fingers push into Castiel’s mouth and he suppresses another moan. Castiel sucks on Dean’s fingers, amazed at how the feel of them in his mouth makes his head spin. Dean pumps them in and out in time with the movement of his hand on Castiel’s cock, and it’s completely intoxicating. “Remember what I said about easing you into things?”

“Yes…” Cas has a vague memory of something but Dean can’t actually expect higher brain function from him right now.

“Stay quiet for me now, baby,” Dean pants into Castiel’s ear. He feels the nudge of Dean’s erection through his jeans for a brief moment before Dean pulls away, withdrawing his fingers and tugging Cas to a different spot against the wall. He drops to his knees, pulling Castiel’s khakis and plain white boxers with him and then all the way down. Dean pulls just one foot free and braces it on the edge of the toilet so Dean’s shoulder is under Castiel’s thigh. Cas doesn’t think about it or ask. Dean takes his cock into his mouth and it’s all that matters.

He tries to stay quiet, he does. He screws his eyes shut and whispers profanity and blasphemy as Dean undoes him with his lips and tongue. His laps at the vein on the underside, kisses at his cockhead then takes him all the way in and sucks and swallows. He works Cas’s balls gently with his hand and then his mouth and then…

“Fuck!” Cas nearly jumps out of his skin at the touch of a spit-wet finger at his hole.

“Shhhhh…” Dean whispers against Castiel’s hip before taking his cock back into his mouth. The gentle pressure of his fingers doesn’t relent. He strokes at Cas’s perineum and then back to the tight ring of muscle. Cas chokes back another desperate sound as his hands scrabble against the wall. Dean sucks and bobs his head just as he pushes carefully into Cas and Cas bites his fist to keep from yelling.

The intrusion is strange, combined with the stretch and a burn. He knows the feeling, having done this himself in the dark long ago. This is better than any of his fumbling attempts. Dean keeps up with his mouth on Castiel’s cock and his free hands gently holding his hip, grounding Castiel. Now
he understands why Dean moved his leg up. It’s easier this way. Much easier when Dean pushes carefully in. Castiel moans around his fist as Dean penetrates him. His finger feels so thick, even just up to the knuckle. Castiel thinks of what Dean’s cock might feel like and his whole body shudders.

“Relax. I’m gonna take care of you,” Dean murmurs as he pulls off, pumping one finger into Cas and going deeper each time. He licks down Cas’s cock and takes his balls in his mouth briefly, then move further, tongue joining his finger, playing at Cas’s rim. Castiel is wet with spit, and struggling to breathe, but he forces himself to obey and relax. It’s enough for Dean to add a second finger.

“Fuck, oh god,” Cas whimpers. Dean's laughter is distant over the roar of Castiel's heartbeat and breath. He eagerly takes Castiel’s cock back into his mouth and Cas barely notices. He’s so full and stretched, like he’s never managed before, with Dean moving his finger carefully in and out and then…Dean manages what Castiel never has, finds that sweet spot inside and pushes. Cas comes so hard and so suddenly that he sees stars.

Cas isn't really sure how he ended up on the floor, head spinning, Dean’s forehead against his. Dean kisses him, filthy and deep so he can taste himself on the other man’s tongue.

“Dean, I…I want…” He’s still soaring from the orgasm, only half registering when Dean stands and the sound of his jean’s being undone.

“I know what you want, sweetheart, I got ya,” Dean mutters. He grabs Cas by the hair and pushes his cock into his mouth. It’s exactly what he wanted, Dean’s right. That’s the thing about Dean that Cas adores: he never has to say the words. He just knows what Cas needs.

Dean is still the one in charge, Cas is just there to take whatever Dean gives. He fucks into Castiel’s mouth, fast and hard and Cas allows himself to be used for Dean’s pleasure. He’s getting better at opening his throat, relaxing his jaw and just taking. He knows Dean well enough to be sure this won’t last very long. Sure enough Dean’s rhythm begins to falter and he pulls back, preparing to come on the floor or somewhere else wrong. Cas grabs him tight and sucks hard and Dean comes with a cry into his mouth.

“Jesus, Cas, what…” Cas chokes and spits as Dean pulls back, trying to catch his breath. “You shouldn’t have…”

“I wanted to,” Cas says, the bitter taste of come still coating his tongue.

“Yeah, but, it’s not safe.”

“I thought it would be clear by now that I am very uninterested in taking care of myself,” Cas mutters, standing and hoping ungracefully back into his pants.

“Yeah, I get that.” Dean sounds more worried than anything. It’s almost sweet.

“That was very exciting.” Castiel thinks it’s absurd to blush now, after what they just did. The way Dean smiles, bashful and amused is absurd too.

“Just a preview of what I can do to you.” Somehow, they're against the wall again, only this time, it’s Dean that’s trapped. “What I’m gonna do to you,” he adds before Cas kisses him.

“I’ll count the days,” Castiel whispers.
Aaron and Ellie’s place always has people in it. Dean’s not sure if he like that or hates it. Lots of people means no one really cares when Dean sleeps on the couch, or even the floor one time. And there’s always someone with smokes, or weed, or booze, sometimes even some pills. Dean keeps his indulgence to weed and drinking, but the prescription stuff was tempting when he woke up on that floor and his old busted ribs still ached. Most days, though, especially in the morning, there’s too many fucking people. Which is why Dean notices the fact he’s the only one in the living room when he wakes up there again on Thursday.

“Hey, you’re still here,” Aaron says cheerfully, plopping next to Dean on the coach. The thing looks like it belongs in a landfill, but it’s a hell of a lot more comfortable than Baby’s back seat. There’s one that’s even worse set up on the back porch, looking out over a tangle of dead weeds.

“Yeah, well, Andy kept me up with Dark Side of the Moon last night, had to sleep it off,” Dean replies, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “What time is it?”

“Uh, two, I think?”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Dean has no watch to check. He remembers working some last night, a sloppy blow job at a bar and then tripling that cash with pool and then coming to Aaron’s to celebrate. And then…a lot of smoke and Zepp. Andy is one of his new favorite people. But he’s not a fan of losing time.

“What, you got somewhere to be?” Aaron laughs.

“Not until tonight, no.”

“Ooo, hot date?”

Dean rolls his eyes. “Can I use the powder room?”

“Be my guest, mi casa es su casa,” Aaron grins.

Dean’s actually confused by that. Aaron never used to let him crash or smoke for free, but things are different since he got out of the joint. It’s not like Dean would mind paying for shit. He can afford it. His saving plan is working pretty well, and the steady income from Cas is giving him some security to play with. But Aaron’s never asked.

Dean stumbles to Aaron’s bathroom. It’s a dump, but there’s water and a place to piss so it’ll do just fine. Dean’s thankful to his past self for passing out in his jacket since it’s where he keeps…everything, from condoms and lube to a small toothbrush and toothpaste. Always best to be prepared.

The fog clears from Dean’s head when his bladder is empty and his mouth doesn’t feel like something died in it. He washes his face and chances a look in the mirror. He needs a shave and to do something with his hair, but it’s not so bad. He could do nothing and tonight Cas’ll still look at him like he’s a Michelangelo.

“Hey, what the-” Aaron’s shocked voice is cut off by the sound of a crash. “Hey!”

“Nice to see you too, Aaron.” Dean can barely hear the other voice through the wall, but it’s unsettlingly familiar.

“Hey, man, I was just on my way over to-”
“Pay me my money?” There’s another thump and Dean’s heart starts racing. He knows who the voice belongs to. Azazel.

“I just lost track of time!” Aaron yelps just as Dean bursts out of the bathroom, reaching for the knife that hasn’t left his pocket since the last time he ran into the bastard.

“Hey! What’s—”

“Dean, no!” Aaron yells as Azazel and the second guy, the one Dean didn’t hear who’s holding Aaron against the wall, turns to sneer at Dean. The other guy keeps the massive knife he’s holding at Aaron’s throat while Azazel points up the baseball bat he’s carrying at Dean.

“Why look what we have here,” Azazel purrs. “You trade your giant out for a third-rate whore for muscle?”

“Leave him alone, I got your money!” Aaron yells as panic and terror pulse through Dean. Now he knows why Aaron hasn’t been alone for weeks: safety. Azazel gives a signal and the other guy lets Aaron go. Dean holds on tight to the knife in his pocket as Aaron scrambles to the ratty couch and pulls up the cushions. He produces a thick envelope of cash.

“Aaron, what the fuck?” Dean demands as Aaron hands the money to Azazel.

“Aaron is one of my newest franchisees. We became great friends on the inside.” Azazel grins, while Aaron’s face is a map of shame and guilt as Dean stares at him. “Of course, back there, Aaron made his payments on time.”

“It won’t happen again, I swear!” Aaron says, voice shaking.

Dean opens his mouth to say something along the lines of it won’t happen again because Aaron won’t be working for a low life like Azazel. But Aaron shakes his head, leaving Dean to just glare.

“No, it won’t,” Azazel goes on, giving Aaron a quick slap on the cheek then turning his attention back to Dean. “Thought that black beauty parked outside was familiar. What’d he say you name was, pretty boy? Dean?”

“Yeah,” Dean says as his skin starts to crawl. Alastair is going to know that by the end of the day.

“Dean, are you a customer of my fine associate here?”

“A friend,” Dean replies, defiant.

“Good, wouldn’t want you getting yourself sick on that shit,” Azazel coos. “You interested in moving up in the world? Give me that car of yours and I will set you up with enough product to move that you’ll be buying a new one in no time.”

“I told you, she ain’t for sale,” Dean says, jaw tight and fists clenched.

“And you’ve got a job already, huh? Bending over and opening up for faggots and freaks.” Dean stays silent and Azazel laughs, slinging his bat over his shoulder. “Alastair misses you by the way. Hope you don’t think you’re too good for him.”

“You got something else to say to Aaron or do you just like hearing yourself talk?”

Azazel scowls and rounds on Aaron. “Pick up next week, big one. Don’t be fucking late.” The heavy gives Aaron a shove as he heads out the door, Azazel following behinds. “See you around,
boys.”

Dean doesn’t breathe until the door clicks closed.

“Dean, I’m sorry you-”

“Are you out of your mind!” Dean yells before Aaron can say more. “What do you think you’re doing? Dope wasn’t enough?”

“No, it wasn’t, okay!” Aaron snaps, anger filling his voice. “I have shit to deal with, Dean, especially after doing time. And come on, you fuck people for money, don’t fucking judge me.”

“I’m not…” Dean stops, forcing himself to take a few deep breaths. “Azazel and his people are bad fucking news, man. That’s all I’m saying.”

“It’s fine. This was a hiccup.” Aaron shakes off Dean’s concern. “I have a plan and I’ve got the Golem for protection.”

“The who?”

“The big guy that’s around? Elmer isn’t a very intimidating street name.”

“And ‘the Golem’ is?”

“The point is that I’m fine,” Aaron sighs. “You don’t need to worry about me. I’m actually more worried about you.”

“Me?”

“Yeah, Azazel wants something from you, and that’s bad.”

Dean gulps. There’s a lot of reasons he’d avoided the Rack for the last few weeks, the main one being that Azazel an the Hell Hounds scare the shit out of him. The lesser one is of course he doesn’t want Alastair to fucking touch him, especially when he’s got someone like Cas.

“I’m staying out of his orbit, as much as I can,” Dean mutters.

“It’s a small town.” Aaron heads back to the couch and plucks a half smoked joint from the ashtray. “Time to settle some nerves, you want?” Aaron produces a lighter from the pocket of his robe and lights up.

“Nah, man, I gotta stay clear, working tonight.” Aaron nods, distracted as he takes a long hit.

“Thanks for, uh, defending my honor or whatever, you’re still welcome by anytime.”

“Thank you for the open door.” Dean watches as Aaron’s eyes droop, a cloud of skunky smoke wafting around him. “Keep wondering when you’re gonna make me pay.”

“Pay for what?” Aaron coughs.

“Uh, anything?”

Aaron looks at Dean like he’s grown a new head. It’s possible he’s actually seeing that. “Dude, you’re a friend. A friend that nearly got his ass kicked by a mean motherfucker for me. This is what friends do.”
“Oh.”

Aaron waves Dean off and he heads back to the Impala, relieved to see she’s still in one piece after Azazel. Dean drifts in thought as he drives, not really going anywhere. He’d always thought of Aaron as a friend, he guesses, but never thought it truly went the other way. He’s only as good to people as what he can provide for them, he’s always been taught that. Eyes to watch Sam and an extra welfare check, small hands and an innocent face for a job, a willing body. He’s there to take care of people, however he has to.

Cas is the first person he can remember in forever that’s really tried to take care of him. Figures that the first taste of that sort of care Dean would ever get would be from a john.

Dean pulls into a nice secluded spot on the edge of downtown. He’s got hours until he’s set to meet Cas, but his stomach is already buzzing in anticipation. If everything goes right tonight, he may get to fuck Cas and it’s been a very long time since Dean’s done that. Can’t blame him for being excited. Then again the feeling in his stomach might be hunger. Whatever. He’ll find something to eat and maybe see a movie to pass the time. Cas will be at the Moonlight All Night at sunset. Fall is getting closer every day, Dean thinks. That means rain and cold nights and general shittiness, but it also means night will come faster, and less of a wait. It’s not that Dean minds the time. He reads and people watches. But it’s better when Cas is there. Even he can admit that.

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Castiel clicks his pen for the thousandth time and checks the clock for the hundredth. It’s 4:45 pm. So close to the hour of escape he can taste it. He’s usually better about this, keeps himself in check more. But today is different, tonight holds the promise of something he’s wanted for a very long time and never even dreamed of really experiencing. Also, the week had been particularly miserable. Meg and Hannah had turned up the dial on their passive aggressive stand off, with Hannah consistently filing claims in the upper shelves out of Meg’s reach. Meg had retaliated by cooking salmon in the office microwave, knowing full well the smell would linger and make Hannah ill. And Castiel had a mid-quarter report that he would love to complete is he didn’t have to keep taking panicked calls from billing ever hour or so. In addition to the monotony of work, Anna had worked late Wednesday, leaving Castiel alone for a welcome party for the new assistant pastor of their church. The poor man had looked even more uncomfortable than Castiel felt, trapped in the basement of the church. Zachariah had led him around by the elbow from person to person, talking over him each time he tried to assert himself. Castiel had lurked behind the table, picking at the pale vegetable platter and selection of store brand sodas until his mother had found him and forced him to make an introduction.

Castiel can’t be sure but he thinks he smelled a hint of alcohol on Mr. Shurley’s breath as the small man stammered about his training in creative writing before going to seminary. Neither his mother no Zachariah had any interest in that story, so they had started talking about…something else. Castiel can’t be bothered to remember. Just like he can’t be bothered to concentrate on the spreadsheet taking up both his computer monitors in front of him. He glances at the clock again. 4:47.

No one would comment if he left now. Not that it actually makes a difference. He still has a wait until is suitable to head downtown. Then again there’s nothing saying he can’t get there early. He knows Dean lurks at the dinner for a while before Castiel joins him, drinking coffee and reading the latest acquisition from the library. The amount of time Dean spends at the library is very endearing.
“Cas?” Castiel almost jumps at the sound of Anna’s voice from the threshold of his office. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to surprise you.” Anna’s voice is small and shaky and her eyes are red-rimmed. Castiel moves to her instantly.

“Honey, what’s wrong?”

Anna nearly collapses into his arms the second Castiel touches her, burying her face in his chest as he wraps her in a hug.

“Bad day. I…I’ll tell you more when I…” Anna gulps, her voice thick with tears. “I’m got off my night shift, I just want to go home. Can you drive me? We can pick up the car tomorrow.”

“Of course.”

Castiel squeezes Anna and quickly grabs his things. Hannah, Meg and Alfie wave politely when they leave, though Anna doesn’t react. She doesn’t talk on the drive home either, just stares out the window with unshed tears in her eyes as Castiel runs through a hundred different scenarios and anxieties in his head. He has no idea why Anna is upset, though the gut feeling that somehow it’s his fault won’t go away. It compounds with the guilt he feels already, because his first, second, and third thoughts when Anna appeared weren’t about helping her, but the fact he couldn’t see Dean tonight.

“I’m sorry,” he says aloud, halfway home.

“You don’t even know what’s wrong,” Anna says, sniffling.

“Preemptive.”

“Thank you,” Anna replies, barely more than a whisper. “She wasn’t even my patient.”

Castiel glances to his wife. She’s still staring out the window, curled into herself in the passenger seat, like a bird with a broken wing.

“People die,” Castiel starts. He remembers the first time Anna lost a patient, during preceptorship, before she even graduated medical school. She had cried for days.

“The patient didn’t die,” Anna says forcefully. “She wasn’t going to die, but her baby…It wouldn’t have had a chance. It wouldn’t have had…” Anna stifles another sob. “I was only one out of every doctor in that hospital that would do the termination. The only one. It’s what she wanted and it was for the best but I…”

Castiel pulls over, not even bothering with the parking break before undoing his seatbelt and pulling Anna into his arms. “You did the right thing,” he whispers into her hair. “It’s alright. You…”

“Am I going to hell?”

Castiel pulls back, staring into Anna’s tearstained face. “No. Anna, no.”

“I killed a--”

“Stop. No. You did your job, you did what was best. You’re a good person.” Castiel swallows. He knows goodness when he sees it, even though he is so far from it himself. “God would never punish you for this.”

“Everyone else will.” Anna wipes her nose on the sleeve of her white coat. She didn’t even change before coming to Castiel.
“We’ll deal with that, together.” Castiel puts the car back in gear, mind racing again as they drive the remaining miles home. Anna is right, there will be repercussions for this, at work and in the church. Even though every law around confidentiality should protect them, people are probably already talking.

Neither of them are hungry, so they just change into comfortable clothes and cuddle together on the couch. Anna gives him details slowly, during commercial breaks of the cooking show they end up watching. He reassures her each time that she made the right choice, that he doesn’t blame her, that he loves her, and that there is no crime her to forgive. Her tears stop after an hour or so.

“You can watch your crappy show, if you want,” Anna says when eight o’clock hits. Her head is pillowed against Castiel’s chest and he’d thought she was almost asleep.

“What show?”

“Dr. Sexy. I know you sneak it when I’m on night shift.”

Castiel forces himself to chuckle. “It’s a rerun anyway. I don’t mind missing tonight.”

“Good, because it’s terrible.” At least there’s some humor back in her voice. “But I guess you could do worse.”

“Yes, it could be football.” That gets a weak laugh from Anna.

They watch another episode of the cooking show, Castiel watches the sky fade to black through the big windows of the great room. He wonders how long Dean will wait or and how long the itch to find some excuse to leave and go to him will stay. There’s no way to even get a message to him. He thinks of Dean, waiting alone and it’s a stab to the heart. And it’s not the right thing to be worried about. Not right now.

“You’ll feel better tomorrow,” he says quietly, squeezing Anna tight.

“Thanks, babe,” Anna replies. “I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- Blow jobs/anal fingering
- Unsafe sex
- Mentions of drug use
- Mentions of abortion/pregnancy complications.

Anna's experience and response in this chapter is very tough and part of a complex issue. She and Castiel are part of a conservative Christian community that in addition to being homophobic, is extremely anti-choice. That's my way of saying: the views of the characters are all their own and don't necessarily reflect my own views on this sensitive and difficult topic.
hooo boy, two chapters in a WEEK? What is going on?! Well, this is one of the ones that I've been thinking about and planning since the start of the series, so it was just sort of in my soul, waiting to get out. I'm not gonna lie, it's a rough one. As always, the specific warnings are in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Everything hurts. Dean’s head and shoulders and neck and, fuck, his ass. Everything. The sun through the Impala window drives into Dean’s head like spikes and he slams his eyes closed but that hurts too. Fuck, he doesn’t even remember how he got back to the car or where he’s parked. The last thing he clearly remembers is the guy that fucked him in the alley buying him a drink like it was a goddamn thank you.

Everything after that is a blur of whiskey and who knows what else. He doesn’t know how much he drank, only that it wasn’t enough. He was drinking to forget and Cas hadn’t left his mind for a second. The shame and anxiety of waiting for two hours after dark at the dinner. The anger and spite had driven him to a bar where he knew he could either find work or get his ass kicked. Even once he’d found his way into Baby’s backseat, somehow, he’d dreamed of him. And endless loop of impossibilities: Cas showing up, Dean calling him, Cas being the one to take him out back behind the bar and fuck him rough and raw. Dean has no idea if the guy that did do that even paid him.

A bang on the window makes Dean jump. He’s can’t focus and the movement makes him sick as he struggles to sit up.

“Oh good, you ain’t dead,” a muffled voice says. Dean blinks, a large, man-shaped figure is peering in through the window at him. Dean grunts and opens the door. The air smells of trash of piss. It’s not much worse than the stale stink inside the car but it turns Dean’s stomach anyway. “Go ahead and hurl, won’t make any difference back here.”

Dean recognizes that voice, and now the face when his eyes decide to work. He always liked Benny’s bar because he didn’t ask questions, and the one time Dean ended up a bloody mess on the bathroom floor, Benny had helped him out. If the guy didn’t mind that, Dean’s pretty sure he’s not going to judge Dean for stumbling away and puking up an entire distillery behind a dumpster.

“Just get it out, brother,” Benny says. He sounds closer than a sane person should be, but Dean’s headache is still too bad to look.

“Fuck,” Dean mutters, spitting out the last of the bile and forcing himself upright. “Why are you… fuck.”

“Here. Drink this.” Benny hands Dean a bottle of water and guides him to some cement stairs to sit. Dean downs the whole thing in one swig and Benny hands him a second. “Maybe go slower on that one. I got some Aspirin here for you too.”

“Why?”
“You tellin’ me you don’t have a hangover that would make the devil weep?”

“No, why are you taking care of me?” Dean takes a smaller sip of water. Even just moving his arm makes his whole body hurt.

“Would you believe me if I said it’s the Christian thing to do?”

It turns out rolling his eyes makes him sick too, but Dean still does it. “No.”

Benny laughs. It’s a nice, warm laugh, the sort Dean hasn’t heard in a long time. Cas doesn’t laugh very often. Benny hands him two white pills and Dean swallows them down, either stupidly trusting or just too tired to care if Benny’s gonna drug him and steal his kidney. “Well, how about I was a dumb kid with nothing once too?” Benny says when Dean looks at him.

“Did you get me in my car last night?”

“After you nearly got your ass beat down at the pool table, yeah.”

The memory is hazy, but Dean does recall picking a fight with some asshole who (correctly) accused him of cheating and Benny dragging him off. After that… “Oh fuck.”

“I’ve had nicer propositions, I must say, but never from anyone quite so pretty.” There’s no bite in Benny’s words. “But I ain’t a fan of sloppy seconds, or paying for what I can get for free.”

Dean feels like he’s going to be sick again. “Jesus fuck.”

“Or taking advantage of someone who's hurting over someone else.”

“Shut up.” Dean wants to stand up and walk off. Drive a hundred miles and find a nice hole to crawl in so he can never come out. That’s too much effort. “Someone let me down is all.”

“Whatever you say, brother.” Dean thinks it would be impolite to punch someone after they were this kind to him. He still considers it. “You wanna use the bathroom? I know you don’t have great memories of the place, but you look like you could use a wash. And I got some pretzels and hot pockets if you’re hungry.”

“Uh yeah, thanks.” Dean’s too tired to be proud. He wishes he were too tired to feel like an idiot for last night.

He takes care of things in the bathroom, changes into some clothes that aren’t quite so disgusting and washes as best he can. He still feels like pounded shit when he makes it out, but at least he’s pounded shit that can move. He shoves his wallet into his pants and thinks about the phone number tucked inside for the thousandth time since waiting in that dinner. What if Cas isn’t okay? What if he’s hurt or got caught and sent to some shitty queer intervention? What if...

The same thought that stopped Dean every time before keeps Dean from asking to use Benny’s phone. Cas didn’t come because he didn’t want to. He had better things to do, probably involving his fucking wife and their nice, picket fence life. Cas is fine. Cas chose not to be there and for fuck’s sake he’s just another customer. Dean found the money from Cas’s replacement – a wad of twenties shoved in the pocket of his jeans. Dean doesn’t need Cas and Cas certainly doesn’t need him.

“You gonna be okay, brother?” Benny asks, catching Dean before he can sneak out the back.

“I’m always okay,” Dean replies with a fake smile that doesn’t convince Benny at all.
“I’m sure you are. Take care.”

Dean doesn’t say anything back. ‘Take care.’ What the fuck does that even mean to someone like him. He’s not going to take care. He’s going to drive and sulk and go to Aaron’s and get so stoned he won’t feel his body or remember anything and sleep for as long as this godforsaken world will let him. There’s nothing here worth taking care of.

—

Castiel knows Anna has coffee hidden somewhere in the house. It’s the horrible instant kind, but he doesn’t care. There’s a picture in his mind of the jar, the one with the sunrise on it and a logo from 1978. It’s supposed to be lurking at the back of the pantry where he wouldn’t think to look for it and it’s not there. He’s searched everywhere and soon Anna will be awake and then he won’t have any chance at all. Maybe the guest room just off the kitchen...

“I threw it away three months ago, babe,” Anna says from the stairs and Castiel spins to face her. He’s too worn out to even feel shame or lie (about this at least). “It’s bad for you.”

“I just need some this morning,” Castiel sighs. “I didn’t sleep well.”

“You could have woken me up.” Anna always says that, as if they can go back to college when they stayed up until obscene hours of the morning talking about everything and nothing. That doesn’t work so well when the thoughts keeping Castiel up are things he couldn’t ever say aloud, even back then.

“I didn’t want to bother you.” Castiel tries to sound kind, tries to smile. They had forgone date night last night, and Castiel had thought he was safe until they went to bed and Anna had kissed him and climbed into his lap. His mind was too full of worry and guilt and fear about Dean that no fantasy or sensation could arouse him. They had given up and turned off the lights but he could feel Anna’s disappointment in the dark, the way you feel cold radiating from a window in winter.

“There’s tea,” Anna offers, forcefully perky. “Or I can make smoothies.”

“Tea is fine, don’t worry.”

Anna puts on the kettle and they move quietly through the Saturday routine, eating toast, reading the news, ignoring the tension and pretending everything is fine until Anna plants herself in the chair next to Castiel and takes a deep breath, the way she always does before asking something.

“What is it?”

“I want to have the talk again.”

The toast sitting in Castiel’s stomach turns to stone. “Anna…”

“Please, Cas.”

“No. You’re still upset, after last week.” He will do anything, anything at all, to not have this discussion.

“Well, you won’t talk about it when we’re happy, and it doesn’t work when we’re angry, so I think
sad is worth a shot.” Anna grabs his arm, stopping him from getting up to leave before he can even try. “Cas, things are going good for us, aren’t they? Except for last night.”

“That’s…”

“We’re over the biggest hurdle and we’re doing well at work.”

“We’re not ready for a child, Anna.” He hates the way the light goes out of her face when he says it, but it’s the truth.

“No one is ever ready,” Anna argues weakly. “Come on, babe, it’s what people do! Get a house and the nice jobs and have babies and pets and families.”

“Why do you keep coming back to this? Why can’t we just stay the way we are?” Castiel asks back, already feeling defeated. He can almost hear the echo of his mother’s words in Anna’s voice, or some bible study discussion of being fruitful and multiplying.

“Because the way things are isn’t working.”

Castiel doesn’t meet her eyes, be he knows the expression of despair and heartbreak he’d see in her face if he looked. He feels completely empty, like his soul has been carved out of him with a melon baller, leaving a tired shell that is only good for lying and getting through the day. “Things are fine.”

“Sweetheart, I love you, so much. And I know you.” Castiel looks up at that, nearly ready to snap and tell her how wrong she is on that count. “You’re not happy. I see you, even if you don’t think I’m looking. You’re drowning and you won’t tell me why. I just want something we can have together. Something that can make us happy.”

“That’s not reason enough to bring a new life into the world.” Castiel is at least confident in that. “A baby isn’t a bandaid for our problems.”

“Then what is, Cas?” There’s steel in Anna’s voice. “Just tell me what you need and I’ll try to give it to you. Please.”

Castiel shakes his head, obstinately and hopelessly silent.

Dean wakes to the sounds of crashing and yelling, and he’s sure half of it isn’t in English. It’s just confusing enough to pull Dean back into the world from the pleasant void of sleep and for that he’s automatically ready to kick someone’s ass. He tries to say as much but it comes out as a garbled groan.

“Damn it, guys, stop shouting!” Aaron’s voice comes from somewhere else. “People are fucking sleeping.”

“It’s noon, asshole!” Dean’s pretty sure that’s Ellie but something about it sits wrong.

“People were sleeping,” Dean grumbles. He sits up and rubs his face, which has taken on the texture of Aaron’s couch. Great.

“Sorry!” someone yells and Dean still feels like it’s coming through cotton. His mouth is dry and
disgusting, and his stomach is unsettled. He still feels loose and soothingly empty, so odds are he hasn’t all the way sobered up.

“You want some coffee?” Aaron plops onto the couch and hands Dean a cup without asking for a response.

“Thanks.” Dean takes a sip and it’s as acrid and sobering as one would hope. He still feels like he’s missing something.

“Can I ask you a favor? Nothing big, I just need a ride on Monday and my car is…”

“Monday?” Dean repeat, blinking slowly. “What’s today?” There’s a wall of smoke and booze between him and something he really needs to remember and he can almost get to it.

“It’s Saturday, man, no rush.”

Fuck. Saturday. Cas. And Sam.

“Fuck. Fucking fuck.” Dean’s brain goes from blank to so full of panic and fury that it hurts. “I gotta go, sorry, I – I gotta meet someone.”

Dean runs out of the house, a ramshakle place that looks exactly like the den of inequity it is. It’s in a shitty neighborhood that just happens to be on the other fucking side of Lawrence from downtown.

Fuck. It’s a miracle Dean doesn’t get in a wreck or get pulled over the way he drives. This is why he should buy a damn prepaid phone, or something. He could do that now, but he still has to get down there and see if…He stops the thought before it’s completed. He doesn’t care if Cas is there. Cas stood him up and Cas can go fuck himself. Dean parks without paying on Massachusetts street and flat out runs to the shelter and the bank of phones. His only stroke of luck is that he doesn’t have to fight someone to get to a phone. He can barely focus on the buttons to punch in Sam’s number.


“Hello?” Dean almost doesn’t recognize the woman’s voice. Usually he only hears Mrs. Hess in the background of Sam’s calls.

“Uh, hi. This is-”

“I know who you are, Mr. Winchester. You’re supposed to call between eleven and twelve.”

“I’m sorry, I got, uh…”

“Luckily for you, Sam is still here.”

Thank God. There’s some muffled muttering over the line, tense and terse, then a heavy, familiar sigh. “‘Hey, Dean.”

“Hey, Sammy, sorry for the delay.” Dean’s voice is shaking and worn.

“Are you drunk?”

Dean blinks and swallows. “No, I’m not. I got held up.”

“You sound drunk.”

“I’m just catching my breath, had a rough morning getting here to talk to you.” Dean’s not even lying, but it feels that way.
“Because you don’t have a phone.” It’s been a long time since he heard Sam sound this done with everything.

“I-I’m working on that. I can get one, if you want to be able to call me.” Dean tries to smile, change the tone.

“I can’t call you, Dean, you know that,” Sam snaps back. “I can’t call you or get letters from you or ever see you because of all the crap you pulled before you ditched me!”

“Hey,” Dean growls. “I did that stuff to keep you fed and keep Dad-”

“Why? Why take care of him after what he did?” Dean doesn’t want to say that the disappointed, angry tone in Sam’s voice sounds exactly like John Winchester.

“He’s our dad, Sammy,” Dean says slowly. “He’s all we’ve got.”

“Is that why you’re in Lawrence? Calling me from a freaking homeless shelter every week? I looked up the number.” Dean hears a muffled exclamation in the background. Sam is in trouble for this.

“Are you waiting for him to come home?”

“This is where he’d come,” Dean replies slowly. Leave it to Sam to figure it out on his own.

“We haven’t heard from him in two years, Dean. He’s probably dead. He’s never coming back.”

Dean hides his face in his hands, he doesn’t want the strangers here seeing the tears pricking his eyes. He’s glad that Sam can’t see at least.

“He might…”

“I’m not coming back either.” The pitch of anger in Sam’s voice continues to rise. “I can’t because the my deadbeat brother can’t get custody of me because he’s living on the street selling drugs or something and-”

“That’s enough, Sam,” Mrs. Hess cuts Sam off. “Dean, please call on time next week. And consider using some of the services at your disposal. Sam is worried.”

“Yeah. Fine,” Dean says, numb and cold. He hangs up and walks out of the shelter in a fog. Sam’s right, he can’t argue that. Maybe not about what Dean does, but about what a pathetic failure Dean is to him. He had one job in his whole life that mattered and he fucked it up. The money he has saved, money he sold himself and bled for to get; it’s as useless as the car he can’t drive for fear of getting busted. He can’t get an apartment or, fuck, a real job when he doesn’t even have a fucking legal ID. He can’t do anything. And hell, even if he could, Sam doesn’t need him to. Sam doesn’t want him to.

Dean walks, not looking where he’s going. Just shoving past the people that get in his way. Dad could be dead and it wouldn't matter to Sam. Dean could fall of a bridge and it would make just as little difference to him. To anyone.

He pushes past a random body and some asshole grabs Dean by the arm. “Hey, get the fuck off!”

“Dean.” Cas says it like he’s repeating it. His blue eyes are wide and worried. He doesn’t let go of Dean’s arm and he looks like crap and Dean feels like he can breathe again for the first time in days. “I’ve been looking for you for an hour.” Cas pulls him away from the sidewalk and into the shade of an awning above an abandoned storefront.

“Sorry,” Dean whispers.
“No, I am…I…” Cas takes a deep breath, his vice grip on Dean’s arm unrelenting. It makes it easier for Dean to tell the guy is shaking. “Can we go somewhere? The motel? Anywhere.”

“It’s the middle of the day,” Dean says, thrown by the intensity in Cas’s blue eyes. Cas tugs Dean closer so that their foreheads nearly touch. It’s moments like this that Dean forgets Cas is shorter than him, because it feels like he takes up the whole world.

“I need you,” Cas says through gritted teeth and Dean feels it like an electric shock. “Please.”

“Yeah, okay. Come on.” Dean wants more than anything to keep ahold of Cas’s hand, but he also doesn’t want to get his ass kicked or get Cas in trouble. Cas walks too close anyway and that’s good enough. They get there fast. Frank at the front desk looks confused but the cash Cas slams on the counter keeps him from asking questions. Dean can see the tremor in Cas’s hand as he takes the key.

Dean’s brain still isn’t working right. There’s questions he should be asking or anger he should be feeling, because Cas is the reason he’s been messed up for two days, but fuck, he doesn’t care. The door slams shut and Dean doesn’t even have a second to consider how ugly the room looks in daylight or how the AC isn’t on before Cas slams Dean against the wall and kisses him and nothing else matters.

Cas has been enthusiastic before but never like this. He’s ravenous and rough, and Dean is wild for it. They practically tear each other’s clothes off between bruising kisses. No marking has always been a hard and fast rule for Dean with Cas, but Cas seems to have no such hang up as he sucks and red mark into the sensitive skin on Dean’s neck, drawing a needy whine from his mouth. Dean’s so hard it makes him dizzy. He can feel Cas’s hard cock against his hip and he would usually comment but he doesn’t want to bother with the bullshit today. Cas knows he wants him.

They stumble out of shoes and pants, falling onto the bed and grinding together. Their cocks slide together, friction eased by sweat and precome. It’s filthy and urgent and Dean moans his encouragement as Cas bites into the meat of his shoulder then kisses him again. Fuck, he feels like the last few days were a bad dream and he’s finally awake. He knows Cas feels it too. He sees it when he pulls back and fixes Dean with that ice blue stare, like Dean is the first sun he’s seen after a long dark winter. It’s breathtaking, and fucking terrifying.

“Get the…in my…” Dean stammers. Fuck he can’t even form a sentence.

“I know.” Cas disappears from on top of him and Dean just tries to breathe. He’s practically shaking with arousal and…fuck, not practically. He is shaking and the room is spinning. When was the last time he ate? Fuck. “Turn over.”

Dean doesn’t ask why, doesn’t complain. Flipping over and presenting his ass to Cas is the easiest decision he’s made all day. Cas yanks Dean to where he wants him, ass up and legs spread, and gets to work opening him up. The lube is cold and Cas pushes in rougher and faster than he ever has before. But his fingers are thick and warm and, God, it feels good. In no time, he as two then three fingers pumping into Dean, hitting his prostate and punching little screams out of him again and again.

“Fucking…please…Cas, please…” Dean whimpers, finally finding a few words in the haze. Cas’s fingers disappear and Dean is empty and waiting for an eternity while he gets in the condom. Dean doesn’t even look, he can’t. He just trusts Cas and that’s so stupid and scary. He bites the pillow when Cas pushes his cock into him, slow and hot. Cas goes still for a second when he bottoms out and Dean can hear the rough sound of his breath in the stale heat of the room. “Please…” Dean whispers, not even sure what he’s begging for. Cas gives it to him anyway.
Dean lets out a long moan as Cas starts fucking him, hard and fervent. He holds tight to Dean hips, maybe hard enough to leave a mark, but it feels good. Everything feels so fucking good and Dean doesn’t know what to do with it. Dean is used to getting bent over and fucked, used to being just a warm hole to be utilized and discarded and this…this feels nothing like that. He doesn’t know how but this is different. Cas fucks him like he’s determined to wring every drop of pleasure out of Dean, his hands and mouth finding Dean skin, when he can. He’s hitting Dean’s prostate relentlessly and everything is lightning and the sound of skin slapping into skin and the smell of sweat and Cas’s breath on his neck and…

“Cas! Fuck!” Dean yells as he comes untouched for the first time in his miserable life. Cas fucks him through it, and Dean distantly registers the falter in his rhythm before he cries out something close to Dean’s name and comes too, shaking and holding onto Dean for dear life.

Cas pulls out and tugs Dean with him to collapse onto the mattress, keeping Dean from the wet spot like a gentleman. He tosses the condom to the floor.

“Fuck.” Dean’s still trying to catch his breath but he manages to turn over and look Cas in the face. They lay there quiet for a while, as their breathing slows and the sweat cools on their skin. The sex with Cas is amazing, and maybe Dean can admit that just talking with him is great too but sometimes, he thinks he likes this the best. Just the quiet. The calm between the storms.

“I’m sorry,” Cas says softly.

“You don’t ever gotta be sorry for doing what you just did,” Dean says, grinning at the memory. Cas cracks a lop-sided smile.

“I meant for missing you, on Thursday.”

Dean bites his lips. He really didn’t want to think about that or how it fucked him up, or anything he’s feeling beyond the afterglow. “It’s okay. I’m sure you had a good reason.”

“Anna had a…bad day. She didn’t do her night shift. I needed to be there.”

Anna.

Cas has never said her name before. For the hundredth time Dean wonders: what does she look like? What does she do? How did she and Cas meet? What do they talk about over coffee in the morning? Fuck, Dean is so screwed up when it comes to Cas, he has no idea what to do.

“It’s okay. I get it.” Dean doesn’t get it but saying that is easier. “I made due.”

Cas swallows, focused on the spot on Dean’s shoulder he’s rubbing gently with his thumb. “I’m sure.”

“This is sorta late for you, for a Saturday, isn’t it?” Dean asks, because the shitty last few days and hunger and endorphins still have his brain leaking out his ear. “Is – An – Is she gonna be worried?”

“She’s fine. She’s at an organic gardening class at Home Depot,” Cas says somewhat bitterly. “So we can have more salad and steamed vegetables.”

“She sounds like Sam.”

Dean realizes his mistake the moment the words are out and Cas looks up at him in confusion. “Who’s Sam?”
Shit. Dean hasn't talked about Sam with…anybody since coming back to Lawrence. Even Martin, who knew the kid but barely remembers him. Especially today he does not want to have this discussion, but he can’t just lie. “Sam is my little brother.”

Castiel gets that 404 error look and cocks his head into the pillow. “Where is he?”

Fuck, this is why Dean never wanted to do this. “He’s fourteen. He’s in foster care. In fucking Ohio.”

“Do you see him?”

“I get to talk to him on the phone once a week. I call from the shelter.” Even in the stifling heat of the room, Dean feels cold now. “Not that he wants to talk.”

“You can’t be his guardian?” To Cas’s credit, Dean can tell from his face that he gets how dumb that question is the moment he says it. Still stings.

“I had this…plan, you know?” Dean says, swallowing back the bile from the argument that’s still fresh. “I was gonna save up. Get a job or a place or something, but with my record and Sam’s asshole social worker, that’s fucking impossible.”

“It’s not.” Dean tries not to laugh in Cas’s face. “There are places that will take you with the right referral and-”

“They don’t take people like me, Cas.” Dean has had the same argument with so many people, half of them in his head, for so long and he’s so tired of it.

“You don’t know that. I can help.” Dean feels the dam inside him break. Finally. “I can-”

“Jesus fucking Christ, no you can’t!” Dean snaps, so loud and forceful that Cas winces back and away from him. Good. Dean stands, shaking his head. “This is not your problem. You do not get to save me, Cas, I’m way fucking past it.”

“Dean.” Cas’s voice is worried and pathetic. Dean grabs their tangled-up pants from the floor and throws Cas’s slacks at him without looking before shoving his legs into his jeans. “You would know that’s not true if you would just stop hating yourself for one minute.”

Dean rounds on Cas, his blood boiling. “Seriously? You’re gonna lecture me on self-loathing? The guy who wants to make me his own little Julia Roberts because he can’t handle how much God hates his gay ass.”

Cas looks like he just took a slap to the face, but he sets his jaw and plows on. “That is not what this is about. I forget sometimes.”

Cas doesn’t say anything. He gets up and walks past Dean like he’s not even there and grabs his clothes. He’s efficient and focused, transforming from debauched to a perfect pillar of the community
before Dean’s eyes in less than a minute. It's fine. It reminds Dean who this asshole is, or at least who he wants people to think he is. It’s all fine until he pulls out his wallet.

“I'm sorry, I won’t forget again,” Cas says, formal and cold. He pulls the money out and sets it on the same dresser as usual, still not looking at Dean at all. “I'll…see you.”

Dean doesn’t reply, just watches as Cas opens that door. He thinks Cas pauses for a second, looking at Dean out of the corner of his eye, but it’s probably just his mind playing tricks on him or wishful thinking or something. The door closes and Dean slumps back onto the bed, eyes stinging and his whole body burning with anger and shame and hurt.

He nearly let Cas fuck him without paying. Cas makes him feel things he has no right to feel or even think about. It’s probably for the best that Cas won’t ever want to see him again after this, now that his little illusion is shattered. First Sam and now Cas. Leave it to Dean to fuck up the only good things in his life in one day.

Dean dresses fast and grabs the money, because looking at it makes his stomach turn. He returns the key without a word to Frank and he walks. There’s a late summer storm brewing, darkening the skies and making everyone on the street skittish with the threat of rain. Dean walks blindly until he gets to the tent camp. He doesn’t talk to Martin, just pushes the money into his hands and keeps moving. Dean doesn’t need it now anyway.

He keeps walking when it starts raining. He doesn’t flinch at the sound of thunder. He doesn’t even look up at the sky.

Chapter End Notes

Content warnings:
-Mentions of Dean/Others and a vague reference to Dean/Benny
-Anal sex (Dean/Cas)
-Mentions of drug use/over-use and alcohol as a coping mechanism
-Depression and some very brief suicidal ideation

These poor boys, honestly. What will they do now? And have you caught a few of the cross-fandom references/easter eggs that I’ve snuck in?

Come say hi to me over on tumblr why don't ya?
Why hello! I'm glad I got this update out before the end of the week! There are warnings and note for the chapter at the end, as usual. They're a bit different than usual, so be aware. And...enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, are you gonna tell me what the fuck is up with you?”

Castiel looks up from his computer. He’s been staring at the same claim dispute for ten minutes, so it’s not like Meg is interrupting. He still frowns and glowers at his empty coffee cup instead of her.

“I’m fine.” Castiel stands and grabs his cup. He has a vague plan about leading Meg back to the main office and leaving her there, but Meg snatches the mug from his hand.

“No, you’re not. You’re trying to give yourself an actual ulcer, and you’ve looked like someone killed your dog since Friday.”

Castiel sits back down and glares at Meg. He’s been telling Anna he’s fine since Saturday too and she won’t believe him either. She thinks it’s her. In a way she’s right. But the real problem is Castiel and all the mistakes he’s made that got him here.

“There was a fight,” Cas says tersely. Maybe he can get by with half the truth.

“The baby thing again?” Meg’s face is surprisingly sympathetic.

Castiel sighs. He can't escape this. “Anna and I…It seems like we want different things, so much of the time.” Actually they want the same thing, which is sex with men and that is the root of the problem. His thoughts turns back to Dean and the sting of his words. “I thought we were on the same page, that we felt the same but I was wrong.”

“Have you considered talking about it?”

Castiel huffs a tired laugh. “We’re not good at that.”

“Not to Anna, I mean.” Castiel looks up at Meg in curiously. He hadn’t meant Anna in the first place. “Like, to a counselor or, hell, your pastor or something. Hannah says your new guy is actually kind of chill.”

Mr. Shurley approached Castiel after services on Sunday, but Castiel had ignored him the same way he had ignored everyone, including Uriel, his mother, and Bartholomew. He’d been able to honestly claim he felt ill, thanks to Zachariah’s pointed sermon on the duty to help those that accepted God and his commandments and no others. He'd run to the lavatory and barely managed not to wretch.

“I don’t need to talk to a pastor,” Castiel says, cringing inwardly at the thought of what anyone who worked for the church would have to say about the reasons for his distress. They'd agree that his suffering was God's payment for his sins.
“Then talk to me, because bottling whatever is going on up inside is gonna kill you.” Meg crosses her arms defiantly and stares down at Castiel.

“Don’t be over-dramatic,” he says even as another pulse of searing discomfort radiates from his gut.

“Cas, come the fuck on, I know you.”

“Language, Miss Masters.” Meg turns to where Uriel stands in the door and Cas can see her holding back from an angry retort. “We have workplace decorum policies here for a reason.”

“Our apologies, Uriel,” Castiel says slowly before Meg can snap at him. “What brings you down here?”

“I have a matter to discuss with you,” Uriel answers and gives Meg a withering look. “ Alone.”

“No prob, I’ll just return to be a productive and well-behaved employee,” Meg says, her voice dripping with contempt.

Uriel watches her go with dark eyes, turning to Castiel as soon as the door shuts. “I don’t know why you keep that one around, she’s an immoral influence.”

“Meg is very good at her job and a good friend.” Castiel is used to keeping his face neutral in response to comments like this, it’s how he’s survived so long. But it still makes his heart race faster and his fists flex unseen blow the desk.

“Careful, Castiel,” Uriel says, low and ominous. “More relationships with sinners and whores, and people will start to think the wrong idea about you.”

Castiel swallows, terror rising fast inside of him. At least he’s already pale and grim-faced, Castiel thinks. He can keep up the lie. Uriel has called many people whores in his day and if he knew about Dean, he wouldn’t be mysterious. How would he know anyway? Maybe and Dean hadn’t been as careful as they thought. Castiel swallows down the panic. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“ I know what your wife did.”

Castiel lets out the breath he was holding, as his terror turns to indignation. “ That’s confidential patient information, you shouldn’t about know that.”

“Neither should you, so let’s not pretend confidentiality matters here. We’re all employees anyway. And the point is that your wife helped a woman commit murder.”

Castiel used to envy the conviction Uriel always spoke with, the unquestionable certainty that he was right in his understanding of God’s will and word. Now he hates it. “That is not what happened,” Castiel seethes. “Anna was the only doctor willing to honor her oath…”

“That oath is to harm none,” Uriel growls back. “And I think ending an unborn life counts as harm.”

“What do you want, Uriel?” Castiel demands. “What’s done is done, and not by me.”

“The deed is done, but not God’s justice for it.”

“What?” Castiel squints at Uriel in complete confusion.

“That patient, her insurance claim should be passing your desk sometime soon,” Uriel explains with a predatory smile. “I suggest you lose it.”
“That could cost her thousands…and it would be a professional and ethical breach on every level,” Castiel says, aghast.

“Not in the ways that matter.”

“Uriel, you’re asking me to assist in fraud.”

“I’m asking you to go what God requires.” Uriel has the audacity to smile. “We have to take a stand, Castiel, against the sin that has infected this country: The child killers. The sodomites. The corrupt and weak.”

“You do not speak for God,” Castiel cuts him off, voice deadly and rage boiling inside him.

“I speak for the administration though, at least the members that matter. And the ones that can make hiring and firing decisions.” Castiel’s rage turns to ice.

“You can’t fire Anna, especially over this.”

The smile on Uriel’s face widens. “No. I can’t fire Anna.”

Castiel sets his jaw, his teeth grinding hard together as he processes the threat. It could be him. It could be Meg or anyone else he cares about. “Uriel…”

“I knew you’d understand. I’m sorry for bringing this into the office, I had hoped to speak to you after services yesterday. I know you’re a good man, despite some of the company you keep.” Uriel stands, not waiting to be dismissed and gives Castiel one more cold smile. “I’m glad we understand each other.”

Castiel slumps back into his desk chair as soon as he’s alone, cold sweat springing to his brow. He wants nothing more than to reach for his phone and call Anna. Somehow she could make this right, she’s always been the strong one in situations like this, but he can’t. He doesn’t want to make her feel guiltier than she already does. He wants to get in his car and drive until he finds Dean, beg his forgiveness and disappear into his arms and be someone else entirely. Someone free. He can’t do either. He can’t talk to Meg because what would talking do but make him feel more hopeless and angry. He can’t talk to anyone or make this go away or make things right. He can’t do anything.

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Maybe they’ll get a tornado. It’s been a long time since Dean’s seen one and it just feels like the right time. Dean stares at the darkening sky from Aaron’s collapsing porch and wonders if thinking a tornado would be nice counts as praying for it and if that makes him a bad person.

He takes another swig of flat, warm beer.

It’s not that he wants a tornado to happen. He knows it would fuck with people and they’d get hurt and that’s bad. But it’s the same feeling he got yesterday when he just barely missed getting hit by a semi when he was driving. He didn’t get an adrenaline rush from it, just a weird feeling that if a wreck had happened, it wouldn’t be the worst thing.

“You’re gonna catch a cold or something, sweetheart,” a female voice says from behind Dean. He looks up lazily. He’s seen the girl around Aaron’s before, but if they’ve talk he doesn’t remember.
She’s skinny, with dark hair and hands that shake as she lifts a cigarette to her lips. Probably a customer then.

“Yeah, well, it’s the only way to get someone to make me chicken soup.” The woman - she looks a bit too old to be a girl – chuckles and takes a seat by Dean on the decaying couch that sits on the porch. It’s probably got rats and other things living in it, but it’s a place to sit. She offers Dean her cigarette and he takes a drag. He takes everything people offer at Aaron’s, which he knows eventually is going to end badly for him. Feels like waiting for a tornado.

“Come on, sweetie, you’re so pretty I bet someone would make you a whole thanksgiving dinner just for smiling.” The woman takes back her cigarette and takes a final puff before grinding the butt into the damp fabric of the couch and tossing it away. “Seen you around for a few days. You a friend of Aaron’s?”

“Something like that,” Dean says, shrugging. “You?”

“Something like that.” She smiles. Her teeth aren’t great but her smile is still nice. He’s one of those people that was probably beautiful once before life chewed them up and spit them out. “I’m Pam.” She holds out a thin hand and Dean takes it.

“Dean.”

“You wanna go inside and fuck around, Dean?”

Dean has to smile at the forthrightness at least. “That’s a nice offer, really, but usually I charge for that sort of thing.”

“Knew you were a hustler,” Pam laughs back. “But come on, one freebie? I got moves you’ve never seen. I’ll make it worth your while.” Dean doesn’t say no immediately, he’s not sure why. Pam takes that as a cue and climbs into Dean lap. She taste like an ashtray when she kisses him, soft and slow. It’s been a long time since he kissed a chick, he almost forgot how nice it could be. Maybe he should just fuck her. The booze and the weed and whatever else he’s used in the last few days won’t get Cas off his mind, maybe this will. “Mmm, knew you couldn’t say no,” Pam purrs.

“I ain’t said yes yet.” Dean bites his lip and Pam grinds into his crotch and it feels…like a body rubbing against him and nothing more. It doesn’t light a fire or start to get him hard. Pam kisses him again, hips still moving and Dean feels numb. Is this how Cas feels with Anna? Cold and empty and detached? Dean’s not drunk or high enough to affect his dick. Maybe if there was money on the table he could perform.

“Come on, baby, let’s go upstairs and forget all our cares,” Pam whispers, ignorant of Dean’s lack of interest.

“I…” Dean starts just as the door opens.

“Hey – whoa!” Aaron yelps, and they fall apart.

“Sweetie, we gotta work on your timing,” Pam says to Aaron, without any malice.

“Yeah, that’s kinda the issue I wanted to talk to Dean about,” Aaron says, wincing.

“Me?” Dean blinks.

“Yeah, uh…” Aaron looks back and forth between Dean and Pam. Pam rolls her eyes.
“I’ll be inside if you want to find me,” Pam says as she stands and gives Dean an inviting wink. “I hope you do.”

Aaron waits until the door is closed behind Pam before turning back to Dean. “Dude, she will eat you alive.”

“Yeah, I got that.” Dean shakes off the lingering feel of Pam on top of him and pushes back the thought of how much he wishes the person waiting for him was Cas. “What do you need?”

“A ride.” Aaron’s face, now that Dean can be bothered to notice it, is pale and worried. “To the Rack.”

“No.” Dean gets up, huffing in anger to drive home the point. Not that he has anywhere to storm off to, except maybe off the deck and into the rain.

“Come on, man,” Aaron whines. “I know you don’t like Azazel or what he does, but I’ve been putting this off and going alone isn’t safe.”

“What about Elmer? Sorry, ‘the Golem?’” Dean asks. He’s a whore, not muscle.

“He’s at night class, okay? He’s got my car and he’s gonna meet me there. He can drive me back if you wanna stay and…do whatever.”

Dean rolls his eyes, thinking back to his last time at the Rack and spending an hour on his knees in an alley, blowing half the gang while Alastair leered. The idea of a repeat performance makes his skin crawl. Then again he doesn’t deserve to feel good, now does he? Maybe it will make him forget. “Fine. You’re buying the first round.”

Aaron chatters away nervously on the drive and Dean doesn’t hear a word of it. It’s good to be back in the car, it feels at home in a way nowhere else does, even with an alien presence there. He spent the second half of Saturday and all of Sunday driving, crisscrossing the city and glancing at the freeway. He could just get on the interstate and go. He knows how to make money and nothing is keeping him here. He could drive until he hit the ocean, buy a new name and start a life he could pretend he wanted until he really did. It was a stupid idea, but tempting. Instead he drove through the suburbs and out past miles of flat farm land and back. He drove by a dozen churches and looked for black hair. He drove by a hundred cookie cutter houses and tried to remember when home was a roof and walls and people and not four wheels and growling engine. He’d kept going past the freeway, drove back to Aaron’s and tried to disappear.

Aaron gives him directions, even though Dean knows the way. It’s something to fill the silence, which Aaron can’t seem to stand. Dean wonders if he was like this in jail and if his cellmate had wanted to kill him after a day. There are a dozen Harleys and Triumphs outside the Rack when they pull into the gravel lot, some of them covered up to avoid the rain but most of them just getting soaked. Dean parks as far off as he can manage, at the very edge, where the yellow light fade into the wet, dark night. Dean can hear the noise from the bar, music and raised voices. Pretty good crowd for a...what is this? Monday or Tuesday? He’s got no idea, but the gang seems to be having a good time. The noise and cacophony and a cloud of smoke hit Dean like a punch when they walk in.

Some of the bikers greet Aaron with a shout and Dean ignores it. He knows what Aaron is here for and he fucking hates it but it ain’t his business. Aaron heads towards the back, where a few extra mean-looking bikers are standing guard in front of the doors to the back rooms. Dean can’t blame them, if he had a few thousand in heroin sitting around and waiting to be handed out to dealers, he’d have muscle standing guard too. Dean turns away just as Aaron gets to the door, braces his shoulders and heads to the bar. Casey start pouring a beer for him the second he sits down.
“Been a while since we’ve seen you around these parts,” Casey says, wiping the bar down with a towel before handing Dean his drink. “Thought you either got busted or went straight.”

“Don’t think I’ll ever go straight, if you know what I mean.” Dean gives half a smile and takes a swig before pulling out his wallet. The damn thing is so worn, with pieces of duct tape holding it together in places. He’s got a few fake IDs and, hilariously, his library card in there with his cash. Tucked safely away is a card with a name and number written in hand on the back.

He’s never taken it out. He’s never touched it, but it makes him feel good, knowing it’s there. Or it did until a few days ago when he ruined everything again. He hands Casey a five and catches sight of an ancient phone behind the bar. She’d let him use it. He has no idea what he wants to say but the chance to make things right is right there. Not that things were right in the first place. How would he even start to apologize when he wants things from Cas -with Cas - he can’t even think about. And it's not like Cas could talk if Dean caught him at home with his wife. Maybe he could talk and Cas could just listen.

“Why hello, Dean.” Dean spins in his seat, his whole body going cold at the sound of his name in Alastair’s nasal voice. The man looks Dean up and down, licking his crooked teeth. “Lovely to see you back around, I was starting to think I’d have to come find you.”

“Fuck off, Alastair,” Dean growls. Of course the one person he doesn't ever want to touch him again wants him. He can't imagine letting Alastair fuck him after being with Cas, even if that makes him an idiot. He shoves his wallet back into his pocket and stands to leave but Alastair stops him with a hand to his chest.

“Haven’t lost your spirit, I see,” Alastair grins, playing with button of Dean’s shirt.

“Fuck. Off.” Dean swats at his hand. Alastair’s eyes darken, predatory and cold.

“Dean. Dean Dean Dean. I think it’s time to take you in back and teach you some manners.” His reaches for Dean again, this time his thigh. It makes Dean want to hurl or start throwing punches. "Lucky for you I have a room and cash, just waiting for you."

“Not interested.” Dean moves to leave again, his fight or flight instinct taking over.

“Now, I know that’s a lie,” Alastair hisses, grabbing Dean roughly and pushing so close that Dean can smell the booze on his breath. “What’s the price, Dean? Four hundred? Five?”

"There's no price, Alastair, not for you," Dean spits. He feels like he's staring at a storm forming and he still can't decide if he wants to take cover or lets the rain and wind wash him away.

"You’ve had half the cocks in this room in your mouth, don’t get fucking precious with me now, boy." Alastair's eyes narrow and he gropes at the front of Dean's jeans. "Since when have you got standards?"

“Since now, asshole. Get off me!” Instinct takes over and Dean pushes Alastair away with all the force he can muster. Alastair stumbles back into the crowd, slamming into two other bikers as he does. For a split second, the whole room is focused on Dean then another commotion starts in the rear as Aaron is thrown from the back room.

“If I said see you next Tuesday, I was calling you a stupid little cunt,” Azazel growls, stalking from the door after Aaron as he cowers on the floor. Of course the fucker has that stupid bat with him again. “You know the pick-up is Monday, idiot.”

“I know, I know…I got confused, but…” Aaron blubbers.
“I told you when you signed up that you keep on schedule and show me respect or I take it out of your ass. And lucky for me your freak isn’t here to fight for you.”

“Hey! Leave him the fuck alone!” Dean has no idea how he got from the bar to standing in between Azazel and Aaron so fast, but here he is, staring down a fucking drug lord with nothing but a cheap knife in his hand. Azazel stares at Dean, gaze flicking to the blade in his hand with something terrifying and unreadable in his eyes. Then he laughs.

“Your new muscle is a whore with a little pig sticker?” Azazel cackles.

“Didn’t you hear the news, he ain’t even that anymore;” Alastair says, striding casually to stand next to Azazel. “Thinks he’s better than that now.”

"Just better than you, asshole," Dean growls and it's the wrong thing to remind Alastair about. Dean’s heart is beating so hard it’s shaking his whole body but he keeps his hand and voice steady. “Listen, I ain’t in your shoes but I don’t think fucking up your employees is a good way to run a business, okay?” Azazel’s face goes from amused to deadly in a heartbeat.

“You come to my house, blow off my dear friend here, get in the way, threaten me and have the balls to tell me how to run my business?” Azazel asks, advancing on Dean with no regard for the knife pointed at him. “All this, after you turn down my very kind offers for that lovely vehicle of yours.”

“Just let us leave and you’ll never hear from us again, okay?” Dean knows he sounds desperate and terrified and Azazel is drinking it up.

“I don’t think you fully understand the situation you’ve put us in here, Dean,” Azazel says. “I can’t let these men see you two act with such disrespect and get away with it.”

“I dunno know, boss, he makes a good point about the little one,” Alastair interjects, singe and horrible. “He profitable when he's on time. No use to anyone broken.”

“Right as always, Al.” Azazel sneers and gives a quick nod to someone behind Dean and Aaron. “Boys.”

Shit.

At least four guys grab Dean at once, too fast for him to fight, their grips bruising as Dean struggles uselessly to get free. Shit shit shit. “Let go of me, fuckers!” Dean snarls, utterly useless. They've got Aaron too, one of the guys from the door locking him in a choke hold.

“No!” Aaron yells as the bikers start to drag them from the bar. “No, you don’t have to! He didn’t do anything!”

“He said no to us too many times, that’s enough,” Alastair says, somewhere to the side. Dean can’t see him. He can’t see much of anything because his vision has tunneled into nothing but the crowd of men in black leather around and in front of him. He knows they’re outside when it gets darker and he feels gravel under his feet as he’s dragged into the parking lot. The rain is pouring now, relentless and cold.

“Oh good, he brought it,” Dean hears Azazel say through the crowd. “Get him over here. I think we need to show some love to this beauty too.”

“No!” Dean screams as the crowd parts and he’s dragged to where he can see Azazel right next to Baby. Azazel toys with the bat in his hand before taking careful aim at a headlight. “No. Please, you
said you wanted her, don’t…”

“And Al said he wanted you,” Azazel crows. “So what we have here is a double ‘if I can’t have it, no one can’ situation. Pity, both of you were so pretty.”

“No, please…” Dean begs.

“I might still take a taste, when we’re done,” Alastair growls, appearing next to Dean and grabbing his hair. Dean struggles fruitlessly as his head is yanked back and Alastair licks at his jaw.

“You sick fuck,” Azazel says before he winds up and bashes in Baby’s headlight. Dean screams until someone punches the wind out of him. “Have at it, boys!”

Dean gets another punch to the gut and everything dissolves into chaos and pain. He has no idea how many bikers there are but half of them have crow bars and tire irons and they swarm around Baby like insects. He gets a punch to the face, a kick to the groin and he can hear glass smashing and steel on steel. Aaron is screaming somewhere in the background. More punches and Dean buckles, only held up by Azazel’s henchmen now.

“Oh, don’t give up so easy, Dean,” Azazel’s voice says and Dean gets a rough slap in the face. He forces his eyes back open and looks up at the dark silhouette. He’s been here before, never this bad, but he’s endured it. Of course, back then he had a reason to endure it. Azazel delivers a powerful punch to Dean’s face and then his side and something snaps. He keeps going relentlessly. Pain on top of pain on top of pain. “You learn your lesson yet, boy?”

He doesn’t know if it’s a memory or if Azazel just chose that moment to use John Winchester’s voice. Dean feels time slow down, just enough to get his mind clear. Just enough for him to wonder if this is where he’s going to run or let the tornado take him.

“Fuck off,” Dean says thickly through the blood in his mouth.

“Drop him,” Azazel orders over the sound of a car driving into the lot.

Dean collapses into a heap, wet gravel digging into his cheek. Head lights illuminate the gang as a few of them scatter like the insects they are. It gives Dean a glimpse of the wreckage of the impala and it’s hurts just as bad as the kick someone delivers to his back. Someone is yelling. Lots of someones. Warnings and roars and God everything hurts so much. It doesn’t matter to Azazel, he raises his bat high and Dean closes his eyes.

He wishes he could see Cas one more time.

The blow lands and there’s nothing but pain. Then black.
-Extreme harm to the Impala

I know. I'm mean. I'll try not to make you wait to long to see what happens next.
Wednesday is meatloaf day in the staff cafeteria. This is the most depressing thing to be pleased about, but Castiel can’t really be picky. He has no idea if he has anything to look forward to tomorrow, so if a slab of breadcrumbs and what he hopes is beef covered in dubious-looking gravy is the highlight of his day, so be it. Tomorrow, he fully intends to go downtown, but he doesn’t know if he’ll find Dean or what he’ll do or say. He just…needs to see him. Even if it hurts, Cas needs to see him. He eats slowly, not savoring, just filling the time until he’s done. The food sits like rocks in his stomach. He buses his tray, walks slowly back to his office, and avoids eye contact with anyone he sees, including Meg and Hannah when he gets back. Alfie is unfortunately standing next to his office door. He looks more nervous than usual.

“What do you need?” Castiel asks flatly.

“I, uh, need to clear my vacation request with you.” That must be the paper Alfie is holding.

“Of course, when is it again?” Castiel asks perfunctorily, already taking the paper to sign.

“September, sorry I’ll miss your birthday.” Alfie goes pale at the perturbed glare Castiel gives him when he finishes his signature. “And, to be honest, it’s not a vacation. It’s a mission. I’ll be in Honduras for two weeks, ministering to the local.”

Castiel is relieved when his phone vibrates in his jacket pocket. He doesn’t recognize the number. “Hello?”

“So this is the same Castiel Novak,” a familiar female voice says over the line.

“Jody?” He knows Jody Mills from volunteer work and a few church functions, though her regular church is different than his. He has no idea why she would be calling him.

“Actually, it’s Detective Mills today, official call.”

All Castiel’s blood seems to leave his body and his mind starts to race. Could she know about Dean? Has he been arrested and given up his clients? Or had Uriel…Castiel takes a deep breath, waving Alfie away but not moving. “What’s happened?”

“We have a John Doe down here with a bunch of fake IDs and your name and number in his wallet.”

Dean. Oh God. What he was feeling a moment before wasn’t panic or fear, not compared to this.

“What…where?” He doesn’t know if Jody means the morgue or something else and the thought
chokes the breath from his lungs.

“Your neck of the woods, actually. You’re at Saint Mary’s, right?”

Castiel’s heart starts beating again, though at an alarming rate. “Yes. Yes, I am. Are you…is he here?”

“Yeah. ICU. Room uh…416.” Jody sounds surprised he’d ask.

“I’ll be right there.” Castiel ends the call with shaking hands and heads for the door.

“Cas, what’s up?” Meg asks from her desk.

“I have to…a friend has been hurt. I think. I-I’ll be in the ICU,” he says too fast. He doesn’t wait for a reply and rushes out into the long hall. The ICU is in the newer East wing, and he’s only been there a few times but he knows the way. It feels interminably long and he finds himself pushing past other employees and patients to get to the right elevator bank. Every step has him thinking of something else that could have happened to Dean. The ICU means it’s bad and if he hasn’t been identified that is very bad.

Castiel catches sight of himself in the dented metal of the elevator doors as they stutters to a halt on the fourth floor: his face is pale and drawn and his expression grim. At least on this floor he won’t be the only one that looks that way. The hall to the ICU has a heaviness to it. Everything is hushed, even the distant beeps and whir of machines. He forgot how much he hates the smell: antiseptic over sickness and decay.

The ICU is behind a double set of doors, twenty or so rooms all arranged around a central island of nurses and equipment. No decorations or anything to disguise that this this is a place where people are going to die. He spots Jody Mills and outside a room with the curtains drawn over its large glass windows into the hall. She’s in deep conversation with Inias, a nurse Castiel knows more from church than work.

“Oh, that was fast!” Jody says, smiling.

“Can I see him?” Cas asks, eyes straying to the closed door of room 416.

“Of course, if you think you know him,” Jody replies, exchanging a nervous look with Inias.

“He’s not in great shape, Castiel,” Inias adds. “Prepare yourself.”

For a second, when Cas opens the door and sees the man with purple-red bruises blotting his face, lost in a tangle of tubes and wire, he thinks it’s not Dean. It’s someone else and this is all a terrible mistake. This broken, beaten person can’t be Dean. Tomorrow he’ll drive downtown and find Dean and everything will be okay. And then he looks at his hands. He knows those hands, in every way. Their shape and texture and taste. Cas feels like the floor is dissolving under him

“Dean.”

There’s a tube down his throat, and compression devices on his legs, hissing steadily in counterpoint to the beep of the heart monitors. One eye is still swollen shut and there are cuts visible between the bruises on his cheek. He has IV’s in his arm and wires from the heart monitors sticking out from the fabric of his hospital gown. There’s a faded red mark just below his jaw that doesn’t match the rest of his injuries, Cas knows because he put it there.

“Castiel.”
Cas turns to see Jody right beside him and blinks. “What?”

“I asked if that’s his name – Dean?” Jody looks more worried about Cas than Dean at this point.

“Uh, yes. His name is Dean. What happened?”

Jody raises her eyebrows with a sigh. “That’s what we’re trying to figure out. Docs called me in since it’s in the obvious felony category. Why don’t you come out here and we’ll talk.” He can see Inais hovering awkwardly in the hall.

“No, I-I’d like to stay here by him, if that’s alright.”

Inias gives a heavy sigh then a shrug. “Fine. You don’t need to worry about waking him up right now. Don’t touch anything. I’m paging his doctor on call to update her.”

They shuffle past the bed and over near the window, where a table, chair and a small couch wait for a family that won’t ever come.

“Please, tell me what happened to him,” Cas asks again, looking at the whiteboard on the wall across from the bed. It lists Dean’s doctor (Hester Elliott, Castiel knows her) and a few other bits of information: John Doe, trauma, surgery at 3:56 A.M.…. 

“Let’s slow down, I need information from you first.” Jody pulls out a notepad and flips it open. “You said his name was Dean? Last name Winchester sound right?”

“I…uh…” Castiel forces himself to look at Jody. It feels like she’s talking from across a crowded room and Cas has to strain to hear her. “I don’t know his last name. Where’d you get that?”

“Same wallet we found your number in. Bunch of fakes IDs with rock star names and a Lawrence Public Library card for Dean Winchester.”

Cas shakes his head, smiling bitterly. “Yes, he likes the library.”

“And how do you know Dean here?” The question is innocent but it fills Castiel with a new and different kind of panic.

“We…I…” I pay him for sex and sometimes I think he’s the best thing in my life. “I volunteer with the homeless, downtown at the mission. I met him there.” It’s not really a lie. “I would buy him lunch. Talk to him. He’s a friend.”

Jody jots down a note. “So, he’s homeless?”

“I think he lives in his car.”

“Big old black Chevy?”

Castiel squints, wondering how Jody knew and trying to recall the few details Dean had shared. “An Impala. I think.”

Jody flips back in her notes. “Officers on the scene reported a very damaged vintage Impala, so that matches up.”

“The scene?”

“As far as you know does Dean have any ties to any criminal elements? Drug dealers? Gangs maybe?” Jody asks it so casually that Castiel can barely process.
“No, he…” This a lie. To a police officer. Dean is a criminal, in the strictest sense, and so is Castiel. But he can’t expose him like that. And Dean’s never spoken about the dangerous people Castiel knows he must encounter. “He never mentioned anything like that.”

“Hm.” Jody scribbles something in her notes and looks back at Dean.

“Can you please tell me what happened?” Castiel asks again through gritted teeth.

Jody sighs. “Your boy here was severely beaten at a dive bar out at the edge of town, place called the Rack. It’s a known hangout for a very nasty biker gang called the Hell Hounds.”

“He…what?” Dean never talked about other clients or places he went. Castiel never wanted to hear it either, but he knew they existed. Still, he has no idea what Dean could have been doing at a place like that ended with him in the hospital.

“He’s lucky he’s alive. Sounds like they got chased off by a friend of the second victim.” Jody shuffles to an earlier spot in her notes. “Bartender called 911, the second vic refused medical care, but gave a statement at the scene. His name and description matches a known drug dealer who was recently released.”

“What happened?” Castiel demands.

“The patient sustained multiple blunt force trauma injuries, the most severe causing a break to his pelvis on the left.” Castiel and Jody turn to a blonde, severe woman in a white coat at the door.

“Hester,” Castiel nods. She’s in the same year of residency as Anna but older, having spent much longer working between college and medical school. Castiel always respected that, even though she was chilly towards him. Now she looks downright murderous.

“Castiel. I gather you know John Doe here,” Hester says, picking up Dean’s chart.

“His name is Dean. He’s a friend,” Castiel says, defensive. “There was surgery?”

“Yes, on the pelvis. Dr. Vilsack had to do a serious reconstruction. We don’t know the extent of the organ damage so we’re keeping him under for a while to allow him to heal and see how his function comes back.” Hester sounds downright bored.

“The Hell Hounds, the gang that may have been involved,” Jody says, drawing Castiel’s attention back. “Their leader is a very bad guy that we can’t keep in jail for more than a few months. And he likes to bash up people with a bat. We think that’s what happened to Dean.”

“But he’s alive,” Castiel says, turning to look where Dean rests in the bed, unnaturally still. If it wasn’t for the heart monitor, Cas wouldn’t even be able to tell he was alive. The thought comes unbidden of having this conversation at a morgue, over a body he couldn’t even recognize. He sees Dean’s blood splattered on some anonymous street in his mind and he thinks he might be sick.

“But for the grace of God,” Jody mutters and Castiel shuts his eyes. He forces himself to remember that Dean is at least here. He’s safe. Maybe.

“Will he be alright?” Castiel asks, looking to Hester with an expression that makes her drop the bored façade momentarily.

“For now. But the first 24 hours after surgery are the most delicate,” Hester rattles, careful, like she’s talking down someone dangerous. “We have no idea if there’s brain damage or other complications. He may not wake up and even if he does-”
“Thank you, Hester,” Castiel says with enough force that she takes a step back. “Is there anything I can do?” He asks no one in particular, his full attention returning to Dean.

“Does he have any family? Anyone who might want be with him?” Jody sounds less like a cop and more like a friend as she says it.

“He has a brother, but he’s not in the state,” Cas replies. The anger and hurt from their one discussion of Sam seems very unimportant now. “There’s no one else I know of.”

“Well, I’m going to head back to the station and consult with my partner about what she’s found on her end,” Jody says, forcefully upbeat. “The hospital will call me if he wakes up. I guess I’ll let you get back to work.” There’s a question in her voice, and out of the corner of his eye Castiel can see Hester looking at him with similar curiosity.

“I’m staying here.” Cas doesn’t look away from Dean as he sits down in the chair beside the bed to make his point.

“Castiel, he’s going to be under sedation for a while, there’s nothing to wait for,” Hester says carefully.

“He shouldn’t be alone.” Hester and Jody both give him nods as they leave the room. Castiel doesn’t let himself break or blink or even breathe until the door is closed and he and Dean are alone. Even then he waits a good thirty seconds before he lets his head fall and his shoulders slump.

He has no idea how, but this is his fault. That’s the truth that finally brings the tears stinging at the corner of his eyes. He wanted to protect Dean and he failed completely. Castiel has sinned and fornicated and lied and broken vows and promises left and right, but no transgression has felt more dire than this simple failure. He dares to look up again, at the bruised face in profile, eyes closed and tubes shoved down his throat.

“I’m sorry, Dean,” Castiel whispers into the silence. There’s an oxygen monitor clipped to the end of his index finger that Castiel is careful of when he slips his hand into Dean’s. He’s never felt Dean’s hand so cold, but all that matters is holding it. “I’m so sorry.”

He holds Dean’s hand, matching his own breathing with the buzz and hiss of the leg compressors that are meant to keep Dean from developing a blood clot. He counts heartbeats and memorizes the bruises on Dean’s face. He wonders if Dean is dreaming and what of.

He waits.

The nurses are supposed to check on Dean every half hour, so he does watch the clock. It’s an ugly thing with big red digital numbers in clear view of the bed so that doctors and nurses can easily see the time for notes. By his calculation he has seven minutes left when the door opens and again. He slides his hand from Dean’s and attempts to look detached and professional. He doesn’t succeed fully before looking up to see his wife in the door.

“Anna?”

He wonders if there’s guilt on his face, or just concern and confusion. Anna looks between him and Dean as if she’s trying to solve a puzzle. Castiel holds his breath. Then Anna smiles. It’s forced and too bright, but that’s the way she always smiles when they’re pretending that they haven’t been tense and fighting for the last few days.

“So, I just had an interesting talk with Hester.” Anna holds up a file that looks like lab results. “She shoved these at me and said: ‘why don’t you take this one too, your family seems to like interfering
“What?” Castiel stands, moving towards Anna on instinct.

“Hester was the treating physician for…Mrs. Klein,” Anna replies tightly and Castiel understands. No wonder Hester seems even colder than usual to him. “But I had no idea what she meant about the family comment until I get here and Inias asks me if I’m checking on you and your friend. Care to explain?” Anna looks back at Dean nervously.

“I was going to call you.” He’s sure he would have remembered to eventually. The lie should be easier with Anna. He’s had practice with it. In fact, he’s already laid a foundation for being here without meaning to. Speaking the half-truth still takes effort. “This is…Dean. The one I told you about.”

“The homeless guy? Wait, that’s offensive. Is it offensive? Oh my God.” The confusion in Anna’s face is gone, replaced by compassion and concern. She grabs Dean’s chart and mutters as she reads. “Blunt force…Full left pelvic…broken ribs…possible organ…Jesus Murphy. How did this–”

“They think it was an attack or a fight of some kind, we don’t know for sure. The police were called to investigate. He had no valid ID and Jody Mills found my number in his wallet.” Anna looks at Cas expectantly. “I gave it to him in case he needed help.”

“Are you the only person they’ve been able to reach?”

Castiel looks back at Dean. It’s a mystery how the hospital bed makes him looks so small. “I’m the only he has, right now.” He knows he’s staring at Dean too long, and looking at him hurts in so many ways, but it’s hard to tear his eyes away.

“You’re a good man, Cas, to be here,” Anna says, solemn. Cas finally meets her eyes. Her expression is thoughtful and soft. She moves closer to Cas and slips her hand into his. He hand is small and soft and warm, and she responds when Cas squeezes it. He wishes it was Dean’s.

“I don’t know about that, but Dean is and he doesn’t deserve to be alone.”

“No one does,” Anna says softly as they both stare at Dean, seeing two very different things. Anna nudges him with her shoulder after a beat. “Well, maybe Hester.”

Castiel laughs quietly and gives Anna’s hand a squeeze. “I should probably let my office know where I am.”

“Do you want to ask someone to bring your laptop? I don’t think the nurses will mind if you camp out in here and work, if you can.” Castiel raises an eyebrow at Anna, who just shrugs. “Remember when I was studying for boards and worried so much I managed to make myself sick? You took three days off work, even though your boss hated you already, and you kept me rested and hydrated and managed to stop me from studying myself into an early grave. And helped me pass.”

“What does that mean?”

“I know you’re not leaving.” Anna smiles as he says it, releasing Cas’s hand. “Call your office. I’ll bring you some dinner before I head home. It looks like Dr. Tran is on for tonight, and she doesn’t hate me at the moment, so that’s good. She’ll probably remove the breathing tube.”

“Do you think…” Cas swallows. Anna was literally just handed this case, and he has no right to put his worry about that man he’s been breaking his marriage vows with on her. But there’s no one in the world he trusts more either. “Hester wasn’t very positive on his prognosis.”
“We’re monitoring everything, but we won’t know if there’s a chance until we take him off sedation. If he was dealing with malnutrition or other complications we don’t know about…” Anna shakes her head and Cas feels all the warmth she brought leave him in a wave. “But patients have better outcomes when they have support present so it’s good if you’re here.”

That could mean two things, and Castiel doesn’t want to think about one of them. Anna gives him another reassuring touch and chaste kiss on his cheek and leaves.

He sinks back into the chair and, after a few more empty minutes of staring, he sends a text to Hannah. Inias comes in and check’s Dean’s vitals, his face grim as he avoids Castiel’s eyes. He does change the name written on the board, from “John Doe” to “Dean.” Castiel isn’t sure if that’s a kind gesture or just protocol. Hannah arrives ten minutes later with Castiel’s laptop, files and coat. Her concern and shock are different than Anna’s. She’s the only person in his life to have met Dean, so she understands, but she doesn’t ask questions.

He tries to work. In some ways, it’s easier here than in his office. For the first time in a while, work is an escape, not a trudge through the same tasks and numbers and spreadsheets as usual. He catches up on the accounts receivable reports he’d been avoiding and starts in on the quarterly projections and claims trends. The hospital wants data on which insurers pay which types of claims fastest and which are most disputed. It’s a daunting process but Castiel has time. Or he would if he didn’t stop every two minutes to look at Dean.

Nothing changes. Inias comes and goes then at four he’s replaced by a dark-haired woman named Tessa who Castiel thinks is a friend of Anna’s but he’s not sure. She at least smiles at Castiel with familiarity, though it’s a sad, pitying sort of smile. She does the same checks as Inias. No change. He can’t bring himself to ask if that’s good or bad.

Anna returns after five with a salad and several dinner rolls from the cafeteria, along with a coke. She looks at the notes on the chart and doesn’t smile. “His temperature spiked, then stabilized. Kidney function could be better.”

“What does that mean?” Cas places the food next to his work to be ignored and rises to get closer to Anna.

“He…” Anna stops herself. “We’ll know more when we remove the sedation.” No good news then. “You can call me any time if you have questions or if…anything happens, alright?”

Fresh panic and guilt well up inside Castiel. “Are you sure you’re alright with this?” He asks because it’s the right thing to say to your wife.

“Yeah, I’ll be okay for a night. You stay with your friend.” Without warning Anna pulls him into a fierce hug and Castiel nearly melts into it. For a few seconds, he’s safe and stable and warm and it feels like coming home. “I love you, okay?”

“I love you too.” He says it automatically all the time, never thinking about it. But he means it entirely right now. Though it’s the wrong love and not nearly enough, it’s there and he squeezes Anna tight and kisses her red hair to remind her. When Anna pulls back her eyes are bright and her lips trembles.

“I’ll be praying for him.” It’s the kindest thing Anna could say and the weight if it isn’t lost on Castiel.

“Thank you,” Castiel whispers.
The door shuts and Castiel retakes his seat. He watches Dean, barely blinking. Maybe if he concentrates hard enough this will feel real and the prospect of how everything has changed now won’t be completely terrifying. Or maybe he can convince himself that things will be alright. Dean will wake up and be fine and then things can go back to how they were. Or things will go back to how they were before he met Dean, desolate and stale and empty because Dean will be gone.

The thought makes new terror explode inside him, the kind that makes him sick and cold and ready to tear his hair out because that would actually be doing something. He doesn’t tear out his hair, he goes back to work because it’s at least doing something. He manages five minutes before looking up again. He can’t lose Dean, not now. And if he just…keeps watching him, he won’t. If he concentrates hard enough and doesn’t look away, he’ll be fine. He’ll be fine.

Tessa comes and goes. Visiting hours end but no one tells him to leave. Privileges of being staff or married to one of the doctors, maybe. He eats a few bites of salad. He holds Dean’s unmoving hand on and off when he can’t concentrate. He’s completely ahead of work for the rest of the week by eight o’clock when an Asian woman in a white coat comes in with Tessa and another nurse he doesn’t recognize.

“I’m Dr. Tran. You’re Dr. Novak’s husband?” She doesn’t bother extending a hand to Castiel. She’s too busy snapping on latex gloves.

“Yes. Castiel.” He stands, scooting the chair back from where he’d moved it close to the bed to make room.

“We’re taking him of sedation and we’re going to remove the breathing tube,” Dr. Tran explains. “You can stay in here or wait outside if this isn’t something you want to see. It’ll be fast.”

“I’ll stay,” Castiel says quietly and Dr. Tran nods.

Dr. Tran and the nurses move quick and careful, obviously well-practiced in the procedure. IV bags are changed and something is injected into the line. Machines are turned off and the tube is pulled carefully from Dean’s throat and mouth. It’s longer than Castiel would have guessed. He wonders if it hurt or if Dean is too medicated and far away to feel anything. They watch his heart monitor, a stethoscope on Dean’s chest as well. Castiel holds his own breath until Dean takes a shallow breath on his own and Dr. Tran looks moderately satisfied.

“Well, that’s good at least,” Dr. Tran declares, slinging the stethoscope back around her neck. “It’s up to him now.”

“We’ll keep checking. Page us if you need anything, alright?” Tessa adds, looking after Dr. Tran as she leaves without another word.

“When will he wake up?” Castiel asks. He had been expecting…something more.

“Like the Doc said, that’s up to him.” Tessa looks between Castiel and Dean. “If you can, get some rest. It might be a long night.”

He doesn’t rest. He watches the light fade from the windows and turns on lamp next to Dean. The over-head fluorescents make him look too pale. The steady rhythm of the machines doesn’t change. Tessa offers him the remote when she makes her checks after nine o’clock. Cas doesn’t take it. He does drink some of the lukewarm water on the side table after he finishes the Coke.

After ten o’clock, he finally manages to speak. “This is the longest time we’ve ever spent together, isn’t it? Thought maybe this doesn’t count…” He sighs and looks at the clock, the machines, the dark
window and back at Dean. “I’m still not good at small talk.”

Silence.

“I’ve never seen you wake up, it was always just…something I dreamed of seeing,” Castiel whispers. “This isn’t how I imagined it might be but…” He sniffs and wipes at his face. He hadn’t noticed the tears starting, but he’s glad of the dark and the quiet in case anyone comes in. Or if Dean wakes up.

By the time Tessa makes her next check, he’s more composed.

Anna sends him a text just past eleven. ‘miss you. Going to bed.’ It’s late for her, but he knows how hard it is to fall asleep when the person you’re used to sharing a bed with isn’t there. He sends back a heart and turns off his phone to save the dwindling battery.

Dean doesn’t move. He keeps breathing, steady and slow, his chest barely moving and he doesn’t wake up. Castiel is tired, and scared and worried in a way he hasn’t been for a very long time. Perhaps ever. He thinks of Anna and of church and his mother and feels like a fraud. He remembers Dean’s mouth and his laughter and his cock and his smile. He thinks of the blasphemies he uttered when he was with Dean, how in those moments together he felt closer to something holy than any other time in his life. He remembers a friend from high school whose mouth was so beautiful, but whose name he’s forgotten. He remembers praying to God to make him not think the filthy thoughts about that boy and his mouth. And God had done nothing. God didn’t create thoughts, or stop them, or change them. He only judged them. Or so Castiel was told. And still he had prayed. He had prayed for God to guide him or help him when he had gone to that strip club to prove something to himself. And then he’d seen Dean.

“Every time I pray, it’s selfish,” Castiel says out loud. “I pray to be better, to be saved or changed. I don’t pray enough for those that need it. And I’m sorry.”

He takes Dean’s cold hand in his but he’s not talking to Dean, not right now.

“I am sorry that I am a selfish, sinful man but, please…if you’re listening if there was ever a time I could beg for something more important, please listen now. Please, let him wake up. Please let him be alright and whole. I can’t offer you promises that I will live better or that I will suffer more, but just please….Save him. Please. God. I’m asking you…please.”

When tears choke the words, he keeps it up in his head, or in his heart. It’s been there all day, unvoiced and unanswered. Please fix this. Please save him. God, I need him. He is good and he does not deserve this or me, please save him. Please.

Minutes tick by in the quiet dark as Castiel wait and prays until his head droops in exhaustion.

The twitch of fingers in his jolts him like a gunshot. Cas looks up, heart racing, wondering if he dreamed it, and sees green eyes.

“Cas?”

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
- Hospitals and medical stuff
- Mentions of past violence

Another cliffhanger, I know! But at least Dean’s alive! I’m working on some other stuff I want to finish this week and then I’m on a vacation so, I HOPE to get the next chapter up by the end of next week. Come say hi to me over on tumblr
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Hey! So, amazingly there's no warnings on this chapter, other than for medical stuff, which at this point I think you know is coming. It's kinda short, but that's where the break wanted to be.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything hurts. Dean’s thought that before, but he was so fucking wrong. *Everything hurts.* It’s not sharp, fresh pain; it’s dull and deep and *everywhere.* His vision is foggy and swimming and Cas is there. Cas is *here.* He’s fucking holding Dean’s hand and that’s the only thing that doesn’t hurt but how…

“Did I…” die? No. That’s a stupid question. They’re not dead. This isn’t the afterlife because there’s no fucking way he and Cas would end up in the same place unless somebody really screwed up their admission policies. Or Cas was right all along…Cas looks really worried and kinda out of focus. “Wha..”

“Dean, it’s okay,” Cas says. It is not okay. Dean hurts and he’s really confused. He needs to get up and look around and get his bearings. Fuck, he feels sick too.

“Fuck,” Dean struggles to sit up and, oh shit, that was a stupid, stupid move because it just makes him hurt more and he can’t. Cas is moving, doing something with buzzing and beeps suddenly it’s way too bright.

“Don’t try to move,” Cas orders and disappears. Dean would really like to call after him but he’s gonna be sick and he can’t fucking get up and shit this is a lot of pain. Why is Cas here? Where is here? Why does it hurt?

“Why can’t I…” His legs are trapped and his eyes aren’t focusing right because this isn’t their normal room. Squinting hurts. Opening his eyes – eye? – hurts. Cas is back, though he’s sort of a worried-looking blob on the periphery with another blob beside him that’s vaguely purple.

“Dean, I’m going to sit you up,” a calm female voice says. “Just stay still, okay?”

“I’m gonna hurl,” Dean mutters as the bed he’s on fucking moves and his upper body is slowly tilted up and that hurts too. “Where-”

“You’re in the hospital, Dean,” Cas says. That makes sense. Kind of. There’s a very concerning amount of pain going on right now, but why would he come to the hospital? He can’t afford that shit. Fuck, his stomach.

“Right here, Dean, it’s okay,” the chick says and there’s a gentle hand on his face and neck. Dean lets go and pukes into the bucket or whatever and it hurts just about everything – his chest and his head and his hips – fuck *his hips.* He doesn’t remember drinking enough to be hungover and this doesn’t feel like that. No. Hospital. This is real pain. He feels like he went ten rounds with the hulk…Or a gang of pissed off bikers. He hurls again as bits and pieces flash into his pounding head. He can’t talk so he reaches for…something. Cas. He squeezes Dean’s hand tight.
“I’m here, Dean,” Cas says as another wave hits Dean. How does he even have anything left in him to throw up?

“You’re okay, Dean, just let it out. The anesthesia makes people sick all the time, it’s okay,” the girl he assumes is a nurse says. Dean takes a deep breath, which is weird cause there’s something shoved under his nose and it smells too fresh over the scent of sick. “I’m gonna get rid of this, you can give him some water.”

The hand on his neck goes away and so does the bucket the nurse was holding. Then Cas is there with a cup and Dean finally manages to focus. He’s able to at least help hold the plastic cup to his lips, though Cas does most of the work. The water is stale and lukewarm but it’s so good. It wakes him up a bit more, at least enough to consider what the nurse said.

“How does he even have anything left in him to throw up?”

“You had surgery,” Cas explain. “They had to do reconstruction on your pelvis. You’re…”

“That fucking asshole,” Dean groans. He remembers a bat swinging down at him and an explosion of pain. Then screaming and sirens and yelling and so much pain. “Who the fuck tries to kill a guy with a bat?”

“So, it was a bat?” Cas says, weirdly. Was Cas there? How would he know what Azazel did to him and Baby? “You have broken ribs too and-”

“Fuck, my car,” Dean exclaims. He has no idea where she’s parked or if the Hell Hounds went through it or anything. “Cas, where’s my car? I need her. She’s got-”

“Don’t know, Dean. They didn’t say anything about her.” Cas is lying, Dean can see it through the worry and pain on his face. Cas is shit at lying to him.

“I need to get to my car, I have…” Dean tries to get up again and pain shoots through him from his hips. Shit, he forgot. He’s fucking broken.

“Dean, shh, we’ll find out,” Cas says, soft and soothing. Dean blinks and Cas is right there, leaning in close with a gentle hand on Dean’s face, brushing his cheek and up into his hair. “All the matters is that you’re okay.”

“I’m not okay,” Dean argues because he always argues. Cas’s fingers are careful in Dean’s hair, his forehead against Dean’s. Oh. So this is a dream. He can’t think of any other explanation for tenderness like this, not for him.

“I know, but…I’m just…”

“Dean?” It’s the nurse. Cas springs away and everything hurts again. “I need to take a look at you, and I’ve paged the doctor. We need to do some tests before we let you rest, okay?”

“Yeah, fine,” Dean says, keeping his eyes on Cas. He’s the only thing that makes sense. Except he doesn’t. “Why are you here?”

“They found my number in your wallet and called me.” Cas’s face is worn and sad, even more so than usual.

“You look like crap,” Dean says as he thinks it. The nurse gives a small laugh as Cas finally cracks a smile and shakes his head.
“So do you,” Cas shoots back as the nurse starts to fuss around Dean. There’s something in Cas’s eyes though, it’s relieved and amazed and beautiful. Dean wishes he would touch him again.

“Oh, I think he’s still pretty cute,” the nurse says in that kind way that means Dean must look even worse than he feels. He feels really, really shitty, for the record.

“Thanks,” Dean sighs, relaxing back on the mattress. He suddenly wants nothing more than to go back to sleep and not have to deal with this nightmare right now.

“No sleeping yet,” a new voice says. Dean turns painfully to see an Asian woman at the door. “It’s nice to see you up, Dean, I think you had Cas here pretty worried. I’m Doctor Tran. I’m going to do a few tests on you with Tessa’s help, okay?”

“Uh, sure,” Dean says. He watches as Cas backs out of the way, next to a dark window. It’s night?

“Ain’t it past visiting hours?” Dean asks, wincing in pain as the doc pokes at him.

“I’m staff,” Cas replies with a shrug. Did Dean know that?

“What day is it?”

Cas glances up at a big clock on the wall and for some reason it looks like he might have a breakdown right there. “It’s technically Thursday now.”

Dean doesn’t say anything as Cas meets his eyes. He’s hurting and, way out of it, but he’s not completely stupid. He still gets why it matters. Not the way he wanted to keep their date, but at least Cas isn’t pissed at him anymore.

“Okay, Dean, I’m going to need you to look at my finger,” Dr. Tran says, bringing Dean’s attention back to her. He obeys and cooperates as best he can as they shine lights in his eyes and ask him who the president is (‘a fuckwad’ is not the right answer but it makes Cas laugh before Dean gets it right) and what Dean’s pain level is (all the pain). After what seems like forever, the doctor nods.

“Okay, no apparent brain damage, so that’s great. And your organ function is doing okay so far, so, we’re going to let you get some rest and give you some more medicine for the pain and to help you sleep.”

“Thank fuck,” Dean groans.

“Your friend’s quite the firecracker,” Tessa says as Dr. Tran leaves. She maybe says something to Cas, Dean’s not sure. Cas just smiles. “Do you need anything?” Tessa asks Cas as he injects something into Dean’s IV line.

“I’m fine, thank you Tessa,” Cas says.

“Just let me know.” Tessa gives Dean one more smile and leaves.

Dean is suddenly very aware he’s a room alone with Cas and not being paid for it and how that makes absolutely no sense. Whatever weird guilt or sense of obligation kept Cas here should be eased now. Cas turns off the overhead light and returns to Dean’s side.

“Do you want to adjust the bed or-”

“Please don’t go.” It comes out hoarse and pathetic, but it gets the job done. Cas takes Dean’s hand and looks at him with all the seriousness in creation. He knows he’s pathetic and more useless to Cas right now than he’s ever been but he doesn’t want to watch him walk out another door. He doesn’t
“I have no plans to leave you, Dean.”

“Will you get in trouble?” Dean murmurs. Whatever Tessa give him is working well and fast because he feels heavy and tired already. That’s good though. Cas staying. That’s good.

“I don’t care,” Cas replies. Idiot.

Dean nods, or he means to nod. His head is so heavy that moving it is impossible. The bed reclines on its own, or thanks to Cas maybe. Dean can’t see, he closes his eyes at some point he doesn’t remember. There’s something warm close to him, breath on his face and a soft touch on his forehead. Lips? He must be dreaming again. Already. Someone takes his hand.

Castiel wakes to the feel of a hand on his shoulder and opens his eyes to see his wife’s face. This is confusing. He’s uncomfortable and starving and still very tired why did Anna let him fall asleep here?

“Come on, I brought you stuff,” Anna says very softly, over the sound of machines. Castiel wakes more fully and looks around. He’s in a chair. In a hospital room. He fell asleep next to Dean. Dean.

“Is he…”

“He’s fine, still sleeping, come on.”

Castiel lets himself be led out of the room. The nurse behind the desk isn’t someone he recognizes, but she smiles at Anna so that’s good. “What time is it?”

“About 7:30,” Anna replies and it wakes Castiel like a splash of cold water.

“Why are you in this early? You don’t have to be here until-”

“I thought my husband would appreciate some clean clothes, among other things.” Anna holds up a canvass bag. And a cardboard cup. “And since you probably didn’t get a lot of rest, I got this from the place down the street. I know you like them better than the cafeteria coffee.”

“You got me coffee?”

Anna gives Castiel a look. “You think I don’t know that you sneak it?”

Castiel feels a groggy wave of guilt but he’s not really surprised. He just hopes that’s all she knows. “If it makes you feel better, my stomach if fine this morning,” he says, cautiously taking the coffee.

“That’s probably because you slept in a chair. It keeps the acid down. I was going to suggest that for at home. Not a chair. Pillows or something.” Anna’s face darkens for a second but she shakes it off. “Drink up, and you can shower and change in the residents’ lounge. Come on, I’ll let you in.”

“Thank you,” Castiel mutters as he follows Anna out of the ICU. She has a huge coffee cop of her own, which is uncharacteristic. “You don’t look like you slept well.”
“It’s okay, just one night. Still probably better than yours,” Anna says, turning to him with a brave smile. “I’ll have you back tomorrow. Sounds like Dean is out of the woods.”

“I guess.” Castiel had watched Dean for a while after he fell back asleep, counting his breaths and thanking God and trying not to think about the future. The last he remembers looking at the clock it was past two. He feels unreal and hollow to be so outside of routine, and the hunger and inadequate sleep doesn’t help. They walk in tired silence, Anna leading the way to the elevators and letting them off on the second floor. It smells less like sickness than the fourth.

“Oh, I brought your charger too,” Anna says out of nowhere just as they get to the longue door. “I guess you turned off your phone or it died.”

“Oh, yes.” Cas pats his pockets until he finds the phone. Anna takes it from him before he can turn it on, and uses her key card to enter the lounge. It’s simple. Lockers, a TV, a few couches and some doors that lead to cots and a nice bathroom.

“I’ll plug it in for you. Go ahead and shower, drink the coffee. Oh, I got you a bagel too, if you’re hungry. I assume you are.” Despite his few hours of sleep Castiel is too exhausted to argue. Anna gives him a peck on the cheek when he heads into the shower.

The hot water feels amazing and Castiel indulges for far too long. The coffee is starting to work too and he nearly feels human. Or at least good enough for his mind to clear and the reality of his situation to settle in. Dean is okay. Dean and Anna are in the same building. Anna is Dean’s doctor because they are both being punished by the hospital and the universe in different ways and Dean is still very hurt with nowhere to go.

Castiel blinks as the water streams down his face. He is completely screwed.

He finishes washing quickly and exits the shower to the empty longue. His phone is plugged in next to the bag of clothes and food with a message to him in the notes app: “Got paged. Will check on Dean too. Let Hannah know you’re alive.”

"Shit."

At least this time Dean doesn’t hurt so bad when he wakes up. The pain is distant, a quiet throb in his ribs and hip mostly, but not worrying. The heart stopping terror is much more concerning. His head is clearer than last night, clear enough to realize that he is in a fucking hospital and maybe nearly died and nothing is okay.

Dean scrambles for the controls on the bed to sit up. Maybe he can just…leave. No, that wouldn’t be cool to Cas. Wait. Was that a dream? Dean looks around the room. He’s completely alone. Of course he is. He probably hallucinated the whole Cas thing because there’s no reason Cas would be there with him. So he can leave, if he could just…move.

“What the fuck…” There are things on his legs making noise and struggling brings back the pain in his hip full force. Right. Broken fucking pelvis. Shit. “Um. Help? Is someone there?!” Dean yells. There’s gotta be a call button or something, right? He turns to look and fresh pain spikes from his hip. “Hello!” Oh; yelling hurts too, his throat, lips and jaw. Fantastic.
“Hey, it’s alright,” Dean looks to the door where a woman in a white coat with bright red hair is standing, looking more confused than frustrated. “Settle down, Dean, you’re okay.”

“Doc, have you got eyes? Do I look okay by any definition of the word?” Dean snaps and to his surprise the doctor smiles and shakes her head.

“You got me there. Let’s get a look at you.” Instead of actually looking at him the doctor retrieves the chart hooked at the bottom of Dean’s bed and reads. She’s pretty, very pretty actually. The kind of girl Dean might flirt with if he wasn’t a freaked out, broken mess stuck in a hospital bed. Hell, he’ll probably flirt anyway.

“What are these things on my legs?” Dean demands after a respectful fifteen seconds.

“They prevent blood clots after a surgery when the patient can’t move for a while, we’ll be removing them now that you’re awake, don’t worry.”

More cloudy memories of the night before come back. Waking up, seeing Cas (or not), puking because of anesthesia. Doctor Tran examining him. “Wait, my doctor last night…she was an Asian lady. Or did I dream that too?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I should have introduced me self. That was Doctor Tran,” not Doctor Tran says. She steps close to the side of Dean’s bed and holds out a delicate hand. “She was on call for the night. Today you’ve got me. I’m Doctor Novak.”

“Doctor Novak like…” No, there’s no way. There’s no fucking way. But there it is, embroidered on her white coat. ‘Anna Novak.’ He takes her hand, more so to make sure she’s real than out of politeness. “You’re Cas’s wife.”

“So, he did mention me.” Anna squeezes his hand tight, almost too tight, then lets go quickly.

“Yeah,” Dean says, fully aware he’s staring like an idiot. “Never said you were a doctor. And now you’re…my doctor?”

“You’ll see a lot of us coming and going. My attending will be in here later too, probably with interns,” Anna says. “Your case is pretty interesting. The malnutrition from your lifestyle may have exacerbated the breaks. And we usually see pelvic fractures like this in auto accident, but yours coming from…”

Dean’s head falls back as he groans, another memory coming clear. “A fucking psychopath with a bat. Super unique.”

“Sorry, didn’t mean to get all clinical. So, uh, how are you feeling this morning?” Anna smiles at him and Dean can only think of how Cas sees that smile every day.

“Um, shitty…Does Cas know I’m here?”

Anna tilts her head in confusion, her face falling. “I thought you saw him last night?”

Dean looks down at his hands and thinks of how real the dream was where Cas held them. He thinks back to Cas’s face close to his and maybe even a kiss before Dean faded away. “I thought I dreamed it,” Dean murmurs looking up at Anna again. She looks worried, hurt even, and Dean has no idea what she knows or suspects. Dean refuses to be the one to break that news to her. “Guess I just didn’t think he’d actually stick around for…some guy he barely knows.”

“Cas is a good person. He stayed with you the whole night,” Anna says softly. Dean can’t even
guess what she’s thinking: That her husband is crazy for freaking out over some homeless guy or that it’s sweet of the homeless guy her husband obviously has a connection with to lie. “I made him go change and shower but, he should be back soon.”

“Cool.” Dean knows he sounds like an idiot. He is an idiot. How Cas ever tolerated his conversation when he’s married to fucking doctor is a goddamn miracle. Or Cas really liked the sex and was too polite to tell Dean to shut up, more likely. “When can I leave?”

Anna raises an eyebrow. “Well, we’ll be moving you to a regular room later, but full discharge after pelvic surgery happens when we see your surgical wounds healing well, the physical therapist clears you on your use of crutches and…” Anna bites her lips, blushing slightly.

“And?” This isn’t helping his panic.

“And you have a successful bowel movement.”

“Fucking great,” Dean sighs. “I mean. Um. Awesome. Sorry, don’t mean to swear in front of a… nice person.” Dean’s blushing, which makes his face throb. “You got any idea how soon can I bust out? I don’t think I can afford…well, any of this, really.” Just the thought makes Dean dizzy. They’ve got his real name, but if he skips town, somehow, he can maybe get out of the bill…not that they’d have anything to collect if they came after him.

“A few days, at minimum. However, discharge may also depend on where you’re going after the hospital,” Anna says carefully. And there it is. The other thing that’s got Dean fucking terrified. The only thing that’s keeping him from going into an all-out panic right now is probably the drugs that he’s on, which he’d like more of as soon as possible. “Do you-” Anna starts to ask just as the door opens.

Cas looks better than last night but not by much, yet the sight of him has never been more of a relief. Cas looks between Anna and Dean, face pale and conflicted. He looks freshly showered and hastily dressed and Dean still can’t quite believe any of this is happening.

“Hey, you never said you married a doctor,” Dean says, grabbing onto the first thought he can to break the tension. “Good work.”

“Well, I wasn’t a doctor when we got married.” Anna looks at Cas and the love and pride in her eyes is jarring.

“You were half-way there,” Cas replies with a shrug, warm and familiar like this is a bit they do all the time.

“Wait, are you a doctor?” Dean asks Cas. “You said you were staff, but I thought you had an office job.”

“I do,” Cas sighs, like a weight just resettled on his shoulders. “I’m a billing and claims administrator. I spend most of my time dealing with insurance companies and medicals bills.”

“That sounds boring as hell,” Dean says.

“I told you.” Cas shrugs and finally steps fully into the room, closing the door behind him. “How is he?” he asks Anna.

“One, I’m right here,” Dean protests.

“Yes, but you’ll lie and say you’re fine,” Cas replies without missing a beat.
“Sounds exactly like someone else I know,” Anna says, smirking. “And he’s doing well, according to his chart. We’re moving him to a regular room in a few hours. And depending on his pain levels we may try and get him to the physical therapist tomorrow.”

“See, I’m fine,” Dean says, though he doesn’t like the sound of a physical therapist. He doesn’t like any of this. “But, uh, speaking of pain levels.”

“We’ll get you something for that,” Anna replies quickly. “Oh, that reminds me, I brought this for you too.” Anna turns to Cas and hands him a prescription-orange bottle of pills from her coat pocket.

“Anna, they’re as needed…” Dean has seen Cas look embarrassed and awkward before but this is different.

“I know you said you feel fine, but I also know it gets worse with stress, so, I wanted you to have them,” Anna says, doting and concerned in a way that’s entirely alien to Dean.

“Uh, should I ask?” Dean will blame the meds if he’s stepping over a line, but if Cas is sick…

“They’re just for acid reflux,” Cas says, shoving the pills in his jacket pocket.

“Don’t minimize it,” Anna scolds and looks to Dean. “It’s Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, it can be very serious.”

Dean thinks back to all the times Cas looked warily at his food before digging in, how he sometimes avoided tomatoes or spicy shit and Dean had thought it was just because he was one of those boring suburbanites afraid of pepper. And other times he’d torn into slice of pizza like he was jumping off a cliff. “You never mentioned that.”

“I didn’t think it was important,” Cas mutters, lying. Dean wonders if Anna knows Cas’s lying face too. The white lie one that he’s got on now. Judging by her dubious, put upon look, she does.

“I’ll get the nurse in here with some pain meds, and I’ll be around for the day. Babe, do you want to stay or do you have to get down to the office?”

“I…” Cas looks between Anna and Dean, clearly conflicted. Anna places a gentle hand on Cas’s arm, a warm, familiar touch that she probably thinks nothing of. The jealousy and guilt Dean feels blots out his pain for a second before he shakes his head.

“Don’t let me keep you, I know you’ve got way more important shi-stuff to do,” Dean says, turning on his professional smile. “Go save the hospital money or something.” He’s still not sure what Cas’s job really entails, because Cas never told him. He never told him his wife was a beautiful doctor with a kind smile who worked in the same place as him and kept Cas from getting himself sick. Cas never needed to tell him because that’s not what they had. They ate and talked about nothing, and fucked but the guy standing next to his wife and looking at Dean like a bomb that might explode? That guy is a stranger.

“Are you sure?” Castiel asks uneasily.

“Yeah, go ahead. I got some TV to catch up on or whatever,” Dean replies. Cas keeps his focus on Dean as he gathers a laptop and jacket from a table Dean hadn’t noticed.

“You’re going to have paperwork to fill out and the police want to talk to you now that you’re awake,” Anna says and the sympathy in her voice is real.

“Fucking Christ, no cops.” A new and exciting thing to freak out about, just what he needs on top of
everything else in his life exploding – a life that was pretty shitty to begin with.

"Maybe we can stall Jody for day," Anna offers. "Come on, hon, let's let Dean rest." Anna tugs at Cas's sleeve and he moves easily.

“I’ll visit later,” Castiel says automatically. A pleasantry.

“Sure. I ain’t going anywhere today.” A few more polite smiles and a wave and the couple is gone. Dean watches their silhouettes retreat on the other side of the window, walking close. He closes his eyes tight and tries to breathe. Not too deep, that hurts too much. Just enough to keep going.

Chapter End Notes

Always feel free to say hi to me on tumblr.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Hello! Not a lot of warnings in this chapter, but they're still in the end notes. I also just want to say that I so appreciate all the comments and kind words on this fic,

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Castiel has no idea what to do with himself. He reorganizes his work from the day before, polishes some things and returns a few missed calls from insurance companies. Work should be a good distraction from the fact that Dean is in the same building, alive and awake, and Castiel can’t go see him. But the Klein claim is sitting on his desk, waiting to be dealt with or forgotten and Castiel can’t quite bring himself to look at it. Asking Alfie to pull the file had been easy, but that’s as far as he’s gotten at this point. He doesn’t need something else making him feel like a failure to good people.

He feels bleary and distracted and seriously considers taking a quick nap at his desk, but he’s too wound up. Especially after a text from Anna letting him know Dean’s moved rooms and giving him the number. It’s thoughtful and also feels like a trap. Not that Anna would do something like that. He thinks. He has no idea actually. He just knows the line he’s walking is precarious. This is not like sneaking away for a tryst. He doesn’t even know what he and Dean are. He knows what he wants: to talk to Dean alone, but he doesn’t know what to say.

He looks up from his hands at the sounds of a knock on his door and Hannah pokes her head in. “Castiel?”

“What do you need something?” He asks, unable to hide how tired he feels.

“No, I…wanted to see if your friend was doing better? I assume since you’re here, he’s out of the woods.” Hannah steps fully into the office and Castiel sees she’s holding a package of some kind.

“Yes, he’s awake and doing as well as can be expected. What is that?”

“I know the food isn’t the best here, so I brought something in case Dean wanted them,” Hannah explains, clinical and stiff as she hands Castiel a bag of Oreos “They’re all that I had in the pantry.”

“That’s a very kind thing to do for someone you’ve barely met,” Cas mutters.

Hannah shrugs. “It’s very kind of you to be there for your friend. I assume you’ll be visiting for lunch.”

Castiel had been avoiding eye contact with the clock and is surprised to see it’s a few minutes past noon. “Uh. Yes. I will be.”

“Well, good luck then, if that’s appropriate.” Hannah gives her best approximation of a supportive smile and moves to let Cas out of the office. Meg is at her desk, already enjoying salmon Cas knows she won’t finish and will store in their kitchenette solely to annoy Hannah.

“Leaving again?” Meg asks.

“I’m going to visit my friend, I have my phone if you need me,” Castiel answers.
“Since when do you have other friends?” Meg calls after Castiel as the door closes and he hears Hannah start to admonish her.

Castiel considers how different this is from his usual Thursday meetings with Dean and how it’s in some way just the same. He still has to pace himself, make a conscious choice not to rush to be in Dean’s presence as soon as possible. He acquires a healthy, if bland, selection from the employee cafeteria to go with Hannah’s cookies and takes measured steps to the elevators up to the fifth floor wards.

Dean’s room, 514, is thankfully far from the nurse’s stations and elevators, enough that Castiel doesn’t make any awkward eye contact with anyone until he reaches the room just as the nurse comes out.

“You a visiting prince charming in there?” the nurse asks, annoyance clear on her face. Castiel nods. “Great. Get him to eat.”

“I’ll try,” Cas barely gets the answer out before the nurse in gone, leaving him to peek into the open door of Dean’s room. The TV is on but Dean is staring out the window, a tray of food untouched in front of him. His bruises are less vivid than the day before, but his skin is still ashen. Castiel wonders if it’s wrong to think he’s beautiful, even like this.

He clears his throat, not wanting to intrude too long on Dean’s privacy. Dean turns to him with a look that’s equal parts confused and weary.

“Hello, Dean.”

Perhaps it’s the familiarity of the greeting, but something warms in Dean’s face and he laughs softly without opening his mouth. “Didn’t think I’d be seeing you again today.”

Cas squints. “Why would I-”

“You ain’t responsible for me,” Dean says, staring Cas down in a resigned challenge. “Whatever guilt or, I dunno, courtesy you’ve got going, you can drop it. Don’t need to-”

“Dean, shut up.” Dean’s eyes go as wide as possible (which isn’t much more for the right). “We don’t need to have this argument right now. Just accept that you’re more than a…” He can’t find a word for what Dean is that he can risk being heard by anyone passing by, or that won’t reduce Dean to something far less that what he is. “I care. I know you don’t think I can, or that I should but…I care.”

“Cas…”

Castiel takes a deep breath, looking to the ceiling for serenity and closes the door behind him. “I thought you might be hungry,” he declares, ending the debate because both of them are too stubborn and tired to continue this argument right now.

Dean glares at him for a few seconds more than gives a stiff shrug of surrender. “More like you knew the grub here was crap.”

“That too.” Cas comes close enough to get a good look at the brown and beige globs on Dean’s tray. “Is that supposed to be…beef?”

“They called is Salisbury steak, but I think it might actually be dog food.”

Cas takes the tray away and replaces it with the cookies, ham sandwich, chips and soda. “I also have
a salad if you-"

“Fuck I haven’t had Oreos in forever.” Dean tears into the package and gobbles a cookie without further ceremony, moaning around the mouthful in a way that makes Cas blush.

“Those are from Hannah,” Cas mutters, busying himself with taking a seat while Dean scarfs two more cookies.

“Tell her thanks. These are like the best thing that’s happened to me all week,” Dean says through a mouthful and Castiel can’t help but roll his eyes. “The bar is low.”

“How are you doing?” Cas asks once Dean swallows his fourth cookie.

“Really fucking shitty, how about you?”

Castiel smiles and shakes his head, glad that at least Dean’s humor is still there. “I guess things could be worse.”

“Yeah, you could be stuck with a broken pelvis and a mound of goddamn paperwork.” Dean gestures to a small mountain of forms next to him. “I don’t even know where to start with this crap.”

Castiel picks up the first form, skimming over the innocuous fields most people wouldn’t think twice about. Addresses, phone numbers, emergency contacts. Things Dean doesn’t have. “Well, do you have a social security number?”

“Probably, but I don’t remember it. I don’t even have a valid ID,” Dean sighs. “I’m still John Doe on half of these.”

“Just put down what you can. It’s mostly for billing anyway.”

“Oh yeah, fun times. You got any idea how much this vacation is gonna cost me? I got some cash stashed away in the car once I find her. If we’re looking at more than a few thousand though...”

Dean shakes his head and eats another cookie.

“You had surgery, an ambulance ride, medication, x-rays, and will be here several nights and will get physical therapy,” Cas rattles off as Dean grows even paler. “You’re looking at upwards of forty thousand dollars.”

Dean laughs, shaky and high. “Holy fuck. Yeah, I’ll just put that on my credit card.” Dean looks up, shaking his head with another hysterical giggle. “Fuck.”

“We’ll figure it out,” Castiel says and gets a withering look for his trouble.

“There’s no ‘we’ here, Cas. There’s just me and the colossal mountain of shit I’m under and-”

Dean stops at the sound of a knock on the door before it opens. Castiel isn’t sure if he’s happy to see Jody Mills walk in, it delays the fight, but it means more questions and stress for Dean. “Jody – Detective Mills. I thought you weren’t coming in today,” he says, rising.

“Yeah, Anna called and asked me to wait but, if we’re gonna arrest the guy we need to move fast. He’s a slippery bastard,” Jody says, looking sympathetically at Dean.

“Detective? Jesus, Cas do you know everyone?” Jody and Cas both ignore the outburst, as Jody approaches the bed and holds out her hand to Dean.

“Glad to see you’re up, you gave this one quite a scare it sounds like.” Dean shakes her hand
uncertainly, glancing at Cas. “Detective Jody Mills, Lawrence PD.”

“I know Jody through our churches, and some volunteer projects,” Castiel explains. “Same way I met you.” So far their stories have matched up when any one inquired, but they haven’t actually discussed it. He doesn’t think Dean will reveal anything but the possibility makes the acid that had been quiet all day so far jump in his stomach.

“My job is to arrest the guys that did this to you.”

“Sorry to disappoint but I didn’t see ’em,” Dean says, flat and cold. Castiel opens his mouth to protest but Dean shoots him a look. “I drove my pal to the Rack, got a beer and went back out and… got jumped. Someone…I don’t know. I don’t know why. They said something about the car. But they got me and…I blacked out. Woke up here.”

Cas watches as Jody jots something down in her notepad and sighs. She knows he’s lying too. “Dean, I know that you may be scared. The people that we think did this, they’re scary. But if you saw who did it, this is assault one, even attempted murder. It could put them away for a long time.”

“All of them?” Dean asks back.

“We can keep you safe, Dean,” Jody says.

Dean’s expression is grim as he stares Jody down, a silent conversation happening between them. “I didn’t see anything.”

Jody shakes her head and stows her notebook. “I’m sorry to hear that. If you do remember anything, call us. We understand that you’ve been through a lot and won’t hold it against you if your statement changes.”

“What about my car?” Dean's voice is shakier than Cas has ever heard it.

“The old impala at the scene?” Jody asks back. “The one with fake tags and no registration?”

“It’s mine. She’s…everything I have is in that car.”

“Not legally she’s not. But don’t worry, I won’t collar you for possession of a stolen vehicle on top of everything.”

“I didn’t…”

“Last registration on the VIN is a John Winchester, so I’m letting that go. But we’re holding it as evidence in case you remember what happened,” Jody explains and Dean looks like he’s been struck.

“When can I get to her?”

“They did a number on the thing, kid, you couldn’t drive it anyway. Once we close this investigation, she’ll go to impound and then probably get sold at auction. There’s a salvage yard that picks up most of the classics we get.”

“No, I…” Castiel can see tears in the corner of Dean’s eyes. “Fuck.”

“I’m sorry, kid. But there’s no evidence that car is yours, so I can’t get her back.” Jody does seem to mean it, not that it matters to Dean. “Call me if you remember anything.” Jody places her card on the bedside table before giving Cas a weak smile and leaving.
Dean looks desolate and Castiel feels absolutely helpless. “There’s got to be a way to-”

“Cas, just…get back to work, okay?” Dean says. “Thanks for the food. As usual.”

Castiel stares, wishing he could just will all of this away and disappear with Dean forever. He wants to hold him and kiss him and lie that it will be okay. All he can do is grasp Dean’s hand and force him to look into his eyes. “I’ll come back later, I promise. I’ll bring you some better dinner.”

“You don’t…”

“And don’t worry about the bills. I’ll…” Cas gulps. “I’ll handle that for you.”

Dean shakes his head, eyes closed and face tired. But he also squeezes Cas’s hand back and for the moment, it’s enough. “Thanks, Cas.”

Leaving is hard. It always is. Standing at a door and looking back at Dean on a bed, beautiful and lost, always tears at something inside him. It’s worse today and when the door shuts behind him Castiel feels like his insides have been carved away and replaced with molten lead.

He doesn’t head back to his own floor. He walks right past Uriel’s secretary and into his office without ceremony and Uriel for his part looks bored and smug when he deigns to notice Castiel glaring down at him. “Casiel, I hope you’re here to tell me the Klein matter has been handled?”

“No, but it will be once you do me a favor.”

__________

Dean has decided that the only thing worse than hospital food is hospital TV. He was sort of excited to see what he could watch, since it had been a long time since he had a TV to himself, but just like everything else in this hellhole, it’s shit. Bad picture and only the crappy channels. No food shows. No good reruns. Just talk shows and soaps, five Christian stations, the shopping network, CSPAN and the weather. Dean settled on the weather after trying and failing to follow Guiding Hospital of Our Lives or something. Kansas is hot in August but not as hot as Texas it turns out.

He hasn’t felt this hopeless and shitty for a long time. There’s one person in the whole place looking out for him and that’s fucked up too. Cas is the only thing that doesn’t hurt, but thinking about him and the insane situation they’re in makes Dean want to scream. So, he’s watching the weather and trying to make it through the next few hours so someone will give him meds to knock him out and he can not think for a while.

The clock says 5:04.

Dean changes the channel to the evening news and eats another Oreo and wonders how far away Cas is and if he’s really going to be back for dinner. He doesn’t want to get his hopes up because it feels dangerous. Cas is an ex-client that’s got a complex, not a boyfriend or even a friend, despite what Cas says.

His heart still does a stupid jump when the door opens, then stops when he sees who it is. Anna’s smile is thin and polite, her red hair pulled back in a messy ponytail, holding a clipboard and papers. She doesn’t have much make-up on. Dean wonders if that’s a church thing or a doctor thing or a personal thing. She’s pretty without it.
“Hi, Dean, how are you feeling?”

“Crappy,” Dean answers, figuring he should save his lying energy for later. Anna’s eyes fall on the half empty package of Oreos and she raises an eyebrow. “Uh, Cas’s friend sent them I guess? Hannah? I met her when she was helping Cas with stuff. Kinda surprised she remembered me.”

“She’s the one that recruited him for the mission,” Anna says. “She has a very giving spirit, if not the…warmest personality.”

“Well, neither does Cas. Guess that’s why they’re friends,” Dean tries and Anna looks at him curiously.

“He’s warm in other ways.”

Dean doesn’t know what to say to that, so he just smiles as much as he can without hurting his face and nods. Anna regards him, like she’s trying to figure him out and Dean forces himself not to squirm under the scrutiny.

“How’s your pain?” Anna pulls up the chair beside Dean’s bed.

“Uh, better. The move was a bitch but I think I’m like a two, right now.”

“Good. That’s good.” Anna looks down at the clipboard and back up to Dean. “I know you’re probably tired of forms but we need to get your medical history.”

“Isn’t that something nurses usually do? Kinda small beans for a doctor.” Dean tries not to let his uneasiness show. He doesn’t need Anna of all people knowing the dirty details of his crap life.

“I’m sort of on the nurse’s shit list right now.”

“You don’t seem like the make enemies type. There a story there?”

“There is.” Anna fiddles with the pen in her hand and chews her lips. “I know you probably don’t want to talk about…anything. No one does. But we need this information so we can take care of you. And if you want, when we’re done, I can tell you why the nurses hate me.”

“You’re offering a trade?” It’s transparent, but he knows he’s not getting out of this. And he can’t say he’s not curious about the woman that gets to share a life with Cas. Anna watches him expectantly and Dean huffs out, “Fine.”

“Great! The first part’s easy: place of birth. We already got the date.” Anna waits as Dean psychs himself up. It should be easy, it’s true. But thinking about the past never is.

“Here,” Dean finally says. “I mean not this hospital, but in Lawrence. I think it was Lawrence General.”

“Really? Hm.” Anna writes down the answer and then pauses with her pen an inch from the paper. “I was born in Ohio. Not here. But Cas was.”

“I didn’t know that,” Dean says and it’s true. This isn’t shit he talks about with anyone, not even Cas. “Doubt we ever met, we uh, left when I was ten or so, and Cas is, you know, old.”

“Thirty isn’t old, be quiet,” Anna smiles. “Do you remember what vaccinations you’ve had?”

“Some? I don’t know, I stopped with that stuff when we moved and I obviously haven’t been in for a checkup in a while.”
“Well, considering that and your circumstances, I’m going to order a tetanus booster.” Dean winces and groans. “Sorry. Any significant medical problems or injuries should know about?”

“Uh, no…not really. Got chicken pox when I was five?”

“Oh.” Dean wonders how much worse he is that he didn’t think that what Ishim did to him was worth noting. “Yeah, I, uh…pissed someone off a month or so ago.”

“And?”

“And I got over it.” Dean tries to shrug which just reminds him of his new broken ribs and that he really should try to stop pissing off people that want to beat the shit out of him.

Anna shakes her head. “Current stuff then. Do you drink? And if so how many drinks a week?” Anna keeps her tones casual, with a practiced lack of judgment.

“I dunno…ten?” Anna makes an interested face. “Too many.”

“Smoke?”

“Once in a while, don’t buy my own.” Dean’s skin is starting to prickle with discomfort even as Anna just keeps scribbling and doesn’t look up.

“Drugs?”

Dean swallows and pauses long enough that Anna looks up, eyes serious. “Nothing hard, okay? Just weed, maybe once a week? And Oxy or something when I was hurting.”

“No needles?” Anna’s deadly serious as she asks.

“No.” The vehemence of the answer seems to satisfy Anna and she goes back to writing.

“Sexually active?” The tone is too light, too forced and Anna pointedly avoids his eyes. Maybe Dean is imagining it. Maybe she’s just an uptight Christian who doesn’t want to ask her husband’s friend about sinful things. Or maybe she suspects what Dean is. Or maybe she’s asking if Dean’s fucked her husband. He doesn’t know and he’s not going to give her this. He won’t do that to Cas.

“No, not really,” Dean answers, turning on the part of him that’s so good at telling people what they need to hear.

“No really?” Anna echoes, still suspicious but daring to look at Dean now.

“I mean, not a lot of love connections happening in my circumstances. Chicks don’t really dig the whole living on the street out of my car vibe, so…” He makes sure to say chicks, not people. Anna still looks tense. “Always used protection. I’m not a complete idiot.”

“I don’t think you’re an idiot at all,” Anna says. He can’t tell what she’s thinking but she makes a note. “I assume you haven’t been tested recently?”

“Uh, no.”

“We’ll run a panel, just in case, okay?”
Dean really can’t argue with that even if a positive test would the cherry on the shit sundae that’s his life right now. “Fine.”

“Next is family history.”

“No.” If Dean could walk he would get up and storm out right there, but all he can do is stare petulantly at the window.

“Come on, Dean, it’s not complicated, we just need to know if there’s any illness, causes of death if any. Simple stuff, not your life story.” Anna actually sounds concerned as she says it but Dena scoffs anyway.

“I don’t know most of that shit.”

“Try. Mother’s side first. Can you tell me her name?”

Dean closes his eyes. Fuck, he’s teared up more today than in the past month. Anna is not going to let this go. Better to just get it over with. “Mary Winchester. Birth name was Campbell. Father was Samuel. Mother was Deana. They died in a car wreck before I was born.”

“And your mom? Is she…”

“Died in a fire when I was nine. And I don’t know her medial fucking history,” Dean spits, finally turning to glare at Anna. He regrets it instantly when he sees the pity in her face. “Next.”

“Father’s side.”

“Granddad: Henry Winchester, ditched my dad and grandma and they found him with a bullet in his head a year later. Grandma was Millie. She had a heart attack while my dad was overseas, before I was born.”

Dean waits for Anna to ask it. He’s not even sure how he’s going to answer.

“I’ve seen your X-Rays, you know. That’s how I knew about the older break on your ribs,” Anna says quietly and Dean’s anger snaps to confusion. “I saw the other broken ribs too, the much older one. Where they’ve healed. And your left wrist. Do you know that with some injuries we see them enough that we can guess the cause? What you had looks like a defensive injury.”

“You’re making me feel kinda naked here, Doc.”

“My father wasn’t a nice man either. He drank a lot. Liked to hit people. Had one of those tempers you had to tip toe around all the time. I…hated him and that my mother never left or stood up to him. Not that she was much better. She liked pills more than drinking.” Anna’s gaze is unfocused, like she’s watching the old memories in her mind, not seeing Dean at all.

“Why are you-”

“You know how most kids rebel by smoking under the bleachers and drinking at parties?” Anna goes on. “That wasn’t me. I met some friends that invited me to their church and that was my rebellion. I found people that talked about love and forgiveness and grace and my parents hated it. But there was an older couple in the congregation and they took me under their wing. I moved in with them and they fought in court to get my away from my parents. When I went to college here in Lawrence, they moved to stay close.”

“They sound like good people,” Dean says quietly and Anna gives a sad smile.
“They were. My dad – adoptive dad, he died when I was a junior in college. Cancer. That’s what made me switch from art to pre-med. Took some doing but Cas helped me out. Mom made it long enough to see me graduate medical school. Passed away two years ago. She stayed with us for a while, at the end. We didn’t want her in a home. House still seems empty without her.” Anna sighs and shakes off the melancholy.

“Doc, I…”

“Call me, Anna.” Does doesn’t know why that sounds like a challenge.

“Anna.” He takes a deep breath as Anna holds his gaze. “Fair trade. Okay. My dad’s name is John Winchester. He wasn’t great before Mom died but he was okay. Not after. You can write down alcoholism on you little sheet. He carted us around from job to job for years until we ended up in the system. Shit happened. Haven’t heard from him in two years, not that he was there for us much before that. Don’t know if he’s alive.” Is he supposed to feel better saying it all out loud? He just feels empty.

“I know saying I’m sorry is trite but-”

“Then don’t.” Anna doesn’t argue. Cas would have, Dean thinks, and he’s glad Cas isn’t here.

“You said ‘us?’”

Dean looks up. Of course she got that. “Yeah, uh, I’ve got a brother. Sam. He’s 14. He’s in foster care. And no, I do not want to talk about it.” The fight with Cas about Sam seems a hundred miles away now, but it still stings.

“Okay, uh…” Anna trails her pen over the forms on the clipboard. “Any allergies?”

Dean snorts. Good transition. “Do cats count?”

“I’ll put it down.” Anna stands, looking resolved and satisfied. “Is there anything else you need?”

“Yeah, you’re supposed to tell me how you pissed off the nurses.” Dean wonders if Anna genuinely forgot or if she was intentionally going to stiff him. Or maybe she thought her sob story was a better trade. He’s not sure of her enough to guess. Her smile fades and suddenly the floor is very interesting.

“Oh. I…performed a procedure most of the hospital doesn’t morally condone.”

“What, like a boob job?”

Anna looks just as surprised as Dean when she laughs. It’s brief and she composes herself quickly, but Dean’s sort of glad he got it out of her. “A termination of pregnancy.”

“Oh. Yeah that’s…” Dean is out of his depth again. “Sorry.”

“It’s only been a week, it will blow over,” Anna says with a shrug. Dean thinks back to a week ago, though it feels like a year. Cas ditching him because Anna had ‘a bad day.’ Now he knows why.

“Do you need anything else?” Dean shakes his head. “Well, Thursday is my night shift so I’ll be around until about three, I’ll check in.”

“Thanks,” Dean mutters. Now he knows what Anna was doing all those Thursday nights while Cas snuck out to fuck him. He doesn’t know if it’s better or worse than sneaking off from volunteering with a church to feed the homeless. Feels worse.
Leave it to Cas to walk in at that very moment with two bags of food and a surprised expression on his face.

“I didn’t know the hospital did delivery?” Anna says. Dean thinks she’s going for playful. “What’d you bring us.”

“Cobb Salad, no bacon, extra avocado,” Cas says without missing a beat and hands Anna a bag. “And several things you won’t approve of for Dean, since he appreciates the finer things in life.”

“You didn’t have to do that,” Dean says.

“No, I’ve seen the patient food, he definitely did,” Anna answers before Cas can. Dean gives an awkward smile as Cas hands him the bag. It smells fantastic but he’s not sure how much he can eat. Getting your worst memories brought up when you’re already feeling chewed up and spit out by the world doesn’t do a lot for the appetite.

“Thanks, Cas,” Dean says anyway and pulls out a warm, greasy fry. “You steal any of these on your way here?”

Castiel avoids Dean’s eyes and Anna shakes her head. “They’re better warm, someone had to appreciate them.”

“There’s some soup at home, with real vegetables in it,” Anna says and Dean pretends the stab of pain he feels is a rib or a bruise. “And doctor's orders are no run tonight, just get to bed.”

Cas opens his mouth to protest, looking between Anna and Dean. He hasn’t seen Cas look at him like this for a while; like Cas is a facing down a gun and Dean’s the one with his finger on the trigger. There’s none of the want or worship in Cas’s eyes now, just conflict and confusion. Dean’s not sure why Cas even wants to stay, there’s nothing that Dean can give him right now other than poor company and more arguments.

“You look worse than me, Cas. Go home. I’m in good hands,” Dean says. “I’m just gonna eat this and ask the nice nurses for something to knock me out.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” Anna says. “The physical therapist is going to see you tomorrow, see how well you move.”

“Great, the sooner I can walk the better.” Dean hadn’t really considered the timeline of getting on his feet again. The pain of just getting from one bed to another made it seem daunting.

“That still might be a while,” Anna says and damn, she seems like a nice person but she’s getting really good at crushing the hope out of Dean with a few words. “We’ll know tomorrow.”

“I’ll stop by,” Cas says, kind and useless.

“I’ll see if I can fit you in, I’m awful busy with callers.” Cas and Anna both smile at the bad joke.

“Goodbye, Dean,” Cas says for both of them and they leave together.

Dean imagines them, even though he has no right to. Imagines Anna holding Cas’s hand all the way to the elevators. Kissing him on the cheek. It shouldn’t hurt but it does. So he keeps going. He imagines Cas driving home alone in his nice car and standing alone in his nice, big house. He imagines Cas missing him, Cas showering and jacking himself off thinking of Dean instead of Anna. He wonders if it’s sexy or sad, thinking about Dean as something he’s never going to have again. It’s easier to think about Cas’s sad life than his own, but he just can’t. Anna and the cop reminded him of
all the shit that got him here and that there’s nowhere to go after, so he forces himself to think of Cas
lying awake in bed and thinking of him. It’s a weird fantasy, and pretty fucking impossible, but it
does the trick.

Dean eats the food Cas bought him and falls asleep aching in a bed Cas probably paid for. Typical
Thursday.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- mentions of childhood abuse
- mentions of substance abuse an alcoholism
- mentions of death of family/parents

Such angst...I know. Everyone has a lot going on and next chapter some decisions are
getting made.
Chapter 11

Castiel wakes up groggy and overheated, a film of sweat between his skin and sleep clothes. The sheets are too heavy and warm around him, the body draped over his radiating heat like a furnace. Anna’s holding onto him tight. He doesn’t remember her getting in bed in the night, but he took a sleeping pill to avoid a restless night worrying about her and Dean, so he’s not shocked. Yesterday morning was the first morning in a while he hadn’t woken up and wondered what Dean was doing, what it would be like to wake next to him. He wonders it again now. The guilt he feels is as familiar now as his morning routine, comforting in a way. It means he still has a conscience at least and that some things never change. Some things can’t change. It’s early, so he takes a bit of extra care in washing and shaving and dressing than usual. More armor against the day.

“Cas?” Anna’s voice is rough and small as she calls from the bed before Cas can creep out of the room.

“I’m heading to work, go back to sleep.”

“Hon?” He turns back. He knows that tone, it’s the one that comes before an order her he’s not going to like. “Coffee won’t be good for Dean right now, so don’t use him as an excuse to get some. Just donuts, okay? Say hi for me.”

“Of course,” he says, dutiful and the words settle in his stomach like stones.

“Love you,” Anna says through a yawn and settles back into the bed.

“You too. See you tonight.”

He’s already shaking when he gets in the car. He drives a different way to work and picks up a dozen donuts and he barely avoids getting sideswiped because his mind is spinning.

She knows. Anna knows him better than anyone and can guess every transgression before he does it. Of course she knows. Or maybe suspects. He can’t be sure without asking and the risk there is too great. How the hell did he get here? He’s been doing and acting without thinking for months, just following each urge and telling himself that it’s alright because no one will know and no one will be hurt. That’s not true anymore.

He has to talk to Dean first. Maybe he knows. Maybe he told her something. Or is that a mistake? Should he even be seen with Dean if Anna suspects or should he behave normally? What in God’s name is normal in a situation like this? Maybe Dean knows. Dean’s better at this than him.

Castiel feels guiltier sneaking to the fifth floor with a box of donuts than he ever did driving downtown for a sexual encounter. He should have felt that yesterday. Should have been more
careful. He was too caught up in the shock of Dean’s arrival at the hospital and his gratitude for Dean’s relative health and safety to control himself. Christ, he kissed Dean when he first woke up. It was chaste and happened in the dark but if someone saw…He was an idiot.

He’s surprised to find himself standing in Dean’s door, fear reverberating through him like the bass at a concert. Dean’s staring out the window, face so blank that Cas wonders if he’s still asleep.

“Dean?” His voice doesn’t shake. Small victory.

He’s seen Dean more in the last twenty-four hours than in the week before. He keeps hoping that more exposure will make it easier; that somehow, he’ll be able to inoculate himself from wanting him but he second Castiel Dean turns to him, green eyes weary, face still smeared with bruises, Cas feels a punch of desire so strong it takes his breath away.

“Hope you got cream filled ones,” Dean says tiredly and Cas doesn’t know if he can move. “You okay? You look shittier than I feel. I and feel really-”

“Did you tell Anna something?” He knows he should lead up to it but he’s never been good at small talk. He shuts the door and lowers his voice. “About us?”

“What? No!” There’s no lie in Dean’s face or eyes, but Castiel’s panic doesn’t ease.

“Are you sure? She…” God, he can’t even say it.

“She knows? Cas…Ow, fuck.” Castiel blinks, finding himself closer to Dean than he thought and Dean reaching out to him and wincing, holding his side. “Cas, breathe. And fucking sit down.” Cas complies, at least with the sitting. “Tell me what she said. Exact words.”

“She didn’t say anything.”

“She didn’t – Jesus, Cas. Then why are you freaking out?”

“I just have a feeling.” Saying that out loud and the way Dean rolls his eyes makes him feel like a different kind of fool.

“She got my medical history and I lied, about what I do; so she doesn’t know the whole fucking guys for money thing. Hell, I told her I was straight.”

“You did?” The fact Anna was the one asking Dean so many questions makes him feel a strange pang of jealousy that is very much not important right now. “You lied to her?”

“I lied to the cops for you, you think I wouldn’t also lie to your wife?”

Castiel relaxes minutely, very clearly remembering his confusion when Dean had spoken to Jody. “I was wondering why you did that.”

“Are you kidding?” Dean scoffs. “The assholes that did this…they know what I am and that sure as hell would come up and get back to you if I had to testify or something. I ain’t doing that to you.”

“I just thought you were scared of reprisals.”

“Well, that’s a factor too. Not that they can do more than actually kill me at this point to make my life worse.” The weariness settles back around him like a haze and he slumps back into his bed. “Hand me a damn donut.”

“I need to save some to take down to the office,” Castiel says, handing Dean a chocolate frosted one
and taking plain glazed for himself.

“Did Anna say anything about what she got out of me?” Dean asks nervously.

“No. She didn’t share anything about you. That would be highly unethical of her.”

“Yeah, she seems like the ethical type.” Dean takes a too-big bite and they chew in silence. “She was gonna run tests. For STDs and stuff anyway. Just so you know,” Dean says as he swallows.

“You use protection,” Castiel says as if it will make a difference. They’ve talked more about the realities of Dean’s profession in the last few minutes than ever before and Castiel doesn’t know how that makes him feel. “I don’t know if she knows…about your work. I just think she knows there’s something between you and me. But I can’t be sure. She knew I was planning on getting coffee for you and using it as an excuse to get some for myself. The way she said it…Maybe she just suspects.”

“It’s still probably better…if you’re worried about her knowing…” Dean looks like he’s having as hard a time saying it as Castiel is thinking it. Dean’s always been stronger though. “You should go.”

“Dean.”

“Cas, come on, you’re putting yourself at risk here and…” Dean swallows and finds something very interesting to look at on the sheet. “It not like I’m any use to you anymore. You can quit hanging around.”

“Use?”

Castiel can see Dean building up a wall of bravado brick by brick. It crumbled quite a bit since the first time they met. But now the cocky stranger Dean pretends to be for johns is looking at him. “I mean I could probably blow you in the right position but I’m on the bench, for a while.”

“You still think this is about sex?” Castiel asks dully and Dean shrugs. “Of course. We don’t have a relationship, we have a transaction. Isn’t that what you said?”

“It’s true.”

“You know it’s not,” Cas says, soft and insistent and Dean’s mask falls.

“It’s better if it is. Get out of here, Cas, you’ve got work to do.” Dean doesn’t sound angry, just resigned. “If Anna thinks she knows…stuff, I’ll still lie. If you need me to. But cover your ass for now, okay? And I’ll cover mine.”

Castiel stares and shakes his head. He sees what Dean’s doing and he has no reason to fight it right now. In fact he has every reason to walk out and keep pretending everything is normal and Dean is nothing to him. What would even happen if Anna knew? Would she leave him? Of course she would. He would lose everything. Everyone. And he wouldn’t even have Dean to turn to because that’s not what they have. Nevertheless, there’s something tempting about it…it’s like standing on the edge of a cliff and the irresistible urge inside whispering jump. Or maybe fly.

“I’ll see you,” Cas says, taking the donuts and barely noticing Dean’s little wave.

“Bye, Cas.” It feels more final than usual.

He steps numbly into the elevator and startles when someone speaks to him.

“Good morning, Castiel.” Uriel’s voice is like distant thunder, warning of a storm and it makes
Castiel just as cold when he turns to him. “What were you doing up so high?”

“Good morning, Uriel.” Castiel swallows. Uriel knows he has no reason to be in this ward and Castiel feels like he’s been caught with a box of matches among dry tinder. “I…was visiting a friend.”

“Your charity case? Very Christian of you. And it’s taken care of, by the way, just like you asked. The hospital could use a few more write offs,” Uriel says, his focus on Cas calculated and unwavering. “How is your project going?”

“It’s taken care of,” Castiel says, summoning all his resolve to remain stoic and calm.

“Good. I knew you would understand. Bringing some treats for Hannah and Alfie?” Uriel indicates the food in Castiel’s hands and Cas nods. “They’re lucky to have you. As is that other miscreant. And your friend. And your wife.” The threat is his voice is unmistakable.

“Uriel, I did what you…”

“I just want you to know how we in the administration appreciate knowing there’s someone to turn to in times of need. You have…a kind heart but you’re willing to protect what’s important. I like that.” The elevator finally chimes and Uriel steps out in with a smile. “Have a good day, Castiel.”

Castiel has always been very good at math. That’s how he ended up in this job after all. The math here is simple. The livelihoods of four people, three of them employees and friends, plus the happiness and stability of someone he has loved for over a decade, plus Dean’s safety and peace of mind. Those don’t come close to equaling the small bit of peace he’d find confessing his sins to Anna and the world. You don’t fly jumping off a cliff. You die.

Dean feels worse today. Maybe it means he’s healing or maybe they’re giving him less drugs because they flagged him as potential addict. Maybe it’s the boredom of laying in bed with noting to do but flip through shit TV and pick at Jello. Maybe it’s that creeping fear that he said something wrong and fucked up Cas’s life. Or the weird ache he feels knowing Cas won’t be showing up again today, not if he knows what’s good for him. Not that Cas ever cared about what was good for him. He cares about other people though, so…who knows. That’s why Dean turns to the door with a stupid surge of hope every time it opens. Or at least, every time since lunch. It wasn’t Cas this time. It’s not Anna either, but Dr. Tran.

“Thought they kept you on the night shift?” Dean asks, putting up the same façade of cheer as always.

“Only once a week. Lucky for me Dr. Novak had her turn at the night shift last night so she’s off today.”

“Great,” Dean says.

“I just wanted to stop in and make a check before the PT comes in and tell you that the assignments are random,” Dr. Tran says.

“Well, I’m hurting some, don’t know how good that will be if someone wants to get my ass
moving.” Dean doesn’t want to be the guy that asks for more drugs but he’d really like some more drugs.

“We’ll get you some of the good stuff after Garth puts you through the paces.”

“Garth? My physical therapist is named Garth?”

“Garth Fitzgerald the third!” A twangy voice says from the door. Dean looks up to see a scarecrow of a man with a scraggly goatee grinning from the threshold. “And you must be Dean.” With two long steps Garth is next to Dean’s bed and hugging him. Dean’s had nurses helping him wash and piss for two days and had to face down a john’s wife asking him who he fucks but this is a new kind of humiliating.

“Told ya,” Doctor Tran says, grimacing on Dean’s behalf as Garth pulls back. “Have fun. Remember, if this goes well, we can get you out of here soon.”

“Awesome,” Dean mutters.

“You bet it’s awesome, friend!” Garth says with a grin.

Dean was wrong about the hug being the peak of humiliation. That’s trying to walk on crutches and with a walker with his ass hanging out of a hospital gown. It hurts and and it hurts bad. He’s amazed by how fucking exhausting it is too. He’d thought he was in okay shape but apparently, he lacks somewhat in the upper body strength category. Garth won’t let him put any weight at all on his legs, which Dean painfully fucks up a few times. Moving is torture, as is finally climbing back into his hospital bed.

“Fuck,” Dean groans.

“Now that was a good solid start, Dean,” Garth says, ignoring him and grinning. “Another session tomorrow and I think you’ll be good to head home!”

“I’ll what?” The idea of getting out had been an amorphous, distant thing before, no matter how much Dean wanted it. Now the idea of going somewhere else has Dean’s heart racing. “But I can’t…I can’t move.”

“Yeah, you’ll need to be on bed rest or off your feet for a few weeks. Gonna take at least six before you’re all healed up.” Garth remains cheerful, completely oblivious to Dean’s panic.

“Six weeks?”

“The docs will want to check you up after about four, but that’s a decision for them. I’ll give you my number and you can come in if you need some follow up, but you should be okay. I’ll have a list of exercises for-

“I can’t be off my feet for six weeks!”

“Now, Dean,” Garth’s voice deepens in what must pass for seriousness for him. “I know it’s probably tough with work and the life a young man like you must live, but if you don’t let yourself heal things can get real bad real fast. The bones may not set right or rebreak and there could be organ damage, infection, even death.”

“Are you…” Dean wants to slap the guy because that’s not the problem. He’d love to sit on his ass in bed for six weeks, but that requires a bed and a roof and a lot of things Dean doesn’t have.
“I’ll be back by tomorrow, okay? Get some rest now.” Garth gives one more goofy smile that Dean doesn’t return and leaves him.

He waits until the door is closed to fully collapse back onto the bed, eyes screwed shut on the pain the panic. Maybe if he can make it to one of the tent camps he can hole up there and pray for help. He cringes at the vision of dragging himself from a dirty tent to a shelter to even piss. The shelter make you clear out after ever night and the long term ones have waiting lists a mile long from what he’s heard. Could he call Aaron? He doesn’t have the guy’s number, or a damn phone, but he could probably find him…unless he got busted for being at the Rack and his parole got revoked. And even if he didn’t, being around him means getting close to the Hellhounds, who Dean is pretty sure might still want to kill him…If he could just get to his damn car he could get his money and pay for a place to crash but that’s not happening. The thought of begging Detective Mills for that makes him squirm. All the begging he’d have to do just to not die in the next month is probably going to kill him with shame before the hip does. And he hasn’t even dared to think about the one person he knows will say yes.

Cas would probably give him anything he needed and Dean can’t even think about that. There are so many reasons that’s not a good idea, chief of which is he told Cas to back off. Cas is being nice to Dean now out of guilt and to avoid Dean telling Anna that her husband is a big ol’ queer. Cas used Dean and Dean used him right back and they were fine with that and there’s no point pretending there was more. Hell, Cas’s wife knows more about Dean at this point than Cas does. And Dean knows more about her, including that she’s not a bad person and he should get the fuck out of their lives before he hurts both of them more.

Dean looks at the clock. It’s a few minutes past five which means Cas is on his way back home. Dean remembers a conversation about how Cas was meticulous about his schedule, how he knew it to the minute. Cas had said that like it was something he was ashamed of, as if the boring certainty of his life was a mark on his character. Dean would kill for that right now. He had two things to look forward to each week – Cas and Sam, and that had been enough to make the streets bearable.

Sam.

What the hell is he going to tell Sam? How is he even going to call him? There's no phone in here and...

“It was fried Friday in the employee cafeteria,” a deep voice says from the door. “I hope you like rubbery popcorn shrimp and tater tots.”

“Cas…” Dean sighs, taking in Cas in his wrinkled suit and backwards tie. He strides to Dean’s bed and sets the food in front of him on the little swingy tray thing. “I thought you were gonna keep clear.”

“I spent all day keeping clear,” Cas replies, fishing a cookie and a can of soda from his pockets.

“And?”

“And it was unpleasant. Eat.”

Dean rolls his eyes and pops a tot into his mouth. It’s not very warm but it’s better than that crap he had for lunch. “You ain’t eating?”

“No, it’s been…a stressful day so…” Cas makes a vague gesture and pulls a roll of antacids out of another pocket and takes one. “And I’m meeting Anna for dinner.”
“You talked to her?” Dean suddenly finds it hard to keep chewing.

“Texted. She didn’t say anything.”

Dean has no idea what that could mean, and obviously neither does Cas. “Guess that means you can’t hang around.”

“I’m sorry.” Cas says it with such genuine regret that Dean can’t look at him. “I would much rather be here.”

“Nah, I get it. You’ve got…” a life to live without me in it. Better get used to it. “Shit to do.”

“Do you need anything?” Cas asks, and Dean dares to look up into those ridiculous blue eyes. It’s Cas making the offer, but it feels like he’s begging Dean for something.

“I…yeah, actually.” Dean can’t believe he’s saying it but Cas needs to help to get some peace and Dean needs help. “I need a phone? Tomorrow. I…it’s my weekly call with Sam and I can’t miss it.”

“Of course. You can use mine or I can find you one or…”

“I may need it for a while, I…gotta make some other calls.” Dean gulps, shame heating his cheeks. “Sorta need to figure out where I’m going when they kick me out of here. Turns out I gotta sit on my ass for six week or something.”

“Are you talking about a shelter or friends or-”

“I don’t know!” Dean snaps, the breathless panic from earlier returning. “I don’t know. I kinda don’t want to die. Yet. Which is dumb, cause my life is fucked. But I…”

“Dean. We’ll find somewhere for you to go. I’ll come in tomorrow and I won’t leave until we have a solution.” It’s exactly what Dean knew he would say but it breaks something in him to actually hear it. “What time do you need the phone?”

“Call’s supposed to be between eleven and twelve. Used to do it at the shelter. That’s why I was always downtown when you were…” Cas looks down and Dean realizes he’s said something wrong. “I came for you too. Just so you know.” He should say something about how he needed the money. He doesn’t.

“You don’t need to flatter me. I understand. Are you going to tell Sam what happened-”

“I don’t know,” Dean whispers, tears pricking his eyes at the thought. “I don’t want to let the kid down again. That’s all I’ve ever done.”

“I doubt that,” Cas says automatically, because he’s the kind of moronically optimistic person that still believes that people are good, that Dean is good. The thought of how wrong Cas has always been about him makes something ugly and sharp twist inside of Dean.

“Did Anna tell you? About me? All the crap she got out of me for my medical history?” Dean asks, blinking back the tears and turning to familiar anger and shame.

“No. I told you, she wouldn’t.”

“Well, I figure that it’s only fair that you know too,” Dean sneers. "My dad was a drunk. And an angry one too. He kept it cool, mostly, when my mom was alive and I...I always stood up for him. Told mom he'd get better but she died in a fire when I was nine. I was the first one to hear it, the first
to wake and I ran down to my dad first. I don’t know why. But he got me and Sam out first and by the time he went back for mom…”

“Dean…”

“I failed her. And after that, fuck…Dad wasn’t ever the same. We hit the road, jumping from place to place every time he got fired or collared for fraud or something. I had to raise Sam. Me. And keep him safe from dad when he got in a mood…and I let him down there too.”

Cas doesn’t offer empty words of comfort, just takes Dean’s hand. Dean knows he should stop talking, that there’s no reason Cas needs to know any of this, but the dam Anna cracked yesterday is broken now.

“I should have helped Dad. Gotten him straight. It’s a miracle that Sam and I stayed out of the system as long as we did, but once we were in…fuck, it got worse. I was in and out of homes and juvie for just doing what I could to keep us fed. Petty theft mostly. I didn’t get caught for…other stuff. But I turned eighteen and they dumped me so fast it made my head spin. I found Dad. Helped him on jobs, kept him in booze two years ago, I wake up and he’s just gone.”

“Gone?” Cas sounds correctly horrified and even now Dean wants to jump to John's defense.

“Gone. The impala was still there so, who the fuck knows where he went but, I started looking for him instead of sticking around to try and take care of Sam. Figured he’d come back here if he came anywhere so, this is where I ended up. He hasn't come back. I’d turned tricks a few times before and…it was easy money. I’ve been trying to save up or something, get Sam back, but…all my cash was in my fucking car and…”

“It will be okay.”

“No, it won’t. How do I tell Sam I got the shit beaten out of me by a john that liked to fuck me bloody and a psycho who was mad at my friend the drug dealer?” Cas winces at that, like any decent person would. “Should I tell him that the one nice guy who liked to pay me for sex is helping me out cause of some weird Christian guilt complex?”

There’s so much ice in the glare Cas gives him that Dean gets a genuine chill. “You know that’s not why I’m here.”

“Cas, I’m still not your problem to solve or your burden to bear.” Dean knows that’s a dumb thing to say to the guy he’s sort of begging for help, but it’s also the truth. “I’m not your anything.”

“You’re my friend.” Dean wants to laugh at that. He’s had this guy’s dick in his ass multiple times and enthusiastically come on his face. That’s not friendship territory. But more than that, it’s just plain stupid on Cas’s part.

“Why? Did you not hear what I’ve been saying? All I do is let people down.” He pulls his hand out of Cas’s, knowing he doesn’t deserve that warmth.

Cas grabs it back. “You haven’t let me down yet.” Cas’s voice is firm, his hand steady as stone and the earnest look in his eyes almost makes Dean believe him. He stares at Cas for too long, letting himself be the person Cas sees, just for a little while. Until Cas’s phone buzzes with a text alert. Letting his hand go isn’t easy.

“It’s Anna,” Cas says looking at his phone. “Asking if I’m on my way. I should go.”

“Go ahead. Get out of here. Thanks for…for everything.” Cas sighs and gives him another long
“I’ll be back tomorrow. We’ll figure something out.” Dean notes the tension in Cas’s shoulders as he turns to go. He’s off to face a wife who may or may not confront him for a whole menu of bad. “

“If you can’t come for some reason. I get it.” It will suck, but Dean understands Cas has a damn life he has to live and protect.

“I’ll be here,” Cas says firmly.

Dean doesn’t have the energy to argue with Cas, as usual, so he just gives him a weak smile and a nod. “See ya, Cas.”

“Goodbye, Dean.”

He’s never really liked watching Cas leave, so he doesn’t look when he walks out the door. He stares at the window instead. It’s beautiful sunny day but the view out feels like another screen or cheap piece of art. The room is cold.

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The restaurant Anna’s chosen for tonight is vegan, near the campus and full of laughing young people taking pictures of their food with their phones. Castiel is surprised to get there first, and unhappy. It gives him more time to stew in his dread. He has a few plans in place, depending on how things go. None of them are moral or pleasant, but they’re necessary. He has to do what it takes to keep his marriage together because it’s about much more than his happiness. If that means drawing on every filthy memory of Dean’s mouth and cock so he can make love to his wife tonight, then so be it. He pushes away thoughts of roads made of good intentions. He’s already on that trip.

“Hey, babe.” He spins at the feel of Anna’s hand on his elbow and plasters on a smile before bending to kiss her. He takes a bit longer than usual and when he draws back her face is warm and amused. “Good to see you too.”

“We still have about ten minutes to wait for a table,” Castiel tells her. “How are you?”

She doesn’t seem in the mood for a confrontation about infidelity, and they are in a public place, but he’s not very good at judging things. “Good. Had a nice day. I…” Anna looks up at him thoughtfully and smiles. “Got some things sorted out.”

“Sorted out?” It sounds ominous.

“Don’t worry. I did some painting, went to lunch went to that ladies luncheon with the new assistant pastor. Your mom says hi, by the way,” Anna says with a grimace. Castiel guesses that it’s a good sign he hasn't received a furious call from his mother yet.

“I thought you were skipping that?”

“Well, I missed the big party so I figured if I was free I should go. He’s…Interesting.” Anna doesn’t say ‘interesting’ the way most other in the congregation do. Interesting usually is code for deviance that must be stamped out, but Anna seems to really mean it.
“I didn’t really get to talk to him much.”

“I did. He had…some good thoughts.” Castiel feels nervous again, wondering if he was a topic of conversation. “Then I came home a curled up with a book. And cramps. You’re off the hook tonight, by the way.” Castiel blinks, one small knot of fear loosening in his gut. “How about you?”

“Not much to report. Had to stop a fight between Meg and Hannah over the last donut. Finished the quarterly projections.” He’s trying not to be too careful, to just talk like normal.

“How’s Dean?” There it is. Is this how spies feel? Or people walking through a field of landmines?

“He’s fine. I think. I didn’t see him much,” Castiel says carefully. Not really a lie.

“His chart says he started PT with Garth, which I would pay to see, and it looks like he’s good for discharge soon.” Castiel raises an eyebrow. “So, I logged in on my day off to check on my patients. I do it all the time.”

“Really?”

“Well, for the ones I like,” Anna says with a playful shrug.

“You like him?” This is very much not where Castiel thought this conversation was going.

“I do. He seems like a good guy, and I can see why you two get along.” Anna continues to smile and Castiel’s mind keeps racing.

“About that. Dean, I mean,” Castiel intended to discuss seeing Dean tomorrow after dinner, maybe even in the morning after some rest and once he’d fulfilled his obligations. But since the topic is open now and Anna seems cheerful. “He asked if I would come by tomorrow. He needs a phone to call his brother and some help sorting out where he’s going.”

“Of course,” Anna says, easy as anything. “Does he know where he’s going?”

Castiel sighs and shakes his head. “No. He’s…he doesn’t have anything, A. No ID, no money, nothing. The car he had was taken and…I know it’s a lot but I was thinking we could help him.”

When he looks at Anna, she doesn’t seem suspicious at all. In fact, she’s smiling brightly. “You haven’t called me A in forever,” she says wistfully. “And of course we can help Dean.”

“Maybe we can find him a hotel or an apartment? He has to recover and…”

“Or we could just put him in the guest room.”

Chapter End Notes

I promise that Chuck is gonna actually show up very soon, as things get REALLY complicated...
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hey! I'm catching up on comments, but I figure you'd rather have a new chapter, since I left you on a bit of a cliffhanger. There are no warnings for this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dean winces as the nurse helps him ease back into the bed. They upped the pain meds yesterday night so only about 60% of his body hurts now, but he's still stiff and things smart like a son of a bitch when he moves the wrong way.

“Hear they’re releasing you back to the wild soon,” Tessa says as she helps Dean arrange himself among his scratchy blankets. At least now he’s free of tubes and wires.

“Uh, yeah, they’re talking about it. Gotta get the all clear from Garth and the docs,” Dean says hesitantly, noting the interested raise of Tessa’s eyebrow. “Why, you looking for a date?” he adds with a smirk, just to see if he can get her to crack.

“In your dreams, hot stuff.”

Dean deflates. He tried not look at himself in the dark bathroom mirror while he was in there, but he wasn’t totally successful. The swelling on his face has gone down, leaving green-purple bruises behind that go great with his pale skin and sunken eyes. He’s pretty sure he’s lost some weight, despite Cas’s best efforts, and he’s looking gaunt. The few days’ worth of stubble, bordering on a beard at this point, helps some and hurts some. Hot stuff indeed. “How’s your pain?”

“Not great,” Dean answers, mostly honest. Pain management is another thing that’s got him worried about leaving. It’s not like he can waltz into a pharmacy for pills, or pay for them. He knows where to get them on the street but that also takes money he doesn’t have and can’t get right now. Just add that to the list of ways he’s fucked. He doesn’t even have clothes left as far as he knows.

“We’ll get you something before Garth comes in, okay? Buzz me if you need anything else.”

Tessa pats Dean’s arm before leaving him alone in the quiet room. It’s never fully silent in the hospital, Dean’s discovered. There’s always people walking by outside, the sound of wheelchairs and walkers and nurses scurrying by in their sensible shoes. He can make out distant beeps and pages over the intercom and sometimes the sound of sirens when some other poor schmo gets brought in. He doesn’t remember coming here, not really. There’s flashes of pain and red and noise, like remembering a nightmare, but that’s it. Leaving is going to be a hell of a lot different, but just as terrifying.

A knock on the door startles him out of his thoughts. He knows it’s Cas before he even turns and he can’t help but smile. “Right on time-” he stops at the sight of Cas’s wide, worried eyes and pursed lips. The sight of a head of red hair emerging behind Cas explains the look. Fuck. Is this the confrontation?

“Hey, Dean,” Anna says with a smile that does nothing to stem Dean’s panic. “Hope you don’t mind me tagging along. We’ll let you make your phone call soon.”
“Uh, no, that’s…that’s fine,” Dean stammers. “Do you have to bill this as overtime?”

“No, she’s salaried. She-” Cas’s mouth snaps shut as Anna and Dean give him the same look. “Oh.”

“I don’t mind coming in. We wanted to talk to you together, actually,” Anna goes on. She sounds cheerful and casual but Dean’s insides still turn to ice.

“It’s nothing bad,” Cas says quickly, doing his mind reading thing. It doesn’t help. “I mentioned to Anna last night that you didn’t have anywhere to go when you’re discharged.”

“And I know that you don’t know us, particularly well,” Anna picks up. “Especially me, but we do want to help and we have a perfectly good room in our house and—“

Dean wonders at exactly which point he started hallucinating. “You…what?”

Cas gives Dean a strained look. “I had suggested an apartment or hotel but Anna-”

“This was Anna’s idea?” Dean has no idea if he should be offended or terrified.

“This is cheaper and easier, and much less stress,” Anna replies. “It’s on the first floor, right by the kitchen with its own bathroom. It’s where my mom stayed, and Cas never took down the bars so it’s set up for limited mobility, which you’ll have for a few weeks and…”

“We have cable too,” Cas adds weakly.

“You’re talking about me living in your house.” Dean doesn’t think he needs to convey to Cas what a colossally bad idea this is, but he’s gonna try. “Eating your food and getting in your way and…No. Dude, that’s too much.”

“It’s the best option,” Anna argues, ignoring Cas’s nervous look. “We can help you get back on your feet. And you’ll have a doctor right there to tell you what to do.”

“Is this some sort of what would Jesus do thing?” Dean asks, queasy at the thought of being a special project for anyone, even Cas.

“Well, it is, but that’s not the motivation,” Anna replies. “I know Cas has been talking to you about the church. You can join us at service if you want to, once you’re moving.”

Dean’s going insane. He can think of nothing more awkward than going to church with the guy he’s extensively fucked and his wife. But hell, maybe that’s proof there is a God and this is him punishing Dean. “I…uh…”

“I know you would do the same thing if you were in our place,” Cas adds, infuriatingly reasonable. “Please. It would be the best thing for you.”

Dean wants to snap that Cas should for once in his life think about what would be best for Cas, but that would be pretty useless. Instead Dean sighs. “I’m not winning this, am I?”

“Nope.” Anna grins, triumphant.

“I see why you two get along,” Dean mutters. “I’ll pay you back. When I can. I promise.” It’s the only thing he can say to ease his shame and Cas thankfully doesn’t argue.

“Here,” Cas says, pulling a phone from his pocket. “It’s pre-paid. Keep it for now.”

“Thanks.” Dean checks the clock. A minute to eleven. Perfect. “Were you gonna hang out? Don’t
you have to get down town for sandwich patrol?"

“I had something more important today,” Cas says, too sincere for comfort. Dean wishes he could ask to talk to Cas alone but that feels way too dangerous.

“We’ll let you make your call and I’ll talk to the on-call about your discharge.” Anna’s all smiles and Dean honestly doesn’t know what to make of it. No one is this good, not without an angle and especially if you think the guy you’re helping is shtupping your husband. There has to be a fucking catch but he’s too thrown and fuzzy from meds to figure it out.

“Great. Thanks. Again,” Dean says. It’s too early for this shit. Yes he knows it’s eleven.

“Are you alright?” Cas asks, low and careful, moving as if he’s going to reach out to Dean then stopping short.

“I’m fine, Cas. Lemme talk to Sam.”

“Of course.”

Dean stares at the phone in his hand for a long time after the door shuts. It’s not fancy at all, but it’s the first cell he’s held in…he can’t really remember. How sad is that? He dials the number he memorized months ago and waits.

“Hello.” Sam sounds absolutely fed up already but fuck it’s good to hear his voice.

“Heya, Sammy,” Dean says, voice breaking.

“Are you okay? Why are you calling from a blocked number?” Sam sounds half angry, half concerned.

“I, uh…” Fuck. He can’t lie but he can’t tell the whole truth. Not yet. “I got in a bit of an accident. I’m in the hospital. I’m okay—”

“Holy crap, Dean! What are you - oh my God your car!” Even after so long apart, Sam knows him pretty damn well.

“She’s in bad shape, but I’ll get her fixed, somehow.”

“How are you…what’s going to happen? Are you okay?” Sam usually sounds older than his years, not right now. Right now, he’s a scared kid and it breaks Dean’s heart that he even cares.

“I’m okay. I’m gonna stay with some friends.”

“Friends?” The ‘you have friends?’ remains unspoken but unmistakable.

“Yeah, nice God-fearing folk actually. Might take me a few weeks to get back on my feet so they’re gonna look out for me.” It all sounds so nice and not horribly sordid and complicated when he says it like that.

“Seriously? And you met them how?” Sam sounds rightfully dubious.

“Uh, the husband he…volunteers downtown. We made friends. Don’t worry about it.”

“You just told me you’re in the hospital and you’re going to live with some strangers, of course I’m going to worry, Dean.”
“I’m not living with them, just staying there while I get shit figured out. Don’t stress.” Dean’s going to do enough of that for the both of them. “Tell me about you. How’s summer?”

“It’s fine,” Sam sighs. “My worker got me into some camp thing for foster kids where we’re gonna climb ropes and learn not to be delinquents or something. Might be cool.”

“You like your new guy? You said what’s-her-face got reassigned, right?”

“Yeah, Zeke’s pretty cool. Kinda serious, but you know, well-intentioned.”

“Sounds like a friend of mine,” Dean says, mostly to himself.

“He’s been really cool about trying to get me in the advanced classes in school, since the Hesses don’t care at all.”

“What sort of classes you looking at?” Sam launches into an extended monologue on statistics and trig and getting into calc a year early and a familiar pride settles under Dean’s battered ribs. Sam is okay and not too pissed off at him for the moment, so fuck it, he’s calling that a win.

The call is winding down when Sam asks, “So, this place you’re staying, are you gonna have, like, an address?”

“I guess. Why?”

“Well, I was…talking to Zeke about ways we could be in touch more and he said maybe letters? Like you can get him the address and I can give him letters and vice versa. I know it’s stupid but—”

“Sam, shut up.” Dean can’t keep the dumb amazement out of his voice. “I’ll get you the address next time we talk, or you can tell me who to get it to, okay?”

“Great. I gotta go! Take it easy and get better, okay?”

“Yeah, bye Bitch.”

“Bye, Jerk.”

Dean ends the call and fiddles with the phone, trying to think what he’d even write in a letter to Sam and failing. He’ll deal with that later, for now he’ll focus on not freaking out about other shit. He takes some time to explore the phone. It’s not a smart phone, but it’s got tetris and pong so that’s cool. He decides to add Sam to the contacts, just so it won’t be empty. To his surprise there’s already a few names entered: “Anna,” “Castiel,” “Doctor,” “Garth” (why). And “Home.”

“Fucking hell, Cas…” Dean whispers to himself. Of course it’s possible that Anna could have programmed it, but Dean has a feeling she didn’t.

He could still say no. He could figure out some way to get out of here without anyone knowing and just…die on the street or something. Sam and Cas and Anna would be sad, maybe, but it would hurt less than becoming part of someone’s home, Cas’s home, and leaving. Anything would hurt less than that.

He thinks about how he used to drive around the burbs in Baby, sneering at the cookie-cutter houses and manicured lawns on his way to swindle some asshole or get fucked in some shitty bar in the hick parts of town. He’d told himself he hated it, because thinking of a nice, clean life like that ever being within reach made him ache too deep to breathe.
He thinks of the last place he ever called home, and sunny days and sandwiches with the crusts cut off and what it felt like to be safe. He thinks of seeing Cas every damn day and how it’s been a week since they kissed or fucked and how much Dean misses the contact. He’s going to have to look at Cas the way he used to look at those nice houses, convince himself to scowl and sneer and move along instead of admitting that he wants the thing he can see but never have. Not really. Not permanently.

“Hey, Dean?”

He looks up at Anna’s voice. She standing, hesitant, in the door with Cas lurking behind her.

“Yeah?”

“So, it sounds like if Garth gives the okay, you can leave later this afternoon,” Anna says.

“This afternoon? Oh…wow.” Dean wonders if they’ll load him up with some drugs before he goes, because he will definitely need some chemical assistance to deal with this. “That’s…”

“We’ll get the room cleaned up and some clothes for you and come back,” Anna plows on, a strange combination of perky and unquestionable.

“If that’s alright,” Cas adds, to Dean’s slight relief.

“Yeah, that’s…” Cas holds his gaze, worried and serious as always. “That’s fine. This just isn’t how I thought the day would go.”

“I’m sure.” Cas’s ‘me neither’ is clear in his face.

"God always has surprises in store," Anna says with a smile that Cas tries and fails to imitate. “We’ll be back in a few hours;”

“I’ll be here,” Dean says.

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Castiel has always strangely enjoyed trips alone to the store. He like being on his own, but not secluded. No one at Target is going to ask him anything besides if he’s finding things alright, and he can wander the aisles and just think. It’s usually pleasant, even when his thoughts aren’t. The hope of finding something soothing was what made him offer to do the shopping while Anna fixed up the guest room. He’s standing in the toiletries section and still waiting for the calm to happen. As it is, he’s trying to pick a shampoo that Dean might like and about to have a panic attack.

What the hell are you doing? The voice in his head sounds suspiciously like Dean. He can hear the frustration and barely contained fury at the utter insanity of this situation. He’s going to be sharing a roof with the man he still lusts for and broke his vows with for over a month. Every day will be a test that he’s sure he will fail. And all at his wife’s suggestion.

He chooses a generic shampoo and heads two aisles over for more antacids. He’s going to need them.

“Castiel?”
He doesn’t know the voice but he turns anyway. It takes him a moment to recognize the small, scruffy man looking at him. It’s not the face but the twitchy, nervous set of his shoulder that finally clicks. “Mr. Shurley?”

“Please, call me Chuck.” Chuck shifts his basket from one hand to another with a distinct clinking noise and holds out a hand to Castiel. He has no idea why he needs to shake this man’s hand again after having already been introduced but he does so anyway. His palms are clammy and he winces at Castiel’s grip.

“Nice to meet you. Again.”

Chuck’s attention falls onto Castiel’s cart. “So are you, uh stocking up on…pants?”

“They’re for a friend,” Castiel says, as if that’s a perfectly valid reason to have that many pairs of sweats in a cart. At least they cover up the packages of socks and underwear.

“A friend?” Chuck echoes, voice going high. “Anna mentioned you had a-a friend that was, uh, hurt?”

“Yes.” Chuck stares at Castiel, wide-eyed and waiting.

“Is he…getting better?”

Castiel squints at the smaller man, wondering if Anna told him something specific about Dean that has him so nervous or if this is just how Chuck is. “He’s recovering. He’s going to stay with us while he recuperates.”

“He’s going to…oh, uh, wow, that’s really…nice of you.” Chuck swallows as Castiel wonders how long he has to talk to him before it’s socially acceptable to walk away. “Very Christian. Very-”

“He has nowhere else to go and we have space,” Castiel says, repeating the argument Anna had made multiple times last night. Any objections Castiel had were impossible to make, since there was nothing inappropriate on the face of letting an adult man be a guest in the home of two upstanding, married heterosexuals. Anna had asked if he trusted Dean and he’d replied instantly in the affirmative, and that had further supported her point.

“Of course, that’s great. I hope I can meet him.”

The very real possibility of introducing Dean to members of his church is something else Castiel has no desire to think about. “Of course. I need to go now.”

“Sure. See you tomorrow I hope!” Chuck calls after him and Castiel suppresses a sigh.

Castiel heads towards the food, wondering to himself if Chuck is a gossip and if there will be whispers and questions among the congregation tomorrow. He reminds himself again that there’s no reason for gossip. No one suspects what Castiel is, as far as he knows, and they know nothing about Dean. It will be fine. He’s going to buy some food for Dean and go home and unpack the clothes and soaps and other sundries and get in the car with his wife and go retrieve his injured friend from the hospital and everything will be fine. They have a past, yes, but that’s over. It was a physical, and monetary, not emotional. At least not on Dean’s side. Cas cares for Dean, of course, and he still desires him but he is under no illusion that Dean feels the same way. He made that very clear the last time they were together. So he can pretend the scenario he’s painted for Anna and the world is true and he will be fine. He’s about to enter a person hell that he completely deserves and like always, he will be fine.
They take Castiel’s car because it’s bigger than Anna’s aging Mazda. Everyone tells her to replace it but as her first major purchase as an adult, she’s attached. Castiel doesn’t mind it, aside from the whining noise it makes some mornings. The Camry is the nice car a there’s enough leg room for Dean in the back and front, and room in the trunk for crutches and the walker Dean will be given.

“Are you sure this is okay with you?” Castiel asks as they pull up to the Hospital. The employee parking lot is much less crowded on a Saturday. Like everything else today, it’s disconcerting.

“I was about to ask you the same thing,” Anna says, laughing. “This was my idea, remember.”

“Yes, but I don’t want you to think this is something you have to do because…” Words fail him again and Anna gives him another tolerant look.

“Cas, I know you’re not good with people, but you know Dean, you like him. This will be fine. It will be good. I think it could even be a blessing for us. In a way. It's a chance to do some good in the world.”

There is absolutely no way he can tell Anna that how much he knows and likes Dean is the entire problem.

The ride is quiet. Dean focuses on the relief of getting the hospital behind him and breathing through the pain of sitting in the back seat. Garth hadn’t gone easy in their final session, and Dean was so tired and sore at the end he was sure he wasn’t going to be cleared to leave. He’d be lying if he said that he wasn’t actually hoping for that, but, no, Garth and Dr. Tran agreed he was good to go. So, after an hour of meds, discharge notes and every lecture in the book about staying off his feet and taking it easy, they’d dressed him sweats and rolled him to the car.

He had avoided Cas’s eyes the whole time, which was pretty easy considering he just sort of lurked in the background and let Anna do the talking. Dean knows it’s vain and stupid, but he hates Cas seeing him like this: broken and pathetic. He’s used to being all the things Cas wants, not a burden. He tries not to notice Cas’s eyes in the rearview mirror or how tight his hands are on the steering wheel.

It’s easier to look out the window at the neighborhood as it passes by. Everything is clean and bright and new, built in recent years. He can tell by the trees that are too small for their plot, waiting to grow. The houses are all variations on the same theme. The lawns are unnaturally green for the summer heat. There’s a few people out in the late afternoon sun, parents running after kids and dogs; someone kneeling in the dirt of a garden. Fuck, there’s an honest-to-god white picket fence in front of one place. He feels like he’s going to get arrested by the home owner’s association the second he steps outside the car.

“Are you hungry?” Anna asks, shattering the silence and Dean jumps.

“Uh, not right now,” Dean replies and catches a disapproving flash of blue eyes. His stomach is nervous and unsettled, so that the idea of food is unappealing at best.

“Oh, well, we’ll figure something out later. Neither of us really cook,” Anna goes on.

“Hey, Cas makes a hell of PB&J,” Dean says automatically. He can’t see Anna’s expression but her
laugh is encouraging.

“I’m also familiar with the theory of several other sandwiches.”

“I love a good BLT,” Dean offers and gets a sigh for it. He’s not sure whose.

“We don’t do much bacon,” Cas says.

“Or tomatoes.” Anna adds with a glare at Cas. “But, hey, remember the egg sandwiches you used to make for us when we were in the dorms?”

“No that was our first apartment,” Cas corrects. “Before you broke the oven.”

“It was an honest mistake.”

“Uh huh.”

Dean feels like he should hate the banter, the easy familiarity of it all. But it reminds him so much of the way he talks with Sam that it makes something very different ache in him than he expected.

They pull into a driveway that Dean can hardly distinguish from all the others on the block, except maybe by the rosebushes on the side. The garage is normal, full of boxes labeled in neat sharpie and with bikes at the back that don’t look like they’ve gotten use in a few years. At least there’s only one step up to the door.

Dean startles again as his door open, having completely spaced on Cas and Anna getting out of the car. Cas is there, holding out a hand and Dean is pretty sure he’s about to have the first of many panic attacks.

“Do you need help up?” Cas asks, even though he knows the answer. The nurse had helped Dean into the car and it makes perfect sense for Cas to help him out and there’s no reason beside his pride to try it himself, except for his very vivid memories of all the places that Cas’s hand have been. Sure enough when Dean gives up and clasps Cas’s hand, electricity shoots through him. He meets Cas’s eyes and knows he feels it too, which make the fact Anna is standing right there holding out a crutch for Dean even more awkward.

“It’ll hurt a bit getting in, but then you can rest and not move for as long as you like,” Anna says, probably taking the face Dean’s making as another sort of pain.

“Sure. Sounds great,” Dean grits out. He makes it up the little stair and into the house with a combination of Cas’s help and the crutch. At least Cas’s gentle hand on his back is a nice distraction from the very real pain in his hip (or pelvis or whatever). Cas lets go once they step into what Dean would call a mud room combined with the laundry and Dean starts breathing again. Anna and Cas toe off their shoes, because of course they’re “no shoes in the house” people and Dean awkwardly does the same with the slippers they brought him to leave the hospital.

“Through here,” Anna says, opening another door and lets them into the main part of the house. Dean gives a long whistle, because holy shit he’s never going to feel bad about Cas over-paying him ever again.

To say it’s the nicest house Dean’s ever been in doesn’t mean much, because most of the houses he’s been in were crap, but…this is still so far beyond anything, it’s ridiculous. The main area is huge and open, with the kitchen, dining and living room all in one big, airy space. There are massive windows looking out into a vibrant garden, shiny hard wood floors and a giant cushy white couch. It’s something out of a fucking catalog and Dean feels like he’s getting it dirty just standing inside and
“Damn, I should have gone to medical school,” Dean mutters. “This is amazing.”

“Thanks, we like it,” Anna says.

“You seriously don’t cook? Your kitchen is insane,” Dean goes on, moving further into the house on his crutches, the movement awkward and halting.

“I’ve wanted to learn, but haven’t had time,” Cas murmurs.

“You’re right through here,” Anna says rushing in front of Dean to a door next to the kitchen. “The sheets and towels are clean and we put the extra clothes in the dresser.”

“Yeah, that’s…” Dean means to say it’s fine but his mouth stops working. It’s not really a particularly special room, but it has a big window looking out on the garden and a clean bed with white sheets and a nice quilt and for a little while Dean gets to pretend it’s home. There’s a painting across from the door, above the bed. It’s abstract; bright splashes of red and blocks of blue that almost look like they’re at war, with other colors sparking in between.

“Dean? Are you okay?”

He nearly jumps out of his skin and off his crutches at the touch of Cas’s hand on his elbow. “Yeah. I’m…this is just…it’s really nice.”

Dean looks back and forth between his hosts. Anna looks as concerned as Cas and Dean gets it. To them this is just another room in their normal, nice house. They don’t see what it is to Dean: a taste of so many thing he never thought to want. He’s not even going to think about how he can’t keep it.

“Good!” Anna pipes up, her smile returning. “Bathroom is right through there. Probably don’t need to show you that. And uh, we can give you the tour of upstairs some other day.”

“It’s not very interesting,” Cas adds.

“I’m sure.” Dean’s not going to say how relieved he is that he doesn’t have to see the room they share or think too much about it.

“We’ll let you get settled in,” Anna says. Dean makes his way to the bed and nods.

“I’ll get started on those eggs sandwiches soon,” Cas says. Dean can’t tell if it’s a peace offering or avoidance because the bed is fucking heaven and he doesn’t care at all right now.

Anna and Cas retreat and leave Dean alone with a click of the door. He carefully arranges himself on the bed, letting the pain ebb as he eases back onto the pile of pillows and looks around again. This is really happening. He’s really here in Cas’s house and life and there’s no way to run.

The room smells fresh, like the windows were open this morning to let in the clean air. The quilt under his fingertips is soft and it’s so quiet. No yelling or sirens or trains. Nothing but the soft whoosh of the air conditioner, the occasional birdsong and the distant sounds of Cas and Anna moving in the house. The AC shuts off after a few minutes and Dean can make out the low rumble of Cas’s voice, his steady footsteps and the clink of plates. Then more quiet.

“Dean?”
Dean startles awake at the voice and knock on the door. “Yeah. I’m…come in,” he says, voice rough and groggy as he rubs his eyes.

Cas is alone when he opens the door, a plate in his one hand and a big glass of water in the other. “Did I wake you?”

“Sorta, but it’s cool. That dinner?” The smell of eggs and warm bread is fantastic after the hospital slop he had for lunch. Cas nods. “Great, Wouldn’t a Saturday without a sandwich from Cas.” Cas hesitates in the threshold, eyes on the food instead of Dean. “Are you waiting for me to get up or an invitation?”

That gets Cas moving, albeit with an annoyed sigh. Dean struggles to sit up, missing the magic hospital bed. Cas sets the food on the nightstand and reaches for Dean to help him. Dean recoils away and Can grimaces.

“I’m sorry, I know you want to do things on your own,” Cas mutters, instantly contrite.

“That’s not…” Dean’s breathing too fast. It’s a dead giveaway of why he really doesn’t need Cas touching him right now. Especially with his goddamn wife loitering nearby.

“Dean, I…” Cas bites down on his lower lip and Dean has never had a more inconvenient urge to kiss someone. “I want you to know I don’t expect anything from you.” Cas looks up at him, all serious and sincere and Dean doesn’t understand.

“Expect?”

“This is not a trade or a payment, you being here. It’s just the right thing to do and I know that – that part of our acquaintance is over. I won’t—“


“Dean…”

“No. That’s good to get out there,” Dean goes on, voice brittle. “Business arrangement over. No hard feelings.”

“Good.”

“Good,” Dean echoes. “And you don’t get what you don’t pay for so, don’t be getting fresh. Capisce?” Dean tries to make it sound like a joke and fails. Cas looks down at the floor like a scolded child.

“I capisce,” Cas murmurs. “Enjoy the food. Anna and I are going to eat in the kitchen. Call if you need anything.”

“Yeah, sure,” Dean says. Cas gives Dean a pathetic excuse for a smile as he leaves, the door closing behind him.

Dean retrieves the food and takes a bite of the sandwich. It’s good. Fancy bread with seeds and stuff in it, mayo and salt and warm eggs. He sits and eats in the quiet, clean room and wonders if the house feels like this for Cas too. Secure and bright and good and empty.

Chapter End Notes
remember, I'm over on tumblr and you can say hi any time :)
Hey guys, did you see the amazing cover art that's been added to chapter one by the glorious Hellosaidthemoon? I love it!

Again we have only a few warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Castiel has never been good at sleeping in; always too nervous or too entrenched in routine. Anna loves to sleep in and though neither of them are really morning people, Castiel is always the first one out of bed. It serves him well today, if that can be said. He showers and shaves and makes it downstairs before Anna even stirs. His efficiency gives him ample time to stare at the closed guest room door while while the water for his tea boils. He wishes he could brew coffee just so the smell could let Dean know he was there and awake. He need the caffeine too, thanks to a restless night, tossing and turning with the knowledge that Dean was one floor below him. Knowing Dean doesn’t desire him should have made it easier, but it just gave him more fuel for an endless thread of dark thoughts until he’d taken a sleeping pill at one.

It doesn’t matter that Dean only was with him because he was paid to be. Castiel can’t stop wanting him, any more than he could stop wanting to live. It doesn’t matter that it’s doomed and there’s no point to it. He still wants. So Castiel stands outside Dean’s door and listens for the sound of movement or any sign Dean is awake for five minutes before knocking gently.

“Dean?”

Castiel hears the sounds of sheets shuffling and the quiet creek of the bed frame, then a low grunt. “Yeah, I’m decent.”

Castiel cracks the door open, keeping his eyes down for his own sanity more than Dean’s modesty. “I’m making some breakfast, do you want anything?”

“Dude, you don’t gotta wait on me.”

Castiel looks up in time to see Dean wince as he pushes himself upright in the bed. “Are you saying it’s easier to do it yourself?”

“Fuck you,” Dean replies through a yawn. “And fine. Whatever you’re having. No rush, this is… gonna take me a while.”

Cas retreats, closing the door behind him and taking a steadying breath. That wasn’t so bad. Maybe somehow through the grace of God he can actually manage this. On the other side of the door Dean groans. It’s a sound of weariness and pain, yes, but it’s tone and timbre Castiel remembers vividly from more pleasurable times and he has to dig his fingernails into his palm to control the surge of heat that goes through him. Maybe he can’t do this and God But there’s nothing else to do but keep going.

He putters in the kitchen, taking longer than usual to cut fruit and pour two glasses of real milk for
him and Dean and Almond milk for Anna. By the time he remember he was going to make tea the water is already cold again. All the while he listens too closely for any sound of movement through the walls: water running, the thump of crutches as Dean makes his way through the room. Castiel still jumps when the door opens.

“Should I…” Dean hesitates, leaning heavily on his crutches and looking between the kitchen island where Cas has set up the food then back to his bed. “Yeah, I think I’ll eat in—”

“Oh, you’re up!” Dean’s eyes widen as Anna comes down the stairs. Castiel turns to her with a nervous smile. “And you convinced Cas to make breakfast. Good work. Morning, babe.” Anna presses a quick kiss to Castiel’s cheek and takes her milk. “Oh, Dean, let me get you a pillow or something so you can sit at the table.”

“You don’t have to,” Anna ignores Dean’s protests and grabs a throw pillow from the couch. “Thanks.”

Dean does fine on his own, using the crutches to get to the table and easing himself down. He’s wearing a plain cotton tee shirt and sweats and he looks soft and comfortable as he nods in appreciation when Castiel sets a bowl in front on him. “It’s just yogurt, granola and fruit.”

“It’s Sunday, haven’t you ever heard of pancakes?” Dean says as he starts in.

“Are pancakes those puddles of lumpy batter with burnt stuff on the bottom that Cas tried to make once?” Anna asks with a devious smile.

“Says the chick who broke an oven.”

“Well you’re not wrong. We’d starve if we had to actually cook anything,” Anna says.

“I mixed three separate foods, I think that counts as cooking,” Castiel retorts, relaxing slightly.

“Sure, Cas, whatever you say.” Dean smiles at Castiel over his glass of milk and his calm diminishes significantly. “This is good though,” Dean adds, suddenly finding his breakfast fascinating and taking another spoonful. He opens his mouth as if to speak again then hesitates. “…Sam would like it. He’s always on about whole foods and stuff. Friggin’ hippie.”

“Sounds like a smart kid,” Anna says. Castiel gets the sense she knows how big a step it is that Dean is talking about Sam at all.

“You have no idea, he’s off the charts. Kid’s going into sophomore year and he’s already on the senior reading list and all the advanced classes.” Castiel has never seen Dean so full of excitement and brightness before now.

“Sounds like intelligence runs in the family,” Castiel says and Dean scoff immediately.

“Dude, come on, I barely got a GED.”

“Considering what those years were like for you, that’s very impressive,” Anna says carefully. Castiel can see Dean’s cheeks redden beneath his scruff and fading bruises.

“And you read more than anyone I know,” Castiel adds.

“Because I have a lot of fucking time on my hands,” Deann shoots back. “Sorry. Trying to, uh, mind the language.”
“It’s okay,” Anna says. "We're all fucking adults."

"Anna," Castiel gasps and both his wife and Dean burst out laughing. Castiel shakes his head "Don’t listen to her, we don’t stand for that shit around here."

Dean grins at him, and even with his healing bruises and scruffy cheeks, it's the most fantastic thing Cas has seen all morning. "Uh, speaking of," Dean says, cheeks still bright. “The reading, not the cursing. Do you guys have a book shelf somewhere I can raid?"

“Of course, we have an office over there,” Anna indicates a door they’d neglected to show Dean yesterday, located near the stairs. “And we’ll get you set up on Netflix and the cable before we go.”

“Go?” Dean echoes, looking nervous.

“Church,” Castiel says and Dean visibly relaxes.

“That sounds…fun,” Dean mutters and Castiel holds his tongue. “At least there’s wine, right?”

“That’s Catholics,” Anna says warmly.

“Oh, uh…what do you guys do?”

“Sermons, some community news, most weeks people will come up to testify, tell stories of how the lord has worked through them and touched their lives and such,” Castiel says with a shrug. “There’s music too. Sometimes it’s not terrible.”

“It’s not that bad. And Chuck says he wants to improve that,” Anna adds. “But today we also promised your mother we’d join her for lunch after. We missed dinner on Tuesday.”

“Just her?” Castiel asks, hoping to estimate what level of scrutiny he’ll be under.

“She mentioned that Mike might be there. Luke can’t make it into town right now.”

“Who are Mike and Luke?” Dean asks.

Castiel fails at suppressing a sigh. “Older brothers,” he answers. “Luke has a farm quite a ways into the country. Mike runs the local Christian radio station.”

“The one Hannah kept turning on to piss off Meg that one week?” Dean laughs, and Anna smiles as well.

“No, that was the a Christian music channel, Mike runs the AM talk radio one,” Castiel explains.

“What was is Meg kept switching it to? Rap?” Anna asks.

“Death metal.” Castiel shudders at the memory. “I didn’t even know we had that kind of station around here.”

“She was probably using an internet radio, you can find anything on there according to Sam,” Dean says. “I stick to radio and tapes, so it’s a mystery to me.”

“Better than this one’s boxes of vinyl he hasn’t ever touched,” Anna replies and it’s Castiel's turn to blush. Dean looks extremely interest though.

“Gotta say, Cas, never pegged you for being that cool.”
“They’re not…” Castiel looks down into his bowl and away from Dean’s crooked smile. “They have sentimental value.”

“I get that,” Dean says. Castiel thinks of Dean poor battered car and jacket and thinks he does.

“So, did you sleep okay? How’s your pain?” Anna asks, blessedly changing the subject.

“I slept pretty great actually. Definitely the nicest bed I’ve been in for a while.” Castiel watches from the corner of his eye as Dean pokes at his yogurt with his spoon. “I, uh, really can’t say enough how much it means, you guys taking me in here.”

Castiel doesn’t quite know what to say to that, as much as having Dean so close is torture, he’s grateful he can help him in any way he can.

“We’re glad you’re here,” Anna says for both of them. “I think it’s going to be a good thing for everyone.”

He and Dean just smile and nod. Castiel knows he’ll be doing a lot of that today, through church and the time with family. It will be okay, he can keep telling himself that. This is only temporary and once Dean is…better, they can go back to their lives and, who knows, maybe Dean will need help in some other way and there can be an arrangement. Or something else. Or he can just let Dean go, if a miracle occurs. That would be there best thing for everyone. Maybe that’s what he’ll pray for today.

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Dean can’t pace, so he’s clicking. Netflix asked him “Are you still watching Dr. Sexy MD?” one too many times for his pride, so he’s finally exploring the ridiculous amount of channels that Cas and Anna have, most of which he’s sure they don’t even know about. He’s been here a few days and it’s probably time anyway. And it will keep his mind off Cas coming home soon – without Anna.

He’s relieved and annoyed that Cas and Anna are almost always home or away at the same times. It’s good in the sense that there’s no temptation, and he has a really good reason not to jump Cas’s gorgeous bones aside from the fact Cas doesn’t want Dean’s broken ones. It’s not like he doesn’t get time alone with Cas. They had a good talk when he and Anna got home from church and lunch on Sunday. Cas had found Dean on the back porch in a nice padded lounge chair that looked like it had never been used before. Dean didn’t get why Cas had looked so worried until he explained that he’d looked for Dean inside and when he couldn’t find him had immediately assumed he was gone. As if Dean could or would leave at this point.

Dean laughed about it. Cas didn’t. He looked like crap and ended up confessing to Dean that church had been fine, same old, same old, but the real wear comes from his family. Sounds like his Mom is a piece of work, and Dean was pretty sure Cas was about to unload a few years’ worth of complaints but then Anna had come out to do some gardening and Cas had shut up. Dean clicks angrily past the church channels and wonders what it’s like to hear that crap from your family all the time, especially growing up gay and thinking you can just pray it away.

But when Anna’s around, even in another room, Dean still feels like he’s walking on egg shells and any misspoken word is going to bring everyone’s life crashing down. On Monday Anna brought home Dean’s STD test result and he was sure they were about to find out he gave the whole family chlamydia right there in the kitchen. But, miracle of miracles, it had been clear and they’d moved on
to a dinner of a whole chicken brought from the store and something called 'ancient grains salad' which Dean still doesn't think is real. Dean changes the channel from some talk show where their problems aren’t nearly as complicated as his life and heads through the weather and shopping networks.

The shopping channels make Dean think of Cas’s family too, and the hideous plates with Jesus’s face on them his mother apparently thinks are the best gifts a person could want. Anna explained the little shelf of horror in the front hall to Dean and he got the sense she hated them just as much as he did, but didn’t want to piss off her mother-in-law. Most of the art in the house it better, since it’s Anna’s. Dean learned in the same conversation that Anna still paints and the colorful piece in his room along with a few others through the house are hers. They’re all vibrant and semi-abstract, washes of color and movement that still seem to tell a story, just one Dean doesn’t know.

He pauses briefly on the sports channels, trying to remember what seasons are even going now before news about the Royals reminds him it’s baseball. Boring. The talking heads on another channel discussing the football season coming up remind him way too much of Dad passed out with a game on so it’s on to the next one. How many damn ESPNs are there? This one is showing some track meet and Dean’s mind jumps unwillingly to Cas again. Specifically Cas’s thighs. Dean’s seen them before, obviously, and he knew that Cas had to do something to stay in shape, but he hadn’t actually anticipated Cas appearing out of nowhere after dinner on Monday in shorts and a shirt soaked with sweat while Dean was just minding his business on the couch with a book.

Fuck those thighs. Seriously. And his arms and chest. And all the shiny, hot parts Cas he just paraded around like it was nothing and Dean wasn’t there staring, trying not to get turned on before the guy’s wife came downstairs. He hadn’t said anything besides ‘hi’ and then watched Cas take a long drink of water before he disappeared to shower. The image of Cas’s flushed face and shimmering skin stayed with Dean for a while after, even though he’d made sure not to be around when Cas got back from his run on Tuesday. Wednesday he’d been weak again and made sure he had a good seat. At least his dick hadn’t betrayed him until later that night. Luckily Cas and Anna have the kind of nice house where there’s kleenex by the bed and Dean had only manage to mildly hurt himself dealing with the situation before bed. If only he could flip channels in his brain.

Next up is the news channels and no fucking thank you to that. Then history which is also a nope. Kid’s stuff. When did Ninja Turtles come back? Up farther is reruns and movies and Dean’s not really in the mood, so he ends up on the food channel. Someone is trying to make an omelet on a scimitar over an open flame while some other guy is blindfolded. Now this is quality television. Dean gets into the show pretty fast, enough that he jumps when he feels a hand on his shoulder.

“Son of a bitch!” Dean exclaim as Cas pulls back like he’s been burned. “Ow, fuck,” Dean adds, pain rippling from his healing bone and bruises.

“Sorry. I thought you heard me come in,” Cas says, looking bashful and awkward, as usual. He holds up a paper bag. “I got dinner.”

Dean sniffs, wondering how he missed the smell. “Fried chicken?”

“The best colonel Sanders has to offer.”

“Oh thank God,” Dean sighs as Cas comes around the couch and sets the bag on the coffee table. “No offense, but I was getting real tired of salad and keno.”

“Quinoa,” Cas corrects as Dean carefully rights himself to start taking out the food.
“Hell yeah, you got extra biscuits too.” Dean looks up to where Cas is still standing, looking as conflicted as Dean’s ever seen him. “Are you gonna sit down or what?”

“I, uh…” Cas swallows. He’s just as aware as Dean of how alone they are and what Cas would usually be doing on a Thursday night.

“Sit down, Cas,” Dean orders. Cas glares but complies, seating himself a respectably modest distance from Dean. They divide up the food and eat in awkward silence for a few minutes as the cooking show finishes. “So, uh, what did you do on Thursdays all alone before…”

Cas looks guiltily at his cup of mashed potatoes and Dean wonders if they’ll ever have a normal damn conversation again. “This, mostly. Sometimes I’ll skip the run too. Very decadent. Get something to eat I knew Anna wouldn’t like and come home and watch…something frivolous.”

“A specific something?” Dean asks, catching the embarrassed pink in Cas’s cheeks. He has a sudden and all too vivid vision of Cas jerking off to gay porn but it doesn’t seem terribly in character.

“Just a show I like, nothing inappropriate,” Cas reassures him, though the image of Cas with his dick out, face red with arousal, stays bright in Dean’s mind. He shoves half a biscuit in his mouth to distract himself. “Anna thinks it’s over-dramatic and inaccurate.”

“Okay, now you gotta tell me what show,” Dean says, mouth still full.

Cas scowls for a second, maybe at Dean’s bad manners, then gives a defeated sigh when Dean swallows and doesn’t look away. “It’s called… Dr. Sexy MD.”

“Holy shit.”

“I know it’s stupid but—”

“I’ve been watching that show for the past three days.”

Castiel finally looks at Dean, really looks at him without fear or nervousness in his eyes, and grins. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah, I kinda love it. Guilty pleasure or whatever. Got a bit behind the last few seasons, obviously. Can’t believe it’s still on.”

“The new season doesn’t start for a month, so it’s a good time to get caught up,” Cas says shyly. “Where are you right now?”

“I, uh, just got to Lizzie getting diagnosed with encephalitis? Apparently, Johnny Drake wasn’t a real ghost just Lizzie losing it.”

“I was happy about that, it was a strange plot,” Cas says, leaning in and completely engaged. “The ghost, not the encephalitis. But the part where Dr. Sexy has to operate on Lizzie—”

“Hey, spoilers!”

“Apologies,” Cas says, obviously not meaning it. “It’s only really resolved in the musical episode and…”

“There is not a musical, you’re just shitting me now.”

Cas takes a bite of chicken with a glint in his eye. “I guess you’ll just have to find out. I…don’t mind rewatching, if you want to return to you ‘binge.’” Cas puts it in air quotes, which is the single
dorkiest or cutest thing Dean’s ever seen.

“Yeah, sure. Just no more blabbing, okay?” Dean picks up the remote and turns Netflix back on before Cas can say anything else.

They finish the food by halfway through the episode and Cas clears the detritus. Dean doesn’t say anything about how Cas makes sure to throwaway the bags in the garage, not the regular trash. The guy certainly has his systems down, though Dean think Anna probably knows – about the food anyway. He still has no idea if she knows or guesses what he and Cas have done together, but nothing she’s said or done indicates she has any suspicions. She’s been nothing but kind and helpful to Dean, which is honestly fucking with him more than anything.

Cas sits back down and Dean also doesn’t say anything about how he’s a little bit closer to Dean this time. Not close enough to touch but, he’s not treating Dean like he’s radioactive anymore either. Dean shifts his own position, telling himself he’s just getting more comfortable and manages to drift a few inches closer to Cas too.

Dr. Sexy is having a crisis about if he’ll be able to successfully do back-to-back operations on Lizzie and his ex-girlfriend, confiding in his very sexy, very cynical male best friend doctor when Dean looks over at Cas.

“You know, I think Dr. Sexy would be better off with Dr. Dane than Dr. Piccolo or Dr. Walsh,” Dean says, trying to sound casual.

“Wait until you see the exploitive sports montage they have of them in a few episodes,” Cas replies. “Let’s say I’m just glad I watched it alone.”

Dean smiles. He knows Cas doesn’t ever get to say anything like that in front of anyone else. Must be a relief. Eventually Dr. Sexy gets his shit together with a big speech about why he decided to give up his family ranch and save lives instead and manages to do not two but three life-saving operations in one day and look longingly at Dr. Piccolo while a sad indy song plays before the credits roll.

“Do you want to watch another?” Cas asks, politely hitting pause.

“Yeah, but uh…” Dean swallows, somehow they got even closer in the second half of the episode and he has no idea which of them is to blame but he can feel a trace of the warmth from Cas’s body and it’s distracting. “I wanted to ask you something.”

“Anything.” Cas says it so easily and so sincerely that Dean doesn’t know what to do with himself.

“I know why Anna went to med school and all, she told me about her adoptive dad,” Dean starts and Castiel looks slightly surprised. “It was a whole thing. But, uh, why do you do what you do? “

“Why are you asking?” Cas asks, as if no one has ever shown a genuine interest in getting to know him in a very long time.

“Like, I feel like I know more about Anna than you and…I kinda want to fix that.” Dean fiddles with the material of his sweats. “You can, you know, talk to me.”

Cas stares at him, and for a second Dean’s certain he’s going to get up an leave rather than actually let Dean in. Which is ridiculous considering the amount of naked time they’ve had and that they both know shit about each other no one else does. Then again, Dean already knows too much about Cas for comfort and he wouldn't blame Cas for saying he's finally crossed the line.

“I wanted to go into literature. Or maybe even art.”
Dean looks up at Cas, holding his breath. “Yeah?”

“I liked reading, a lot. Even though my mother would have killed me if she caught me with half the books I liked. Fantasy. Novels. Murder mysteries. Poetry especially. When I got to college and was finally on my own, I thought I could do what I wanted and pursue that, but…I wasn’t suited for it and my mother made the point that it wasn’t terribly viable and I needed something practical. I was good at math, business and accounting seemed like a good fit.” There’s a brittleness to Cas’s words, a tension that Dean recognizes from when Cas is saying things he knows he has to say.

“Okay. That’s a nice story, but what’s the truth?” Again Cas gets that wide-eyed, scared look and gulps, but this time Dean doesn’t look away.

“There was a professor. In the first literature class I took,” Cas says quietly. “He was…exotic. He had an accent I’ve never heard anywhere, somewhere between French and English and something else. He was handsome and vibrant and…”

“You had the hots for him?” Dean asks with a chuckle.

“I…yes, I did.” He’s never heard Cas’s voice so small and vulnerable. “But I was going to say he was gay. I’d never met someone who was out before. All I ever heard about was perverts dying of aids and predators. Horror stories. And then there he was, just living his life as boldly as could be and…it was amazing. He was one of those people who talk to you and make you feel like you’re the most important person in the world. I thought he was just amazing. His name was Balthazar.”

“You sure you didn’t bond over the weird name thing?” Dean says and Cas smiles weakly.

“I switched my schedule so I could take two classes from him in the spring term and he was happy to advise me about anything I asked; books, different programs. Even studying abroad,” Cas goes on, wistful. “Anna kept warning me that my family wouldn’t like that. We were just friends then, but she’d joined our church with her parents and so she knew everyone. She knew what they’d all say about we associating with a known homosexual. I didn’t listen. All I saw was him and chance to be…free.”

“Were you and him, like, a thing?”

Cas scoffs. Shaking his head. “No. I wasn’t so bold and he was much older. I had fantasies of course but nothing came of it.” Castiel looks sideways at Dean with a warmth that makes Dean’s heart jump. “You’re the only man I’ve ever known that way. You can be assured, if that’s something you care about.

Dean wasn’t going to be jealous, he told himself that when he asked, but it still satisfies something deep inside him to know he’s the only one that’s had that part of Cas. “So what happened?”

“At the end of the year someone reported him to the administration, said he was being inappropriate with younger students,” Cas says darkly. “Everyone knew about his sexuality, and rumors started to swirl and spread. I know none of them were true but…he wasn’t well-liked in some circles.”


“Yes. Those. I don’t know if he left or was fired, but, the next year he was gone and I realized…” Cas swallows, shaking his head. “Or I finally truly understood what sort of life I would have if…if I let that part of me out. I already knew I was damned, an abomination, but I hadn’t really considered how people would react to…someone like me. I wanted to teach too and…”

“Cas,” Dean says softly. He wants so much to touch him, offer some kind of comfort but he’s afraid
if he does Cas will panic and slap him away.

“So, in the fall I declared as a business and accounting major and started dating Anna at mother’s insistence. It was easier that way, to just go along with what was for the best.” The coldness is back in Cas’s voice and face, that stoic resolve that Dean wishes he had the balls to shake out of him. “So that’s why I do what I do.”

“Yeah,” Dean murmurs. He knows Cas is talking about more than his job. “Thanks for telling me.”

“You’re the first person I’ve ever told, really,” Cas replies and leans a little closer to Dean. “Thank you for asking.”

Dean clears his throat. The itch in his palm to touch Cas is still there but he settles for just sliding it closer to him. “Since we’re, uh, getting at the big stuff, can I ask you one other thing?”

“Of course,” Cas replies, though he seems nervous.

“You, uh, talk about your mom a lot but not—”

“He left.”

Dean blinks, wondering if Cas is going to say more. His own fatherly mess could be just as easily distilled into the same to simple words but it wouldn’t scratch the surface. “When?”

“I was three. Luke was five, Michael was six,” Cas says mechanically. “I don’t really remember much about him other than one day he was just…gone. Mother doesn’t talk about it.”

“Jesus, that’s shitty.” Dean studies Cas’s profile: the tense, sad set of his jaw and downcast eyes. “You know, I still don’t know why my dad bailed on me. Sometimes I think it’s cause he thought I was useless, hated me and Sam. Some days I hope he ended up dead in a ditch because that would mean he didn’t chose to ditch us but…It still sucks. Getting left behind.”

“It does,” Cas sighs. “My mother was alone with three children and hadn’t worked for years. She had to get a job and take care of us and to this day I don’t know how she did it. We couldn’t have done it without the church helping – people brought us food and watched me and Michael and Luke while she looked for work.”

“Guess they can be nice when they’re not being dicks about where people put their dicks,” Dean mutters and Cas laughs softly. “Sorry.”

“I think he liked music, my father,” Cas says after a moment. “All I have left of him is a few boxes of vinyl records.”

“The ones Anna was talking about.” Cas nods. “Does she know who they belonged too?” Very slowly Cas shakes his head in the negative. “You ever look an ‘em?”

“No. One day, maybe.” Cas’s eyes return to Dean, a soft smile playing across his features. “Would you help me? You likely know the artists better than me.”

“Yeah, I…I could do that,” Dean nearly whispers.

“Thank you.” Cas turns back to the television, somehow inching just a bit closer to Dean in the process. “Should we go on to the next episode?”

“Sure.” Dean shifts carefully, getting comfortable again as Cas hits play and sets the remote aside.
Somehow, this feels more illicit than anything they’ve ever done. Just sitting here, talking, being together and Cas revealing things to Dean that Anna’s never known. It feels cruel, in some way that Cas gives to him so easily what Anna must have to pry out of him or only guess. But Cas’s secrets are his, just his. It feels like a precious gift and Dean may be a selfish bastard but he’s damned if he’s going to share it. Not when holding it close feels so special and good.

Cas doesn’t say anything when Dean’s hand finds his, ten minutes into the new episode. But they stay that way for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- mentions of homophobia
- mentions of masturbation
- a frankly absurd amount of sexual tension.

So, I HOPE I can manage an update next week, but I can't promise because I will be at San Diego Comic Con starting Wednesday through Sunday. It's going to be awesome but I won't have much time to fic. You can check my tumblr for ways to follow my adventures and if you see me there, say hi!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry for the wait but SDCC was amazing madness. We got to see Kansas sing Cary on Wayward Son LIVE! It was soooo cool. I apoligize for any egregious typos, I am posting as I head out the door on another little trip. this one will have more writing time!

Anyway, here's a slightly longer chapter than usual to make up for the wait. Warnings in the endnotes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Castiel plans to leave the house for his volunteer shift and stop for the largest cup of coffee that Lawrence can offer. He doesn’t care if he’ll spend the rest of the day hurting, because he deserves that as much as the sleepless night he spent next to Anna after last night’s unsuccessful date night.

But first he goes for a run. He missed Thursday, as usual, and last night had been booked, so it’s due. He only spares one look towards Dean’s room before he’s out the door. He wishes he could see the humor in literally running away from his problems, but it’s just another kind of cowardice. He rushed out the door yesterday morning because he could barely look at Dean after Thursday night and how much it had reminded Castiel of the bone-deep want the man inspired in him. Then he had avoided seeing him at all in the evening. Now he’s running away from Anna because he felt wrong using Dean as a fantasy to incite his arousal when he was just a few rooms away. They hadn’t argued, really, just decided to go to sleep in a fog of discontent. Except he hadn’t slept. Maybe tonight he’ll just take a pill.

He used to run every morning before it became something to fill the empty evenings. It used to be meditation. He used to love the fresh smell of dew and the quiet of a world just waking up, the rhythm of his feet on the pavement the only sound. Now he’s just running from things. From the woman in one room he can’t look in the eye and the man in another he can’t stop looking at. He runs until his lungs burn and his knees ache and his empty stomach churns and cramps. He doesn’t even think about his route and shocks himself when he sees the bright yellow roses in front of the house.

He briefly considers turning away. But he’s starving and thirsty and there is no point in trying to avoid this. He still tries to be quiet coming in and lets out a small sigh of relief at the sight of Dean’s still-closed door. He grabs a glass and fills it from the sink, downing the entire thing in one long swallow then refilling it and gulping more down.

“Jeez, be careful, Cas, you ever heard of dry-drowning?”

Castiel very narrowly avoids spitting water over the counter at the sound of Dean’s voice from the couch. He’s seated with a book in his hands and a sardonic expression on his face.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“You absolutely meant to frighten me,” Cas shoots back and Dean breaks into a laugh. “It’s not funny.”
“Your face was.”

Castiel rolls his eyes and sets his glass down. “How are you this morning?” he asks, stiff and halting.

“Slept like shit, which is new. Really wish you had coffee.”

“From your mouth to God’s ears,” Castiel mutters to the counter tile before looking back up at Dean. “I’m sorry you slept poorly. I did too if that’s any consolation.”

“Really? Thought you’d been chill. Anna said you guys had date night, or whatever.” Dean is too falsely casual in the way he says it for Castiel to believe. “How was that?” Dean asks after a beat, voice a tone too high.

“Uneventful,” Castiel replies, dark and firm.

“Oh,” Dean blinks at him, lips parted as he processes Castiel’s meaning. “Oh.” He thinks he sees Dean relax slightly, but it could just be wishful thinking.

“That’s why I slept poorly,” Castiel adds. “It caused some…awkwardness.”

“Yeah, I, uh…”

“We probably shouldn’t talk about this.” Cas gestures towards the ceiling.

“No, you’re right that’s not my business,” Dean stammers. There’s an argument to be made against that point, but Cas keeps it quiet. It is very much Dean’s business, especially since Castiel feels like he’s betraying Dean each time Anna kisses him or touches him. That is of course ridiculous, considering they aren’t even intimate any more which is why he can’t think of Dean that way. “Uh, how was your run? You training for a marathon or something?”

“No, I just…it helps me calm down. Or it’s supposed to.”

“Sam was saying he wanted to do track but his school doesn’t have it, which I don’t get,” Dean says. “Like, what kind of shit school doesn’t have a track team?”

“Probably budget cuts,” Castiel says, though he thinks that might have been rhetorical.

“I can’t imagine that weirdo on track,” Dean goes on, wistful. “Kid was all shins and knees last time I saw him.”

“Are you talking to him today?”

Dean nods. “Yeah, got the phone all charged and ready. What are you planning?”

“I have my volunteer shift, then I promised Anna I’d go with her to…I don’t remember what it was. I think it’s at the mall.”

“She’s swapping out her phone,” Dean says, rolling his eyes. “And I think she said something about buying you a new coat.”

“The one I have is fine,” Castiel bristles.

“She says you’ve had it since college.”

“How long were you two talking?” Castiel snaps back. He doesn’t know if he’s offended or jealous or terrified of Anna and Dean chatting about him or their days and plans, so he settles on annoyed.
“I dunno, a while? We got to the story about her trying to do yoga and the church shutting the class down for being pagan or some shit and then she had to go and meet you.” Dean sounds defensive and Castiel sighs. He doesn’t want another conversation that’s half a fight, not with Dean but he doesn’t know what to say. It had all been so much easier on Thursday when it was just them in the soft light of the TV, no one watching over their shoulders.

“Are you hungry?” Cas asks after too long of a pause.

“You offering to cook me some yogurt?” Dean smiles back, a little tentative but warm.

“Oh, me too!” They look up to see Anna coming down the stairs. “Actually, I’ll handle it, babe, you’re disgusting. Go shower.”

Castiel opens his mouth to protest but thinks the better of it. Being in the same room with both of them is more than he can handle right now. He retreating to the shower and washes quickly, thinking back to the few meals they’ve shared. They’re not awkward, really. In fact, things with Dean there sometimes are easier than when it’s just him and Anna alone. Dean’s one of those people that always has something to say, who makes the room feel warm and the conversation feel bright just by his presence. Sometimes it feels like Dean gets along with Anna better than with Castiel. Perhaps it’s because _they_ don’t always have to be careful about saying the wrong thing. It must be nice. Castiel is the one constantly on edge that he’ll stare at Dean too long or, God forbid, touch him by accident and set something off. So avoidance it is.

Just as expected the two of them are talking politely on the couch when Castiel comes back down, washed and fresh and already sweating again. He hopes the heat breaks soon.

“Listen to me. That noise? I’ll bet you all the dollars I don’t have that it’s the fanbelt,” Dean is saying as Castiel sits down in front of his fruit and yogurt.

“So I shouldn’t take it in? Can I just live with that for a while?” Anna asks. This must be about her car. Of course Dean knows what’s wrong just by the sound.

“Not for too much longer.” Dean looks over at Cas and nods. “No one wants that busting while you’re driving. I just don’t want some mechanic to gouge you.”

“How easy is it to fix?” Anna replies.

“Replace a fanbelt? Simple if you know what you’re doing.”

“Which you don’t,” Castiel reminds his wife, who sends him a glare over her shoulder.

“No, but Dean does and he can help.”

“Wait what? I, uh, don’t think I’m in good enough shape to do that, Doc,” Dean stammers.

“No, but you can tell me what to do. I’ll go out and get the part and we can figure it out today or tomorrow.” Anna grins. “If I can’t do it, Cas can figure it out, he’s pretty mechanical.”

“I nearly killed myself building an IKEA shelf and you’ve never let me forget it,” Cas interjects.

“Can you make it out to look under the hood at least?” Anna asks.

Castiel feels like he’s slipped into some strange dream and it seems like Dean feels the same, based on the panicked look he gives Cas. “Yeah. Sure, maybe a bit later after I talk to Sam?”
“No problem. Babe, you’re gonna be late,” Anna says and it takes Castiel a second to realize she’s addressing him. Sure enough the clock shows that it’s past nine already. Castiel rushes to grab his things and gives Dean and Anna the most cursory of goodbyes.

He should have kissed her, he thinks as he drives downtown. He feels far more guilty for that than the coffee he buys. He should have made more of an effort. He should have made more of an effort last night instead of making up excuses about feeling embarrassed about sex with a guest in the house. It’s been weeks since he properly discharged his duties as a husband, and keeping up the illusion is more important than ever now, with the ultimate temptation living under his roof. And now for the first time in weeks, months even, he’ll be downtown among the poor and he won’t see Dean. He won’t spend hours looking for his smile or stolen minutes in some abandoned place with his mouth on his cock. It will just be a normal day doing good works. Who knows, maybe that’s what he needs.

He finds Hannah in the basement of the mission as usual, where she turns to wave at Castiel from a conversation with… Uriel.

“Glad you could make it, Castiel. We missed you last week,” Uriel says, low and smooth yet still somehow threatening.

“Yes, well, I had to take care of something,” Castiel replies, attempting a polite smile. He fails. “Helping a friend.”

“That’s what you texted me, yes. Was it Dean?” Hannah asks and Uriel look from her to Castiel with a raised eyebrow. The acid in his stomach that had been a manageable low simmer all morning jumps to boiling.

“How did you—”

“You don’t have very many friends, Castiel,” Hannah says and Uriel chuckles.

“Yes. It was Dean,” Castiel replies, trying to stay calm. “He was discharged and we—”

“I thought you said he was homeless?” Uriel asks, suspicion thick in his voice. Castiel’s heart starts to beat faster in panic. He hadn’t told Uriel much about Dean, but he knew enough. And Hannah knew more. Lying to them would make this too complicated and another deception to maintain might actually kill him.

“He was. Is. But Anna suggested he stay with us for a while,” Castiel confesses, trying to sound helpful and calm. “We have more than enough room and he needed somewhere to recover.”

“Your charity for this man is truly remarkable, Castiel,” Uriel states.

“Castiel is one of the kindest people I know,” Hannah says with a stiff smile. “I’m not surprised at all.”

“You should be careful, you wouldn’t want anyone taking advantage of you,” Uriel counters and Cas stiffens.

“Well, I try to be vigilant. And we trust Dean completely,” Castiel says. “He’s a very good person.” Uriel makes an interested sound, but says nothing else.

“Let’s get to work, Hannah,” Cas says, a chill creeping up his spine.
“I’ll see you both tomorrow,” Uriel says. Castiel swears internally, wondering which members of the congregation Uriel will be gossiping to first.

__________

“So, how do you know these people?” Sam asks over the line, not falling for Dean’s third attempt to change the topic. “And don’t tell me he’s just a friend. You never talk about friends.”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t have them!” Dean huffs. He squints up at the sun and imagines Sam’s exasperated face.

“Dean.”

“Fine. Cas…Castiel. He’s the guy. He’s a real do-gooder type and he volunteers downtown and we met there,” Dean says, keeping as close to the truth as he can.

“And?"

“And what? I was living in my car and he had free food and we got talking,” Dean replies, fidgeting. “Kind of hit it off, I guess. He’s dorky but he’s sorta cool and so he gave me his number if I ever needed help.”

“Why you?” Always trust Sam to get to the heart of it. “I mean, I’m sure he meets a lot of people.”

“I dunno,” Dean mutters. Not like he can tell Sam or anyone that he and Cas connected over some fantastic sex for money. “But it worked out ’cause someone found his number on me after the accident, and it turns out his wife, Anna, was my doctor.”

“Wow, that’s pretty crazy.”

“Yeah, seriously.” And the kid doesn’t know the half of it. “But they felt bad about my, uh, situation and offered me a place. So here I am.”

“Is it nice?” Sam asks, voice garbled as he chews something.

“Don’t talk with your mouthful, kid.” Dean looks around the patio where he’s sitting, at the shiny, barely-used grill and pots of flowers and soft green grass. “Yeah. It’s way nice. Like, Martha Stewart nice.”

“You watch Martha Stewart?”

“Shut up, I’ve had a lot of time on my hands.” Dean perks up at the sound of a door closing inside the house. “I gotta go. I’ll send your guy my address and stuff, okay?”

“Great! Talk next week!” Sam says. Dean hasn’t heard him sound so perky in a long damn time and it warms him more than the sun.

“Good luck in school, if anyone gives you shit tell ’em you got a big brother that’s gonna kick their ass from Kansas, okay?”

“You gonna beat them with your crutches or something?”
“I can still kick your ass.”

“Bye, dork,” Sam laughs.

“Bye, Sammy.”

Dean ends that call and stares at the post-it and note in his hand. Hope he doesn’t get Sam in trouble for this.

“Hey, thought I’d find you out here.” Dean looks up as Anna comes out of the house, her red hair catching the sun perfectly as she takes it out of a ponytail. He punches down his disappointment as seeing the wrong Novak as she hands him a bottle of water and takes the chair next to Dean’s chaise.

“Well, I’m nothing if no predictable,” Dean smiles back. “Unless doctor’s orders are to go inside?”

“Nah, fresh air and sun is good for you. There’s like tons research on it.”

“Sure there is.” Anna laughs as Dean takes a long drink of water and fiddles with his phone and the post-it.

“How’s Sam?”

Dean’s getting better at telling Anna’s doctor voice from her normal one. She has a good bedside manner but half the time he feels more like a patient than a guest. He doesn’t blame her, since he’s a stranger living in her house. It’s just interesting to note when she’s being polite because that’s the nice thing to do and when she’s really interested. This question comes across as really interested.

“He’s good. Starting school next week,” Dean replies. “Can’t believe it’s September.”

“I’ll wake you up when it ends,” Anna says. Dean squints at her and she sighs. “It’s a crappy music joke. God, you’re as bad as Cas.”

“Come on, no one is a bad as Cas. I had to explain ABBA to him.”

“You know ABBA and not Greenday?” Anna laughs back.

“Shut up.” Dean smiles as he turns back to the garden. He’s always amazed at how bright and green it is. So vivid and alive compared to the concrete and decay he’d lived among for the last few years.

“It is really nice out here. You do a good job.”

“Eh. Sometimes it works. I’ve been trying to grow decent roses for years,” Anna says with a shrug.

“The ones out front are nice, what are you talking about?”

“They’re the only ones that lived. I’ve planted red ones like three times and they all got sick.” Anna follows Dean’s gaze through the garden with a sad smile. “I like it out here too.”

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“It’s so…quiet.” Dean gets a look for that. “I mean, I hung out in the parks a lot downtown and there were always cars and people shouting, or sleeping on benches or whatever. This is…this is better.”

“I bet.” There’s a heaviness around Anna that Dean can’t quite figure out. She’s usually cheerful and sharp, not wistful and subdued.

“So, uh, how was the date last night?” Dean ask carefully. He knows this isn’t his business. He knows he shouldn’t push, and he already knows no one got laid, which is kind of a relief, but Anna seems low and he at least owes her a sympathetic ear after everything.
“Cas took us to Red Lobster.” Anna says it like Cas took them to kick kittens or something.

“Are you allergic to shellfish or something?”

“No, though I don’t like it much.” Anna sighs heavily. “But the last time we went there was after my mom – adoptive mom – after she died. It was the most depressing meal of my life. I hate it.”

“Oh. Does Cas know that?” Dean asks carefully.

“Obviously not,” Anna scoffs. “So I can’t really hold it against him, but the whole date night has been more hassle than help lately. I think we’re running out of ideas.”

Dean scratches at a spec of dirt on his chair cushion. This is the first time Anna has ever mentioned the marital problems Dean knows are there. He feels like a double agent or something, trying to talk normally without letting on that he knows exactly why their dates are crappy.

“What’s with that anyway? The date night thing?” Dean asks carefully.

“It’s…” Anna bites her lips and looks askance at Dean.

“Sorry, this really isn’t my business.” Dean means it. He knows too much already and spent the whole of last night stewing over Cas and Anna out for a romantic evening then coming home to fuck on floor above him and now he feels like shit for that and for feeling happy to know it went badly.

“No, it’s fine.” Anna says, a bit too perky.

“Uh…”

“It was his mother’s idea, actually,” Anna pushes, with a tone that makes Dean wonder how often she and Mama Novak agree. “She was worried about us…not getting time as a couple.”

“Because of work and stuff?” Dean asks hopefully. Doctors do get busy.

“And stuff,” Anna mutters, cheeks heating and Dean wants to sink into the ground.

“Naomi knows Cas, she knows that he does better with routine and when he has set rules and expectations.” Anna goes on, as if this is something she’s repeated to herself many times. “He tends to drift sometimes, when there’s no structure. And that’s what was happening. We were drifting, so we set up date night.”

Dean bites back a scoff. He wants to tell Anna exactly how much ‘better’ Cas does with routine and rules and how much Cas has been drifting in the last few months, but he’s not that cruel. “So Cas…likes it?” Dean asks, trying not to sound too dubious.

“Did he ever tell you how we met?”

Dean raises an eyebrow, not sure where this is going. “College is all I know.”

“It was a study group for Brit Lit 101,” Anna explains. “He didn’t really need the group, because he did so well in the class. The professor adored him. But I knew he was smart and, well, cute, so I started the group and invited him and he joined to be helpful. He didn’t notice when I’d invite him and it was just us after a while, but we eventually got to be friends and I didn’t mind that he was oblivious. We were good friends and it was nice just to see him.”

The little smile Anna gives as she recalls what sounds like an epic crush makes Dean’s stomach twist. Of course Cas didn’t notice her or any other girl throwing themselves at him, he only had eyes
for Professor Balthazar. “I don’t get what that has to do with dates?”

“When he finally asked me out the next fall it was like a switch had flipped. He did everything right, perfect gentleman, like something out of a movie,” Anna says with a smile. “Everyone was jealous and we were such good friends already it was natural. And he never pushed. I was so happy.”

Again, Dean can’t say that he knows why Cas never pushed Anna on sex or anything. He can just smile and nod at what sounds like a nice story on its face.

“So, I know that when he has…parameters to fill, he does well. And so date night; it’s been helpful. Especially lately, it’s been good. Or I thought it was.”

_I thought about you when I was with my wife, last night._ Dean had tried not to think about it. He’d always felt like the biggest hypocrite in the world for not liking the idea of Cas with anyone else, but he’d still known. He’d known that Cas fucked his wife thinking about Dean, fueled by the memories of the filthy things they did in back alleys and motel beds and dirty bathrooms. Dean had told himself it was fine because Cas as a client, not his and anyway, Dean was sorta there. But now Dean’s out of the equation for Cas and it seems like things are right back to shitsville.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to unload on you,” Anna says, taking Dean’s silence as awkwardness. “Things will be fine. Cas just needs time and guidance. The Lord will be good and take care of him. He always come around eventually.”

Dean blinks at how fast Anna goes from forlorn to determined. “Uh, yeah.”

“At least date night’s better than dinner with his family – which you were an excellent excuse for missing, thank you very much.” Dean tries for a smile in the face of Anna’s joke. At least he hopes it’s a joke.

“Gotta earn my keep somehow.” Dean looks down at the phone and paper in his bites his lip. He’s always been good at making himself useful, especially when he needs something in return. “Uh, by the way, can I use your computer? I need to send an email.”

“Of course,” Anna says without any hesitation. “Can I ask who to?”

“Sammy’s social worker, gonna give him my address and, you know, get him updated on me and stuff.” Dean doesn’t add that he’s fucking terrified about getting a reply back that he can never talk to Sam again, but he’s got to take the chance.

“That’s great, Dean. Do you, uh, have an email address set up for yourself?”

Dean lets out a weak laugh. “No, guess that’s step one.”

“I’ll help you. Then we can go over the car stuff.”

Dean had almost forgotten the promise to help Anna with the fanbelt. He has no idea how he’s going to manage that, but he’s got to try. Sort of applies to this whole scenario. He needs this place, and he likes this place, so he has to do all he can to help. Even if it means listening to Anna lament the problems of a marriage Dean knows won’t ever get better.

Or maybe he doesn’t want it to get better. He’s not sure. He knows it makes him a bad person to think that way, but he’s frankly never been a good person in the first place, so there. He doesn’t like seeing Anna suffer either. So he’ll just help where he can.

He sends an awkward email and talks Anna through getting under the good of her car without
making a single dirty joke. They’re in the garage when Cas comes back, looking just as uncomfortable and tired as he did this morning.

“It looks like you two are having fun,” Cas says dryly as Anna wipes a smudge of grease from her hand and Dean adjusts himself on his crutches. His pits and arms are aching as badly as his hip right now and he really should sit down but with Cas just coming home, he wants the time with him.

“Oh yeah, Anna’s a natural,” Dean smiles and Cas’s frown just deepens.

“It’s apparently a miracle this thing hasn’t exploded yet,” Anna adds. “We need to stop at the auto zone after the mall. Let me change first.”

“Are we going now?” Cas asks and Dean doesn’t miss the glance he gives him. It’s brief but Dean sees it, the look of longing and disappointment.

“They close at five on Saturdays and then we’ve got to get to that thing at Daniel and Adina’s. Slide show from the honeymoon?” Anna explains and Dean really wishes they would get a calendar or something so he’d know when to expect a night alone on the couch and when to look forward to a meal with all three of them.

“That’s tonight?” Cas asks, sounding just as disappointed as Dean.

“Yup. Dean, can we bring you something home for dinner or are you okay with the pantry?” Anna asks, ignoring Cas’s pained face in a way that makes Dean bristle.

“Uh, I’m fine on my own,” Dean stammers.

“Great, I’ll just go get cleaned up and we can head out,” Anna declares. Dean wants to protest but that would be wrong. Anna’s the one that’s actually entitled to Cas’s time and attention, as she had so clearly reminded him. Dean’s not jealous he’s just annoyed he doesn’t get to see more of…his friend.

“Cas, can you help me back in? Need to get off my feet,” Dean hears himself ask as Anna heads inside ahead of them.

“Of course,” Cas says and he’s at Dean’s side in the blink of an eye. He’s too eager but Dean doesn’t care. He doesn’t care that this is an admission that he’s weak and needy. He just wants a few more seconds alone with the guy before Anna whisks him away again. Cas hovers near Dean as he hobbles back into the house, his hands a few inches from Dean but never really touching him.

Holding Cas’s hand Thursday feels like a dream, especially since it’s the only time Dean’s touched anyone in near a week. It’s weird. He never thought about it much but his job was physical, especially his time with Cas, and now he feels like he just quit a drug cold turkey. Maybe that’s why he stumbles just a bit and leans into Cas’s touch when they make it into his room. He feels Cas go tense but his hand on Dean’s chest stays firm and Dean fights back a sigh as Cas’s palm slides up to his shoulder. If feels so good Dean almost sighs.

“Are you okay?” Cas asks, voice tight, eyes boring into Dean like he’s looking for his soul or something.

“Yeah, fine, I just need…” He needs to keep touching Cas so badly he can taste it. "I..." Dean can’t breathe suddenly. This is a mistake. There’s a good fucking reason for them to stay apart and it’s not just the woman upstairs. It’s the helpless pull he feels right now and there’s nothing but badness and heartache and regret and rejection waiting. “I need some meds. Can you grab one for me?”
Cas nods and lets go of Dean, the warmth of his touch fading too fast as Dean eases back onto the bed. He brings Dean a tramadol and Dean washes it down with a stale water from the glass on the nightstand.

“Thanks,” Dean says. Cas nods and lingers, looking too pensive for comfort. “Don’t you gotta head to the mall?”

“I missed seeing you today,” Cas says softly, eyes downcast.

“You’re seeing me right now…” Dean starts before he realizes what Cas really means. He missed Dean getting him off. “Oh.”

“Sorry, I know I shouldn’t bring it up.”

“Yeah that’s, uh, in the past or whatever,” Dean mutters back.

“I’ll see you later then.” Cas turns to go and Dean grabs for him without thinking. He meant to catch his wrist but ends up with Cas’s thick, soft fingers trapped in his own. One more hit of contact. Cas stares at him, breathing shallowly and Dean knows he’s on the high as well, even if Dean’s just a reminder of better memories.

“I’m here for you. Whatever you need, Cas,” Dean tells him, not even sure himself what that means. Maybe he wants Cas to know that despite spending that day with his wife, Dean is still here for him. Still his.

“Thank you, Dean,” Cas says and tugs back his hand. “Have a nice evening.”

Cas closes the door after him and Dean listens to the muffled sound of steps then the garage opening and closing as he hangs on to the ghost of a touch. The meds are starting to work already, making him a bit loopy and carefree. Well, as carefree as he can get. He lies back in the nice soft bed and give a hallow laugh, because what else is there to do?

How did this all get so fucked up? Why can’t he just pick whether or not he likes Anna or hates her? Why can’t he decide if he wants Cas any way he can have him or not at all? What’s the fucking point either way, when Anna’s not going anywhere and Cas may still have some lingering impure thoughts for Dean (he saw the fire in his eyes) but he’s getting over it.

He doesn’t want Cas to be over it. He doesn’t want Anna here. He wants Cas inside him, fucking him into the mattress and moaning his name or coming down his throat and that’s fucking insane because Dean isn’t being paid to want that and if he had any decency at all he wouldn’t lust after the husband of the nice woman who is practically saving his life right now.

He doesn’t have any decency though. He rubs himself through his sweats until he’s hard and then takes his dick out in broad daylight and jack it fast and tight to thoughts of Cas. He comes with a whimper into a wad of tissue whispering Cas’s name.

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Cas. He dreams the sound of the name so clearly it gives him chills. Castiel takes pills to sleep because it’s simpler than staring at the ceiling all night. And because the sleep they bring may leave him hazy and dull in the morning, but it comes without dreams. Or it’s supposed to. Dean echoes in
his mind, the feel of him around Castiel more than a memory and less than reality. Yes, fuck, love your cock in me, Cas, you’re so good. No one fucks me like you. Just like the lie of those words, the lie of the dream sets Cas on fire. He’s so hard it hurts and that’s what wakes him, halfway way at least.

There’s a warm body against him that found its way there in the small hours of the morning. Hands cling to him, warm skin presses against his and Cas turns and takes it. He wants contact and relief, Anna makes a soft, surprised sound and he blots it out with the echo of Dean still fresh in his mind. Yes, Cas, want you so bad, look what you do to me. He leaves it to her to find his mouth to kiss him, but she does well enough. He keeps his eyes closed as they push off their sleep pants and his cock finds its way into slick heat. Wrong. The way the bones of her hips poke into his is wrong and the weak grasp of her thighs in wrong and but he needs to come and he needs to prove this to her while he can and so he thrusts hard and fast while she gasps and coos beneath him.

“Yes, baby…” Fuck yes. Cas. “So good.”

He comes with a grunt and opens his eyes. He’s never been so sad to see Anna’s face, even when she’s smiling.

“Wow. Good morning,” Anna says, searching his face, cheeks still flushed.

“Sorry, I…I didn’t mean to wake you.” Castiel’s heart is pounding, the brief release of the orgasm replaced entirely by guilt and dread already.

“No, it’s…” Anna bites her lip then winces as Castiel pulls out. “It’s okay. I’ll never complain about that. It’s the nice kind of surprise.”

“I know,” he says weakly. “I just…”

“Stay for a little while, okay?” Anna asks, readjusting them so that she’s draped on his chest. “No run this morning. Let’s just enjoy this.”

He’s never wanted to crawl out of his own skin so much before but he pushes the feeling down. The minutes spent cuddled with Anna are strange torture, but eventually he makes it to the shower. He washes too forcefully and for the first time in a while he prays, really prays for some peace. He knows there won’t be any, that asking God to change him is fruitless, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t want it so desperately sometimes.

Dean’s shower in running when Castiel and Anna make it downstairs and start breakfast. Anna makes smoothies and toast and Castiel watches the door. They’re almost done by the time Dean comes out, damp and scruffy and so ridiculously beautiful Castiel wants to scream.

“Morning, folks,” Dean says with an uneasy smile.

“Good morning, glad we caught you before church,” Anna says. She’s almost skipping and Castiel knows he should be happy about one burden being lifted but he can’t quite manage it. “You’re welcome to join us.”

“Maybe some other time,” Dean evades, looking at Castiel and reminding him he hasn’t spoken yet.

“It will be there next week,” Castiel remarks and Dean’s smile wavers.

What the hell had he even meant, that he was there for Cas? It couldn’t be sexual because Dean wasn’t selling that product anymore and wasn’t going to start offering it for free. But it had felt that way and the very hint of that had lit a fire in Cas. And Anna was the one that benefited from the
“Yeah, I guess so,” Dean mutters.

“Come on, babe, we’ll be late,” Anna says and pulls him away.

Maybe he’s being paranoid but he feels like she’s been doing that more than usual lately, guiding him where to go and telling him what to do and be. It used to be an easy thing to accept, but now it feels like she’s steering him constantly away from Dean.

They pull into the parking lot of the church, the angular, beige building squatting by a line of trees has the doors open wide as families and couples and a few singles make their way inside, greeting each other kindly and giving hugs. His mother is already in the lobby, holding court but she zeroes in on Castiel and Anna the moment they enter.

“Well, it’s been too long,” Naomi says, giving Cas a dry peck on the cheek and one-armed hug to Anna.

“It’s been a week,” Anna argues.

“Darling, would you go find Michael? I think he just parked and he was in charge of pastries for today and needs some help.” It’s a transparent ploy to get Castiel alone, but Anna doesn’t argue. She knows better. Sure enough Anna is barely twenty feet away when Naomi turns to Castiel with a scowl. “When were you going to tell me?”

“Tell you?” Cas echoes in confusion.

“Was I just supposed to show up for dinner one night and be greeted by your new - what are we calling him? A roommate?”

Castiel stomach does a nervous flip and he feels his temperature drop then spike. “You heard about Dean?”

“Bartholomew was informed of the situation by Uriel, yes,” Naomi sighs. “He was talking about how kind it was of you to take in a drifter or something absurd but, surely you know people are going to talk.”

“Mother, Dean isn’t—”

“Anna never knew how to do something halfway, did she?” Naomi mutters. "She's trying to solve one problem with another when people are already talking about her.”

Castiel blinks. “Anna?”

“Of course I know she’s a good wife, even if you two have had your troubles, but she has to understand that not everyone is aware of that,” Naomi goes on as Castiel tries to understand.

“You’re worried people will think it’s inappropriate to have a man in the house because of Anna?”

“People will get ideas, Castiel,” Naomi replies. “Oh, thank you dear!” Castiel looks up as his mother wave to Anna and Michael as they approach with pastry boxes. “Let’s get these downstairs. Castiel, the door please.”

Castiel obeys, still in a daze from the quick conversation. It would seem that there are things to worry about that he hadn’t even considered.
Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
-Masturbation
-Vaginal sex (Cas/Anna)
-Exercise as a coping mechanism

Hope to have another chapter for you no later than a week, since GISHWHES starts after that!
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

Welp, this happened faster than I thought it would but I'm sure you're not complaining.
Slight slight warnings at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dean wakes up resolved. It’s the start of a new week and he’s decided he’s going to make an effort to make this one better than the last, if not for him, then for Cas. To be fair, Dean hasn’t had a real weekend since his mom was alive, but he’s pretty sure that people are supposed to look rested and refreshed at the end of one, not like warmed over crap the way Cas did at dinner last night. At first Dean thought it was just church, but Cas didn’t improve over the rest of Sunday. He mowed the lawn and helped Anna and Dean fix the fanbelt and went for a run. He barely touched the dinner salad (not that Dean blames him) and then disappeared looking sad and worn. They hadn’t managed more than a few seconds alone so Dean couldn’t ask him what was up, so today he’s awake early and fucking resolved to do something to make Cas look a little less like he’s dying.

Today that’s French toast. It wasn’t his first choice, but he’s living with monsters who don’t buy bacon or coffee and he doesn’t know how anyone likes their eggs. The bread was getting stale too and it’s an east recipe. It’s a little hard to manage still using one crutch but it’s not so bad, and the amazed look Cas gives him when he comes downstairs is worth it.

“You can cook?” Cas asks unceremoniously.

“Better than you losers, yeah,” Dean smirks and pushes the plate piled with finished slices towards Cas. “Dig in, I’ve got one more to flip and I’m done.” He can feel Cas staring at him as he serves himself and sits at the counter. He glances over just as Cas takes a bite and the noise he makes should be illegal.

“Dean, this is fantastic,” Cas declares through a full mouth and Dean beams in pride. It’s the first time he’s seen Cas actually smile in days and feels like the sun just came out. Fuck, that’s stupid and corny, but whatever. Maybe it’s a holdover from the way things were before, but he likes making Cas feel good. Someone fucking has to.

“What’s going on here?” Dean nearly drops the tongs as Anna appears, but he manages to keep his composure. “Are you…is that French toast?”

“Yeah, I thought it would be a nice change. I was getting paranoid that I might turn into a bowl of granola.” Dean turns off the stove, plating the last slice. “You guys need syrup.”

“We need a lot of things,” Cas mutters and Anna swats him playfully. “This is fantastic without it anyway. Did you add something?”

“Uh, some orange? I kinda saw it on one of the cooking shows,” Dean confesses, scratching the back of his head.

“Mmm, amazing,” Anna says around a bite. “You learned all of this just from a week of TV?”
“I figured out my way around the kitchen when I was a kid. Someone had to keep Sammy fed,” Dean explains, spearing himself a bite. “Cooking’s a lot easier when you’ve got a full stove and the ingredients aren’t from a Gas-N-Sip.”

“Well, thank you, it’s delicious,” Anna says.

"It is," Cas agrees.

They eat and chit-chat until Cas takes the empty plates while Anna gets ready to leave. The kitchen is big, so there’s no reason for Cas to walk so close to Dean that he brushes against him, but he does. Dean shivers at the fleeting contact and barely notices Anna saying goodbye.

“Have a good day,” Cas mutters as he shrugs into his old trench coat. Dean’s glad Anna failed in getting him to buy a new one. A different coat just wouldn’t be Cas. It’s not the coat that makes Cas slouch with something heavy and hard as he heads out the door; that weight it always there, it just lessens sometimes.

“Yeah, you too,” Dean replies, holding Cas’s gaze for a second and feeling stupid for thinking one breakfast might fix things. Cas doesn’t say anything else before leaving, but there’s still something warm about his presence that Dean can feel is missing when the door closes behind him.

Dean’s still getting use to how quiet the burbs are. He can hear a clock ticking in the office, the buzz of an airplane overhead. A dog barking three houses over. It makes the quiet rumble of his own thoughts absolutely deafening.

He heads to his favorite spot on the couch, right in the corner, and turns on Netflix. The food channel is still infomercials at this point in the morning, so he starts up an episode of Dr. Sexy and tries not to feel bad for watching without Cas. He’d said it was fine, but even after a few episodes, it feels like their thing and Dean doesn’t want to diminish that. But on the other hand he really wants to catch up before the new season starts.

The episode is just finishing when the sound of the door startles Dean. He swivels to see Cas coming in, his face etched with annoyance.

“You forget your lunch or something?” Dean asks and he swears Cas looks just a bit less put-upon when he sees Dean is there.

“Apparently it’s a federal holiday and my office is closed,” Cas sighs.

Dean doesn’t even try to stop himself laughing. “You forgot you had Labor Day off?”

“I’ve been distracted.” Cas shoots Dean a glare that gives him the good type of goosebumps and starts stripping off his coat and then his suit jacket. Dean feels a reflexive twitch to tug off his own clothes but keeps himself in check. Cas heads straight for the couch and sits by Dean, his eyes on the television. “Which episode are you on?”

“Uh, Alec just saved the hospital by bringing in all the orphans from Haiti.” Cas nods and Dean hits play. “Are you…okay?”

Cas gives him a withering ‘of course not’ look. Dean sighs. The theme music starts and Dean tries to concentrate on the screen, not on the man beside him. Cas seems to be doing the same, but much more easily than Dean, which is annoying. He gets up halfway through and heats up the remaining French toast and when he sits back down he’s a few inches closer to Dean. It makes Dean’s skin prickle and he clenches his jaw.
“I didn’t like the storyline with the orphans, it felt exploitive,” Cas says as he chews and Dean grunts in agreement.

They make stupid small talk over the rest of the episode and when Cas returns his plate to the kitchen, he sits even closer. Maybe he’s trying to kill Dean or maybe he doesn’t know he’s doing it. Dean scoots towards him though. And he absolutely means to do it. They start another episode. They’re both too tense and awkward and Dean doesn’t know what to do, because he wants to touch Cas, but the last thing he should be doing in the broad light of day is touching Cas. And who fucking knows if Cas wants to be touched by the pathetic mooch with the ratty beard in the ugly Wal-Mart sweats? Not to mention touching and other things are a massively bad idea in every fucking way right now. Dean thinks Cas might be relaxing just a hair until Dr. Piccolo and McChicken or whatever they call the new guy start making out in a supply closet. The guy pulls off Ellen's scrubs Cas looks downright green.

Dean hits pause and Cas looks up at him like he’s been caught in some sinful act. “Hey, seriously, are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Cas replies too quickly.

“No, you’re not. You’ve been twitchy since yesterday.”

Cas scowls and starts moving to leave. Dean catches his wrist to stop him and he looks up at Dean like he just punched him in the stomach. “Dean, please…”

“Did I do something? Or say something wrong?” Dean pushes. “I can’t fix something when I don’t know what’s broken.”

Cas stares at him for a long moment, his mouth opening in closing in confusion. “I had sex with Anna. Yesterday morning and…” Cas actually looks like he’s going to be ill. Dean’s with him. It’s petty and selfish, but he hates the idea of them together. But Cas doesn’t need to know that right now.

“Hey, man, it’s okay. I didn’t think you’d stop.” He’s lying; saying what he has to to make Cas feel better. Cas probably knows that. But as long as Dean didn’t fuck up, that’s something and he’s focusing on that. “It’s okay.”

“Nothing about this situation is ‘okay!’” Cas snaps. “I used you and I shouldn’t have and it was a lie. I keep…lying. To everyone.”

Dean swallows. He can see that weight on Cas again and he swears it’s about to crush him. “No to me,” he says, catching Cas’s face in his hands. It’s too familiar, too intimate and forward and Cas gives a small gasp at the contact. “Have you ever lied to me?”

“Never.” Cas says it with the intensity of a storm and Dean has no idea how things went from zero to what-the-fuck-are-we-doing in a few seconds.

“Then it is okay.” Dean watches as Cas gets a hold on himself again; the way his breathing slows and he blinks a few times so that his eyes just look watery, not threatening tears. He grabs one of Dean’s hands and squeezes tight and, god, it feels so stupidly good. “You're not lying to everyone as long as you don't lie to me. I said I’m here for you, right?”

“Yes, but…”

"And I get that you and Anna are-"
The sound of the doorbell makes them jump like a gunshot. “Who the fuck is here?”

“I don’t know,” Cas mutters. Dean doesn’t even know what the guest interrupted but he’d really like to kick them in the jewels on principle. It’s probably a damn salesman ignoring Cas and Anna’s polite ‘no solicitors’ sign by the door. “Mother?”

Dean’s heart drops through the floor and he spins painfully to see Cas blocking an older woman’s entry to the house. What the fuck?

“I hope there’s room in the fridge, Michael is just behind me and he’s got more meat and beer than I know what to do with,” Mama Novak says, as if she’s continuing a conversation that’s been going on for an hour and breezes right into the entry past Cas. She’s a handsome woman with brown hair, a lavender sweater set and a stern expression that reminds Dean of every teacher that ever hated him.

“Michael?” Cas echoes.

“Luke’s running a bit behind but I figure since Anna won’t be off work for a few more hours it’s fine.” Dean can tell from Cas’s pale, horrified face that everything his mother is saying is news to him.

“Anna’s working all day,” Cas says. “And why exactly are you here?”

“Darling, she told me yesterday that she’d be off at noon in time for the barbeque, didn’t she mention that to you? She was saying how little you get to use that new grill of yours and since Michael’s porch is getting done we agreed that it was best to bring the party here.”

“She agreed? She didn’t – I mean, I don’t—” Cas stammers and his mother waives off his concern like it’s nothing. Dean knows Anna can be callous with the schedule sometimes but he’s pretty sure she wouldn’t forget to tell Cas his entire family is descending on them. He has his suspicions about Michael’s porch too.

“It’s not as if you weren’t already hosting guests,” Mrs. Novak says and her eyes fall on Dean with the focus of sniper. “Please introduce me, Castiel.”

Fuck. So that’s what this is about. Dean found a new way to screw with Cas’s life and he didn’t even realize it. He grabs his crutch and struggles ungracefully to stand and shuffle towards the Novaks.

“Mother, this is Dean,” Cas says as Dean extends a hand. “Dean, this is my mother, Naomi.”

Naomi does not take Dean’s hand, just looks at it like it’s a dirty sock she has to pick up off the floor.

“Does Dean have a last name?”

Dean is proud that he doesn’t flinch at the ice in Naomi’s tone, nor does he let his hand fall.

“Winchester. It’s a pleasure to meet you, ma’am,” Dean says. “Cas has said a lot of great things about you.”

Dean is proud that he doesn’t flinch at the ice in Naomi’s tone, nor does he let his hand fall.

“Winchester. It’s a pleasure to meet you, ma’am,” Dean says. “Cas has said a lot of great things about you.”

“Well, that makes one of us,” Naomi says with that particular sort of sweetness rich folk use to insult people to their faces. Dean can see Cas panicking from the corner of his eye, but he doesn’t look away. Naomi finally relents clasps Dean’s hands with more force than he would have thought possible. “Now, I’m sure you’ll want to change before the family gets here, Dean.” Naomi gives a glance to Dean’s baggy sweats and his confidence evaporates. He drops Naomi’s hand and looks to Cas.

“Yeah, I’ll uh…” Dean starts.
“I’ll get you some other clothes,” Cas says under his breath, but of course Naomi hears.

“You’re providing him with clothes too?” Naomi asks. “What happened to yours, Dean?”

It’s too early in the day to go punching friends’ mothers, but Dean considers it. “They were all in my car,” Dean says, mock-cheerful. “But she’s stuck in police impound right now until I can get her back so Cas and Anna were nice enough to get me a few things.”

“Hm,” Naomi says before turning away and heading to the kitchen.

“I’m sorry,” Cas whispers. “I’ll be right back with something to change into. Can you…”

“I’ll call Anna, my phone’s in my room.”

“Thank you.”

Dean is more than happy to retreat to the guest room. His phone is by the bed and he dials Anna while he sits and tries to calm down.

Anna’s voice answers after a few rings. “Hello? This is Doctor Novak.”

“Anna. It’s Dean, uh…Did you know anything about Cas’s mom and the rest of the fam showing up for a nice Labor Day barbeque today?”

“What? Shit.”

Dean lets out a breath in relief. He knew this wasn’t Anna’s style. “She seems to think you were all for it.”

“She mentioned something after church, but I didn’t think she meant coming to our place. I explained I had work for the morning and…I’ll shuffle stuff and head over. Make sure Cas doesn’t burst an ulcer before then, okay?” Dean would be touched or shocked that that Anna trusts him so easily to take care of Cas if he had time for it.

“I’ll get him some tums. Any advice for dealing with Naomi?” Dean cannot believe he’s asking his ex-client’s wife for help dealing with his bitchy mother.


“Recycling?”

“Luke thinks it’s a liberal conspiracy.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.”

“Don’t say that either. I’ll be home as soon as I can.” The line goes dead and Dean closes the phone. Maybe he can just…stay in here until everyone is gone. The knock on his door indicates otherwise.

“Dean?” Cas’s voice is muffled and hesitant.

“Come on in.” Cas enters with a faded pink polo and a pair of khakis in his hand. “Ugh. Remind me to make you buy some goddamn jeans.”

“If we live through this, we’ll put it on the agenda,” Cas grumbles back.
“This is about me, isn’t it? The ambush. Your mom ain’t happy I’m here,” Dean says as he starts to pull off his shirt and Cas’s eyes go wide in horror. “Sorry, I forgot…” that they aren’t like that any more and Dean can’t just go getting naked in front of the guy.

Cas takes a deep breath and trains his eyes on the floor. “It is about you, but not the way you think. My mother is worried about how this reflects on Anna’s character.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” The look on Cas’s face is all the answer Dean needs.

“Anna isn’t in very good standing with the community now,” Cas mutters.

“Cause of the abortion thing?”

Cas looks up at him in shock. “She told you about that?”

“Yeah, back in the hospital. But how would folks know? That’s like, confidential, right?”

“Most of the hospital employees go to our church or others in the same community and they talk. That’s how mother found out about you.”

“They sound like fine Christian folk. So, they think Anna is stepping out. Wow…” Dean rolls his eyes then stops as a thought occurs to him that makes his stomach turn. “Is that why Anna did this, taking me in? To piss off the uptight Church ladies?”

“No, she…” Cas stops because sometimes it seems he knows as little about how Anna thinks and feels as Dean. “I don’t think she’d do that.”

“Hey. I’m used to being used,” Dean says with a shrug. He knows Cas can see past that line of bullshit. “I know she wouldn't though. Go entertain the clan, I’ll get decent.”

“Dean, you don’t have to do this.” He knows Cas means it. He knows Cas would let him hide in this room for the whole day and he’d take all the questions and awkwardness he had to in order to protect Dean, and Anna too. Which is why Dean needs to be out there.

“I know, but I’m gonna.”

Cas nods and leaves Dean to change. He takes his sweet time because moving is still not his best skill and also he’s terrified. He doesn’t bother with his hair or anything. He needs a damn haircut and a shave, but it hasn’t been a priority so he’s just going to ignore that. At least all his bruises are gone and he’s gained a few pounds so he’s no so gaunt. He emerges to find Naomi in the kitchen with a shorter woman with long hair that’s just between brown and blonde wearing a dress that’s a touch too nice for a simple family barbecue. A small child runs past them and to the door as a man with dark hair enters along with Cas. Dean can tell immediately they’re brothers. Same chiseled noses and blue eyes and stern good looks. They don’t look much like Naomi so they must favor the long lost dad. Dean’s sure that’s super easy for Mrs. Novak.

“Here, let me get those, hon,” the woman, who Dean assumes is a wife, says and takes the grocery bag. "Muriel, out of the way."

“Can I do anything to help?” Dean asks. He knows it sounds stupid because he’s still rocking one crutch but it’s the thing you say. The family members turn to him and he can’t tell if the look he’s getting is suspicion or disgust.

“We’re fine, don’t worry,” Cas says, because he’s a nice person.
“So you must be the new…what’re we calling you? Guest? Boarder?” The brother says, striding to Dean.

“I prefer the term house boy,” Dean says and Naomi flinches. The brother just laughs, thankfully.

“Well, you’re funny. I’m Michael Novak.” He shakes Dean’s hand, firm and forceful like his mother and looks Dean over before nodding towards his wife. “This is Rachel and the munchkin is Muriel.”

“Nice to meet you, I’m Dean. Winchester.” Dean’s hand smarts when Michael lets go. Rachel gives Dean a weak smile.

“Winchester. You know, I remember a mechanic by that name, over on the other side of town,” Naomi says. The way she says ‘other side’ make Dean’s hackles rise but he smiles through it.

“That might have been my old man, he used to have his own shop,” Dean says.

“So you’re a local boy?” Michael asks, jovial in a way that makes Dean suspicious.

“Not exactly, we left when I was ten. Moved a lot. I ended up back here a few years ago.”

“Were you homeless then?” Naomi asks and Cas’s eyes go wide.

“Mother,” Cas snaps. He sounds more offended that Dean feels. Michael and Rachel just look uncomfortable.

“Yeah, I was. Though I had my car, and I always felt like she was home so it didn’t bug me,” Dean replies, unblinking.

“The car that’s currently impounded?” Naomi asks back and Dean grits his teeth. Thinking of his baby beat to hell and locked up on her way to a scrap heap makes him more upset than almost anything.

“It’s evidence, in the case against the people that—” Cas starts.

“Honey, I think I just heard Luke’s car!” Rachel nearly yelps. Sure enough the sound of a car door comes from outside and Naomi turns away from them with a frown and heads to the front.

“Don’t worry, you’ll like us all a lot more once you meet Luke. He’s the character of the family,” Michael says. Dean does not like the sound of that.

“What’s that mean?”

“When we were kid we called him Lucifer as a joke,” Cas explains grimly and Rachel bristles.

“There’s nothing funny about the devil, Castiel,” Rachel says. “Your brother is a faithful man.”

“He’s something,” Michael mutters just as a man with sandy hair and a grin Dean immediately wants to punch off his face bursts in.

“Are you warning Cas and Anna’s new stray about me?” the man who must be Luke asks loudly.

“Not that a warning would help him,” Michael shoots back. “And I don’t think Dean here enjoys being called a stray.”

“Charity case then?” Luke goes on undeterred. It’s a slight consolation to Dean that Naomi looks just as appalled by her other son as Cas.
“Just Dean is fine,” Dean says, coolly, holding out a hand to Luke. The man’s hand is strangely cold when Dean takes it and he squeezes it too tight. “Nice to meet you, Lucifer was it?”

Luke flinches at the dig, then gives a wide, predatory smile. “He’s got spirit, that’s nice. See why Anna would like you,” Luke says and Dean sincerely wishes she were here. “Cassie though. Spice never agreed with him. How did that happen?”

Dean drops Luke’s hand and is dangerously close to spilling exactly how he met Cas out of pure spite, but Michael speaks first. “My impression is that Castiel was ministering to Dean and they struck up a friendship,” Michael says.

“Yeah, and Cas and Anna did the Christian thing when I got busted up and had nowhere to go,” Dean adds.

“That’s so inspiring.” The words come in a too-sweet female voice and Dean notices the other people behind Luke: a woman with golden curls holding a toddler with sandy hair to match his father. “I’m Lilith and this young man is Jack. Nice to meet you.”

“You too,” Dean says.

"Now, Cassie you're gonna have to stop that silliness downtown if word gets out about the shelter you're running now. The vagrants will be beating down your door like it's a welfare office," Luke sneers. Dean doesn't think he's ever grown to hate someone quite this fast.

"You aren't a very charitable man, are you, Luke?" Dean asks back, barely holding in his contempt.

"Charity is an excuse for theft by those that can't take care of themselves," Luke counters, unfazed.

"The Lord you profess to love would disagree," Cas says, low and dangerous but Luke just rolls his eyes.

“It's time for you men get out on the deck and talk about sports or hunting or whatever it is you don't like us girls hearing,” Rachel says. “We’ll bring you some meat to throw on the fire when it's ready.”

“We can help…” Dean starts but shuts up when Cas shakes his head.

“We can help…” Dean starts but shuts up when Cas shakes his head.

“Wives belong in kitchens, men belong at grills, that's the way it is,” Michael says, laughing at himself. “Can I get you a beer?”

“No, I don’t think that would mix well with my meds.” Dean’s thankful for the excuse. As much as he’d like to be intoxicated right now, he needs all his faculties to deal with this clusterfuck. Naomi seems at least moderately pleased by that response.

“I’ll have one. Cassie too,” Luke says. Dean looks to Cas to see if he’s going to protest but he doesn’t. He limps out to the porch to see where Jack and Muriel are already playing happily in the grass and takes his favorite seat at the edge on the lounger, close to the lilacs.

“Now, Dean.” Dean jumps at the sound of Michael’s voice above him. The other man smiles as he pulls up a chair. Dean tries to wave down Cas but Luke has him cornered near the grill. “I’m glad to hear that Castiel has been witnessing to you. For so long he’s been too caught up in good works and not enough in spreading the good word.”

“Uh, well, we mostly just talk about regular shi-stuff,” Dean stammers. Is he going to get a scripture quiz?
“Well, that’s part of it. I’m sure through talking with Castiel you’ve learned the joy and peace a life lived through Christ can bring,” Michael replies with a smile.

“Oh yeah, Cas has been real good on that front,” Dean says so insincerely that Michael would notice if he wasn’t the kind of guy that really likes to hear himself talk. Cas has indeed shown Dean how awesome a faithful life is. Maybe if Dean’s lucky he can end up suffocating in a closet with an ulcer and cheating on his wife too.

“Good, good. Now, the next step is to truly understand that Christ has a plan for you, and this is all part of it,” Michael goes on and Dean settles in. He doesn’t need to pay attention to this, really. He just smiles and nods as Michael gives a well-rehearsed spiel about God’s plans and the beauty of creation and sacrifice or something. There might be a bit about sheep, he’s not sure because he keeps most of his attention on Cas as he avoids whatever speech Luke is giving and plays with the kids.

Muriel is cute, brown hair and a big smile and she follows Cas like a puppy. Jack is more of a terror but it’s still cute at this age. The women come in and out, replenishing drinks and eventually carrying a platter of burgers and sausages.

“Is Anna okay with this menu?” Dean asks, probably interrupting Michael. Luke and Naomi turn to him, both looking curious and a little impressed.

“She uh…” Dean starts.

“Because you know that’s all just propaganda created by the liberal media to undermine American industry.”

“What now?” Dean balks.

“They’re trying to tear down the things that keep this country on top: our farms and our guns and our liberty. It’s all a bunch of lies,” Luke goes on.

“Dean doesn’t want to talk politics,” Cas tries, hovering behind his brother. Luke waves him off.

“This isn’t politics, it’s about the soul of our country and the people that want to destroy it.” Luke counters and Dean’s never heard that kind of contempt outside of cable news. It makes his skin crawl. “Who did you vote for in the last election, Dean?”

“Well they don’t really let you vote when you don’t have an address or valid ID, so…” Dean hedges.

“Everyone should engage in a civil society,” Luke replies. “Otherwise the sodomites and feminists and foreigners will take over and then where will we be?”

“I dunno, California?” Dean tries to joke but no one laughs. He can see Cas practically trying to hide behind a porch umbrella and he really, really want to make Luke bleed just for that.

“Luke runs a farm out in the country,” Naomi says, placating. “He’s very invested in the issues.”

“It’s a slaughterhouse, not a farm.” Everyone looks up to where Anna has appeared at the back door. Dean sighs in relief.

“Aunt Anna!” Muriel squeals and runs for her while Luke scowls.
“At least you know the burgers are fresh, sis,” Luke says and Dean wonders how many times they’ve had this confrontation. Anna glares at her brother-in-law over Muriel’s head and Dean’s never liked her more.

“No more politics, today is about family,” Naomi says, clapping her hands in front of her.

“And others,” Lilith says with a cold glance at Dean.

“Speaking of,” Rachel pipes up, coming to stand next to her husband, who slips an arm around her waist. Dean watches as Anna takes a place by Cas and notes the difference in how they barely touch. He wonders if anyone else sees it. “We were waiting until everyone was together to share some good news.”

“Oh, sweetheart…” Naomi coos.

Dean doesn’t understand until Muriel starts jumping. “I’m gonna be a big sister!”

“Oh, wow,” Dean says but no one reacts to him. Everything is a bustle of hugs and congratulations and fussing over Rachel. Dean keeps his eyes on Cas, enjoying seeing a genuine smile on his face as he hugs his brother and sister-in-law. From what Dean can tell, Cas is the favorite uncle and Dean’s happy that he’s getting another rugrat to enjoy. Sounds like the baby is coming in March. Anna’s smile is much thinner and doesn’t reach her eyes.

Dean keeps to the edges of things when the excitement dies down, just trying to stay out of the way as the “men” grill up burgers and talk about things Dean could care less about while Anna and Cas get caught by Naomi, Rachel and Lilith. He doesn’t mind being left alone to just watch, since one more conversation with Luke might result in bloodshed. It’s not that people don’t talk to him, they just talk at him. Despite the curious or disapproving looks he gets, no one asks him questions and Cas gets blocked every time he comes close. It’s Anna that finally makes it over with a plate of food and a soda for Dean.

“You don’t have to serve me,” Dean says automatically.

“It’s fine,” Anna shrugs. “Sorry for all of this. Naomi wanted to get a look at you I guess.”

“Can’t blame her. Strange guy moving in – not exactly normal.”

“She’s looking for reasons to be disappointed in us. Well, me,” Anna says flatly.

“Why?” Dean doesn’t get that at all, Anna’s not the problem in the marriage, even he knows that. Then again, judging by Naomi’s other kids, she’s the sort of person that doesn’t acknowledge problems when it’s her kids that have them.

“She thinks if I was a better wife that didn’t work or wasn’t otherwise so radical that things would be…better.”

“You know that’s bullshit, right?” Dean asks and Anna shrugs.

“Sometimes I wonder.”

“Hey, if I’m screwing things up for you being here…” Dean can’t believe he’s saying it, but he hadn’t considered that coming here was going to fuck things up for Anna too. Though it’s not like leaving will make Cas any less gay or his family any less full of fuckwads.

“You’re not. Having you here…it’s better.” Anna sounds sincere and Dean for the life of him can’t
tell what that means. He still has no fucking idea what Anna knows or suspects about him and Cas, and that just muddies the waters even more.

“Anna, will you help me with the coleslaw?” Naomi calls and Anna plasters on a smile and heads off. Dean watches her go and shifts in his chair. He’s starting to hurt again and he could really use a pain pill. Or one of those beers. He settles for food and chows down on his burger. It’s really good and he hates himself for enjoying it. He washes it down with a coke and close his eyes to enjoy the sun.

“What happened to your leg?” Dean looks over into a set of big brown eyes. Muriel has seated herself beside him and is examining his crutch.

“Muriel, don’t be rude,” Cas chastises, rushing over.

“It’s okay,” Dean says, smiling over at the kid. “My leg is fine, it’s the part on top here that got hurt. Broken actually. But I’m getting better.”

“Did you fall off the monkey bars?” Muriel asks seriously. “My friend Lucas fell like that and broke his leg and he had to miss school for two weeks. Did you miss school?”

Dean and Cas both chuckles at the forwardness of a four-year-old. “I didn’t fall. My car and I got hurt. And I’m not in school, but I do have to sit down a lot to get better. That’s why I’m staying here with your aunt and uncle, so I can get better.”

“Are you really uncle Cas’s friend? Daddy says he doesn’t have any friends and I think he’s lying because uncle Cas is nice and nice people have lots of friends.”

Cas grimaces at that, but doesn’t say anything as he sits down next to Muriel and Dean. Dean meets his eyes over the kid’s head and smiles. “Cas is my best friend, yeah.”

Cas looks surprised by that, and hell, Dean’s surprised he said it. But it’s true. No matter what their past is Cas has treated him better than anyone else in his damn life and that matters. Just the soft way he’s looking at Dean now makes him appreciate it.

“Mommy says I’m gonna have a little sister or brother. I hope it’s a sister so she can be my best friend because Sally down the block had to move,” Muriel goes on. “Have you got sisters and brothers?”

“I’ve got a little brother, yeah,” Dean replies.

“Where is he?”

Dean’s smile waivers but Muriel doesn’t notice. “He’s still in school. He’s much smaller than me. But I check in on him. That’s the important thing with little brothers and sisters – you have to take care of them. That’s your job.”

“I’m gonna!” Muriel grins. “I won’t let anything happen to her.”

“You’re on the right track then.”

“I’m gonna go get more corn now.” Without ceremony Muriel jumps up and leaves Cas and Dean alone.

“You doing okay?” Dean asks.
“I was going to ask you the same thing.”

“I’m fine. Need to take a piss and get some meds.”

“No one will question if you disappear for a while. Though I’ll be envious.” Cas stands and offers Dean a hand to help him up. Dean holds onto him too long and not long enough.

“I don’t want to leave you to the wolves out here.”

“I’ll be fine, I’m used to it,” Cas replies, resigned. Dean doesn’t argue and heads back inside. The chill of the AC in the empty house gives him goosebumps and his room seems eerily quiet compared to the activity outside. His window overlooks the lawn and the vegetable patch, so he can’t hear the voice from the porch. Which is why he knows the voices he hears when he comes out of the bathroom are coming from the kitchen.

“…I’m sure he’s a nice person and he has his uses, but there’s no reason for him to live here,” Naomi is saying. “You could have just paid for a hotel room.”

“This is easier and we like having him here.” It’s Anna that replies. Dean knows he shouldn’t lean closer to listen but he’s good at doing things he shouldn’t.

“Like it? Surely this can’t be good for your relationship with Castiel. If you’re still having difficulties then having a guest in the house won’t make things smoother.”

“Naomi, I am not having this discussion right now.”

“How long am I going to be waiting for you to make an announcement like Rachel’s, Anna?” Naomi pushes on. Dean cringes on Anna’s behalf. “I thought you were going to talk to Castiel and get that ungodly thing removed from inside you.”

“It’s called and IUD, Naomi, it’s not witchcraft,” Anna groans.

“I understood the need for those measures to be taken when you were in school and starting out, but it’s been too long.”

“Cas isn’t ready.”

“No one is, and who is to say that once it’s gone things will happen instantly. But it’s time to put it in God’s hands before it’s too late.”

“Maybe I’m not ready either. We’re just getting to a good place right now, and with Dean here…”

“What on earth does the vagrant you’ve taken in have to do with anything?” Naomi asks. Good to know he’s made a good impression, Dean thinks. “How long do you intend to keep him here.”

“As long as he needs to get on his feet.” Dean blinks. They hadn’t actually discussed that and he doesn’t know how he feels about Cas and Anna helping him more than they already have. In his mind he’ll be out the door as soon as he can move on his own but of course they wouldn’t allow that. Idiots.

“Anna, this isn’t a game, this is your life. My son’s life.”

“Exactly. Our lives. Not yours. We’ll make our own decisions” Something slams and Dean hears the sound of retreating steps.

He doesn’t go right back out. Instead he sits on his bed and tries to take a few deep breaths. He’s
learned a lot of information about Cas and his family today and he’s not sure how to process it or if he’s ready for more. He’s certain that Naomi would rather that he keep out of sight for the rest of the afternoon now that he’s been evaluated and met all her expectations of a vagrant, so he considers staying there. But Cas and Anna are still out there alone and Dean can at least deflect some of the attention from them. It’s not going to solve anything in the long term, but it’s something. So Dean gathers himself back up on his crutch and returns to the fray. Resolved.

Chapter End Notes

warning:
-Cas's family are general classist, sexist assholes.
-Mentions of abortion

can you guess who Luke characterization was based on? ;) Michael is in Matt Cohen form if that needs to be said.

Next week is GISHWHES but I'll try to have something for you!
I'm still alive! GISHWHES was intense but my team was awesome and I think we have a serious chance this year (I'm reblogging lots over on tumblr if you want to see). But with that out of the way updates should be back to weekly now.

No warnings for this chapter, but I do hope it's worth the wait.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Castiel slams the door of his Camry and looks to make sure the food didn’t get too wet. The weather finally broke and it’s been raining on and off all day. It’s nice. It makes everything smell fresh and clean but the roads are a nightmare. That means it’s going to take him longer to get home to Dean and so he’s decided that for today, he hates the rain. Luckily the taco truck isn’t too far out of the way, so maybe he can dim the hate to a smoldering dislike.

He feels the same thrill of anticipation and subterfuge driving home with burritos as he used to when going downtown to meet Dean. It’s ridiculous, since he and Dean will just watch Dr. Sexy and talk. Well, if Dean wants to talk to him after getting to know his family. They’ve all had a few days to recover, and things have been relatively normal, but the closest they’ve come to a moment alone is when Dean caught him before leaving this morning and requested Mexican. There had been a sparkle in Dean’s eyes when he said it, making it feel illicit and exciting. Dean could ask Castiel for a kidney with that look and he’d reply ‘which one?’ Despite his excitement, Castiel stays in the car once he’s parked. He needs to temper his expectations and remind himself that this is not a tryst. This is dinner with his friend. Yes, a friend he used to have sex with and who he desperately wants to have more sex with, but a friend he cares for and respects just the same.

His best friend.

Something warm fills his chest and for once it’s not reflux. He’d always thought of Anna as his best friend, but since spouses count as something different, that was wrong. Meg and Hannah are both close to him. But literally no one in the world knows him like Dean and no one makes him feel as comfortable and safe. He smiles at the thought and walks in to the house to find Dean standing from the couch to greet him, and the warm feeling only increases.

“Hello, Dean.”

Dean smiles and moves to meet Cas. “You actually got burritos.”

“I wasn’t about to turn down the request of an injured man.”

Dean takes the bag of food and Cas sheds his coat and jacket. Dean makes a noise of happiness but it’s for the food, not Castiel removing his clothing. “Yeah, yeah. Just don’t die from eating this okay?”

“It’s stress more than anything that exacerbates the reflux.”

“That doesn’t sound promising.”
“This is the least stressed I’ve been all week,” Cas says with a smile that Dean returns. “And I did pick up something else just in case the food gets to me.” Cas nods to the second bag Dean hasn’t opened and Dean pulls out a pint of ice cream.

“You’re a genius.”

“Thank you.”

They walk back to the couch and sit, Dean moving slowly without the crutch, but much better than Castiel has seen so far. He’s not sure how he feels about Dean getting steadily better. He’s glad he’s healing but it means getting closer to the day Dean has to leave and he’s not ready to think about that yet.

“These are fucking amazing,” Dean says through a mouthful after a while. “Where’d you even find them?”

“A little truck on the edge of town. They used to park near the hospital until they were forced to move, but I kept track of them.”

“Forced to move?” Dean asks, eyebrow raised.

“One of the board members, Uriel, he didn’t like having foreigners feeding us. Said it sent the wrong message,” Castiel mutters, making no attempt to hide his disgust.

“Sounds like he and your brother would get along.”

“They’re very good friends, yes.” Castiel knows it was a joke but there’s no point in sugar-coating things. Dean shakes his head.

“Cas, I don’t know if you know this, but your family are a bunch of dicks.”

Cas hangs his head and huffs a laugh. “I had noticed.”

“Mike seems okay for a church guy I guess, and the little ones are cute, but your mom? Yikes.”

“She’s very…set in her ways.”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Dean says and takes another bite. Castiel regards him as he chews.

“You know, I didn’t really notice it; how bad she is, how close-minded and cold. It’s like a bad smell,” Castiel muses. “You get used to it until you barely notice it’s there. Until you get some fresh air.”

“You callin’ me fresh?” Dean smirks and Cas rolls his eyes. “Disliking me, I get. I’m a weirdo living in your house and I ain't exactly Sunday school material. But I can’t tell if she likes Anna or hates her.”

“She wishes she had better control of Anna, I think.” Having better control of him through Anna goes without saying. Anna in turn tries to control Castiel against Naomi. Everyone but Dean wants to control him in some way, his wife included. He takes another large bite and savors the small taste of rebellion then lustfully watches Dean lick a grain of rice of his lips and enjoys that transgression too.

“I guess I’d take her over Luke. What a piece of fucking work.”

“The result of just enough education to be dangerous and the unquestionable conviction that every
thought that occurs to him is right.”

“Don’t forget cable news.”

“And the people that argue with him are simply unenlightened or fools or part of the problem so nothing they say has any effect.” Castiel balls up the wrap from his burrito with too much force and drops it on the coffee table.

“So, no one is ever going to get through to him. Great.” Dean looks carefully at Cas for a second as he also crumples up his foil and tosses it next to Cas’s. “Kind of a miracle you turned out so good, coming from all of that.”

“I think that’s debatable. Especially by their definitions I’m quite the embarrassment. And they don’t even know that I’m…” He swallows. It occurs to him that he’s never really said it out loud or even in prayer. Maybe he’s holding onto the idea that if he never even confesses it, never speaks the words, in some way it won’t be true.

“Cas, there’s nothing wrong with you.” He looks up, having not even realized that he’d looked away. Dean’s face is open and honest and sincere and Castiel doesn’t understand.

“I’ve done some very bad things, Dean,” Castiel agues softly.

“We all have, man, but liking dick ain’t one of them.” Always trust Dean to be so blunt it makes him blush.

“Dean…”

“Cas, it massively sucks if I’m the first person that’s ever told you this but: You’re not broken.” Cas takes a shuddering breath when Dean’s hand squeezes his arm. He didn’t think words he never even imagined hearing would affect him this much. “This situation is fucked up, I’m not saying it’s not but there’s nothing wrong with you and fuck anyone that makes you feel like it is.”

“You don’t know how many times in every conversation I want to tell them, all of them, to go screw themselves,” Cas confesses unsteadily, imagining the look on his mother’s face.

“Why don’t you? I get things are complex but even before; These are the people keeping you in the closet?”

Castiel winces at the term, even if it’s accurate. “They’re my family. They raised me, and I love them.”

“All of them?”

“Most of them.”

Dean gives him a crooked smile and rubs his shoulder Cas leans into it, the way he does every time Dean touches him. “Well, I know about not giving up on shitty families so I guess I can’t tell you what to do,” Dean says, slumping back into the over-stuff couch cushions. Castiel follows, chasing his warmth.

“Sam doesn’t sound shitty,” Cas says, looking over at Dean. He likes the way Dean’s eyes light up anytime he mentions Sam.

“No, he’s not. He beat the odds. Kinda like you.” Dean’s eyes remain gentle as they meet Castiel’s.
“And you.”

Dean scoffs. “I ain’t nothing to write home about.”

_You’re everything_, Castiel wants to say. But he keeps it inside. He still cringes when he remembers the last time he tried to convince Dean he was a worthy person. Maybe things are different now, but he still has to be careful. “I think you’re quite remarkable. If that wasn’t clear.”

He can make out the barest hint of a blush behind Dean’s beard and freckles. “Shut up. I’m kinda useless.”

“Not to me,” Cas says before he can stop himself. “There’s no one else that I’m…out to. Just having someone that knows and that I can talk to. It matters.”

“That’s good, I guess,” Dean says quietly. He turns his attention to the television and turns it on. At the same time he slips his hand into Cas’s like it nothing. Like this is normal and this is just what they do. What they are. Maybe it is…and at least for a little while it can be.

They watch two episodes as it gets dark, they argue about who should date who and the questionable ethics of Seattle Mercy hospital and demolish the pint of ice cream together and end up talking about books between episodes and it’s without a doubt the best evening Castiel has had in a long time. They’re halfway through their third episode when Dean says, “Never got why there was even a choice for Lizzie between Alec and Jordan, Alec’s way cuter and Jordan is a dweeb.”

“Alec’s an asshole though. And he’s not _that_ cute,” Cas argues, easy as anything.

“Cuter than Jordan at least. Come on, if you were gonna bang one of them on looks alone, you’d pick Alec.”

“I prefer to think I’m not that superficial.”

“The premise of the fucking question is about being superficial,” Dean squawks.

“Then I don’t pick either. Johnny Drake was hotter than both of them.”

“Ugh, no, he looks too much like my dad for me to wanna hit that.” Dean’s comically disgusted face is beautiful in the blue glow of the television. They haven’t managed to turn on the lights and it almost feels like a different house or a different world. A liminal space just for them.

“Were you…out, to him?” Cas asks thoughtfully.

“My dad? No, not really.” Dean doesn’t seem to mind the question but he keeps his eyes on the screen. “He caught me with a guy when I was sixteen, screwing around in the back of the car. But he was hammered and he never talked about it after. I figured if he knew it was just another thing we didn’t talk about.”

“Was it hard for you? Hiding?”

Dean finally turns to Cas and gives him a curious look. “Why you askin’? You know what it’s like better than me.”

“I’m just trying to understand. What you said about my family being the reason I…that I’m in this mess. I don’t know if that’s entirely true.” Castiel can’t imagine not going through life carrying this secret inside, and not just because his mother would remind him he was doomed for hell if she found out.
“Yeah I guess there’s, like, society too,” Dean replies with a sweeping gesture. “But I fucked around with enough girls that it wasn’t really a big deal. And Dad was half out the fucking door by then so…” Dean shrugs as if that completes the sentence.

“I used to hope I was bisexual. That maybe I would meet a girl that made me feel the way men did,” Cas says flatly. “It would have been easier if I had any attraction to them. I kept trying but…” Cas gives his own shrug and he knows Dean understands.

“It’s not that much easier.”

“For a while I thought that maybe I didn’t even feel sexual attraction at all. I’d been infatuated with men and fantasized about them, but it was never consuming, so maybe I was just…not a sexual being,” Castiel goes on, thinking back to the various hopes and delusions he’d entertained over the years.

“Used to?” Dean’s question is innocent but it quickens Castiel’s pulse anyway and he looks away from Dean to the television. He has no idea what’s going on. Someone is on an operating table and doctors are giving each other serious looks over the tops of their surgical masks.

“Until I met you,” Cas says at last. “I’ve never wanted anyone the way I want you,” he adds, barely above a whisper. In his peripheral vision Dean gulps and stares at him, clearly moved in some way by the confession. “I’m sorry. That was inappropriate I—”

“Want? As in present tense want?”

Cas sits up and turns to Dean, blinking. “You thought I’d…stopped?”

“Well yeah.” Dean looks absolutely flummoxed. “Look at me. I’m a mess. I figured you were into me because I was, you know, there.”

Cas rolls his eyes so hard he might give himself a concussion. “How could you possibly think that?”

Dean pulls a face and throws up his hands. “I don’t know! My self-esteem is not great if you haven’t fucking noticed.”

“Dean, I…” Cas takes a breath, trying to find his composure. “You were never just there.”

“Oh.” Dean scratches the back of his head, the way he always does when things get awkward.

“I thought it was very clear that my attraction was not…situational. I understand why you’d think that, I guess. Given…” Cas bites his lips. He was going to say given that fact he paid Dean to be attracted to him. But he’s finally found something that he shouldn’t talk about with Dean. Or doesn’t want to. He likes remembering the way things were with them as he believed it to be, not the reminder that Dean’s side of things was a lie. “Never mind. This isn’t something we have to discuss. I know you don’t…I’m sorry.”

Dean just keeps staring at him, until Castiel starts wondering if there’s something on his face or if he’s broken things irreparably. “You think…” Dean starts then shakes his head. “Whatever. We…we got one more episode in this season. Do you want to watch or have you got to get to bed?”

Castiel wants to say that even when he goes to bed he’ll just spend an hour tossing in bed thinking about Dean and that he’s almost afraid to shower because the temptation to touch himself will be too great and that still feels like a violation of…something. “I can stay a little bit longer.”

“Cool,” Dean says uneasily as Cas settles back into the cushions beside him. Dean shifts just enough
so that their arms are touching and Cas catches his breath. They’re so close that every instinct tells him to drape his arm around Dean’s shoulders and hold him close but that’s not going to happen. It can’t happen. Nor can pulling Dean to him and kissing him until neither of them can breathe. Just touching his like this is good. Just talking to him is more than enough.

They watch two more episodes until both of their eyes start to droop. It’s well past eleven but the temptation just to fall asleep next to Dean for once is so strong it takes every ounce of will power Cas has to finally get up and turn off the TV.

“Thanks for hanging out. And dinner,” Dean says as Cas helps him up, stealing one more touch. “How’s your stomach?”

“Surprisingly good.”

“So that means you’re not stressed right now. That’s good.”

Cast isn’t sure what Dean is trying to say, he too distracted by his hand lingering on Castiel’s arm. Dean looks at sea and Cas speaks without thinking. “You were always the best part of my week, you know.”

“Yeah, you mentioned that once or twice,” Dean smirks. Cas resists rolling his eyes or glowering again and keeps eye contact.

“I just want you to know, that hasn’t changed.”

Dean’s bravado falls away instantly and Cas feels a charge in the air between them, something fragile and dangerous. His eyes fall inextricably to Dean’s mouth as he licks his lips.

“Same for me, just…so you know,” Dean says softly. His hand on Cas tightens and they each take a deep breath.

It’s been nineteen days since they last kissed. He’s counted. It feels like a month and if he just moved an inch closer he could reset the clock and change everything. It would be so easy.

“Thank you for this evening,” Cas says, stepping back. “Good night, Dean.”

“Night, Cas,” Dean replies, sounding distant. Castiel doesn’t look back as he walks away and up the stairs. He doesn’t hear the sound of Dean’s door closing, or he can’t hear it over the pounding of his heartbeat in his ears.

He almost did something very stupid and very wrong and unwanted. He’s been given one sliver of peace and comfort in his life and he was still ready to ruin it for the sake of his own lusts. Doing anything with Dean would mean disaster for them, in the long run. Even what they’re doing now is skirting a line they shouldn’t even be close to. Or Cas at least. Dean’s probably not troubled by this. Or maybe he is and that was why he responded the way he did? If that were the case…Cas doesn’t even let himself entertain the thought. Dean isn’t weak like him. And Dean isn’t interested. Dean isn’t his.

Dean is fucked. Dean fell asleep with that thought ringing in his head and it’s the first thing that
occurs to him once he’s awake, staring at the ceiling. He is one hundred percent, absolutely, completely *fucked* because Cas still wants him.

He realizes that his shock here is kind of his fault. He was very used to being a thing to people, reduced to the service he could provide. He was a warm body where someone could stick their dick into a hole of their choosing and that was fine because it was business. Cas never treated him like that. Cas bought him dinner and asked if Dean was hurt and made Dean come and, fuck, *let Dean move in when he had nowhere else to go.* For some reason Dean had convinced himself that knowing him as a person meant Cas wanted to fuck him less, but that was stupid on so many levels. Or maybe he’d just needed to think that way so that he didn’t go insane.

Dean goes through his morning routine trying to avoid just that. Going insane that is. It’s hard. *He’s* half hard when he showers but he doesn’t do anything about it because he has to look Cas in the eye at some point today and it’s already weird. He thinks they almost kissed last night. Or almost something-ed but Cas held back. Despite all the evidence, Dean’s not an idiot: he knows that Cas isn’t making a move because he thinks Dean doesn’t want him. He thinks Dean was only pretending because he was being paid, and hell, maybe Dean hasn’t been sending any signals to the contrary because of his own idiocy.

But he does want Cas. He really does. And that takes him to a whole new level of fucked.

Dean lurks behind his door, fiddling with his plain t-shirt and sweatpants. Why didn’t he ask someone to at least get his clothes out of Baby or ask Cas for a damn razor or something? He doesn’t want to walk out of the room like this and face down Cas. In fact, going back to bed sounds like a really good idea. He’s feeling extra achy today anyway.

“Dean?”

Dean jumps back from his door and right into a chest of drawer and aggravates his stupid healing wounds in the process. “*Motherfucker!*”

“Dean, are you alright?” Cas asks through the door as Dean hobbles over and opens it.

“I’m fine, just… tripped.” Cas blinks dubiously at Dean. God, his eyes are blue and he’s fresh showered and shaved and Dean is *fucked.*

“You’re usually up and about when I come down, I just wanted to check on you.”

“I’m fine, just a little, you know, fuzzy. You kept me up late last night.” God, he sounds like a moron.

“I’m sorry.” Cas looks genuinely sorry and Dean kicks himself internally.

“No, it’s fine. No one else I’d rather stay up with.” *Jesus, really?*

Cas gets that sad, puppy that just chewed up your shoes but it really sorry for it look. “I’m apparently meeting Anna at 5:30 for dinner and a gallery opening tonight, so I won’t see you until we get home. Late.” Dean feels like someone just let the air out of his tires.

“Oh not at all,” he says, going for casual and just sounding bitter. “I mean, I might already have turned in by the time you get back and I know you’ve got, uh, stuff to do.” Why did he bring up the sex thing? Why?

“We’ll see. It’s been…” Cas sends a guilty look up towards the ceiling. “Dicey.”
“I thought that you two had, uh…you said…” Dean cannot understand how he keeps ending up in situations where he’s counseling Cas about sex he doesn’t want to have with a person Dean sorta wishes he could replace. “On Sunday?”

“The only times I can…perform with her is if I’m thinking about…things I shouldn’t think about anymore.” Cas’s eyes rake over Dean and he knows exactly what he’s talking about. So that’s what that ‘I used you’ weirdness from before meant. Cas didn’t even think he was entitled to fantasize about Dean. What sort of martyr bullshit was that? Goddamn there are too many misconceptions for Dean to fix and not enough time. But he has to know.

“Cas, you—”

“I’m going to be late,” Cas cuts him off. “Have a nice day, Dean.”

Cas turns and disappears so fast it makes Dean’s head spin.

He floats around downstairs, unable to settle. He eats breakfast, cleans up some and watches a few episodes of *Good Eats* without absorbing anything, his brain still foggy with thoughts of Cas.

It’s almost a relief when Anna comes down, casual in jeans and a tee.

“Hey, how are you today?” Anna asks.

“Not bad,” Dean tries to lies and obviously fails.

“Really? You look a little uneasy.”

“Just getting a bit of cabin fever.” That not a lie. Dean’s starting to climb the walls for a few reasons. “Been a long time since I was anywhere this long. Kinda gets to a guy.”

“Yeah I’m sure,” Anna says as she get together smoothie materials. “You’re moving around pretty well though, you could get out and about if you feel up to it.”

Dean perks up in his seat on the couch. “Really?”

“Don’t see any reason why not.”

“Um, no clothes, no car, no cash. Pretty good reasons.”

“You can borrow some of Cas’s and we’ll go to the store and get you some new stuff,” Anna says with a wave.

“No, you…I can’t…” Dean stammers. “You’ve already done too much.”

“I’ll put it on your tab, okay?”

Before Dean can argue Anna turns on the blender and effectively drowns out anything he might say. There’s not use in arguing with her either, Dean knows that.

“I will pay you guys back, for everything, one day,” Dean says when the blender goes off. Anna gives him a knowing sort of smirk as she pours.

“I know you will, hon.” Dean’s pretty sure that was condescending but he’s not certain. He doesn’t know if he should be offended by that either. Sometimes he wants to hate Anna, because that would make wanting her husband a bit less terrible on his part, but she makes it really hard. Either way, this field trip is going to happen and he may as well go all in.
“Uh, if we’re going out can we make a stop at a barber?”

Three hours later Dean’s hip aches from sitting in an uncomfortable chair at strip-mall barber shop (and trying on pants at Sears) but when Lou the barber turns him around to the mirror he recognizes himself for the first time in weeks. Well sort of. He’s got more color – all that time in the sun on the back porch and fresh air have something to do with that, probably – and a little more fat on his bones. And the sight of himself in the mirror doesn’t make him want to shatter it, which is a nice change too.

He grabs the cane that Anna found for him and pushes down his shame to use it. It does help, which he hates to admit. At least it’s not a crutch. Anna looks up from her magazine when Dean shuffled into her space. Her jaw doesn’t exactly drop but she does blink a few times.

“Wow, you look great,” Anna says after a pause.

“Less like a hobo so, it’s a start.” Dean shrugs. He’s used to being looked at, or at least he thought he was, so he doesn’t know why he wants to hide from Anna right now. Maybe because she’s not the half of the couple he’s hoping to impress.

Anna hands Dean cash to pay himself, which reminds him too much of shopping with his parents in another life.

“I guess I was wrong about going somewhere nicer,” Anna says as the head back to the car. "They did a nice job."

“Yeah. No bougie man-salon needed.” Dean had taken one look at the first place Anna had taken him and vetoed it immediately. “Can’t believe you get Cas into that place.”

“He likes it!”

“Cas doesn’t know what a comb is half the time, come on.” Every morning before Cas leaves for work Anna fixes his hair, combing her fingers through the bird's nest to render it respectable and tame. Dean hates it. “And you’re already spending too much on me, so cheap is fine.”

“About that…” Anna says as she buckles her seat belt. Dean grimaces at the pain from getting into his seat as well as the incoming awkward conversation.

“I will pay you back. I swear.”

“I know you want to, that’s not what I’m asking. I just want to know…how.”

Dean feels that familiar lump of lead fear in his stomach. “How?” he echoes uncertainly.

“As in, what are you planning to do to get money?” Anna doesn’t start the car, just stares at Dean causally and waits. He’s completely trapped. He can't tell her about the money that's hopefully stashed away in Baby, since a huge chunk of it came from her husband. Would that even count as paying them back? Fuck.

“I…I don’t know.” He’s not lying. He’s actively avoided thinking about his ‘plans’ because going back to turning trick already seems impossible. He can’t get risk it for a list of reasons that starts with Alastair and Sam and ends with how getting caught would mean disaster for Cas. “Just ‘get a damn job’ doesn’t count as a plan?”

“You know you’re going to need ID for that. And reference and an address and a resume and…”
“Fuck, I know,” Dean groans. “I’ve been trying not to think about it.”

“You just need to go one step at a time,” Anna says, sounding way nicer than Dean deserves. “Let’s start with the ID.”

“Start?” Dean blinks. He had been under the impression this was a ‘get your shit together you useless idiot’ talk, not actual planning.

“Yeah. You need something to start with and you were born here so we can go down to the records office and get a copy of your birth certificate and start with that.” Anna starts the car as Dean stares at her, dumbstruck. “Yes, I know that will cost money but you can pay us back for that too.”

“I…shit.” Dean doesn’t know what else to say.

Anna chatters about how ridiculous the laws about getting a government ID are nowadays, and it turns into a rant about voting rights that Dean doesn’t really get and before he knows it they’re downtown in an outdated building talking to a bored civil servant. Everything is sort of a blur until he’s back on the Novak couch running his thumb over his mother’s signature then the raised official seal. He’s legally a person and that shouldn’t make him feel things, but it does.

“You okay?”

He looks up at the sound of Anna’s voice. She’s changed into a black dress and her hair and makeup are done. It’s the kind of effort people put into first dates and Dean wonders if she really thinks it’s going to make a difference.

“I’m fine,” Dean says. “You look really pretty.”

Anna actually blushes. How long since someone said that to her? “There’s pasta in the fridge. And salad stuff, as usual.”

“Thanks, I’m good. You guys have a nice time,” Dean finds himself actually meaning it, and returning Anna’s smile before she heads out the door.

The house is quiet once he’s alone and his thoughts return to the same refrain from the morning: he’s so fucked, and it’s even worse than he thought because Anna doesn’t deserve this messed up situation any more than Cas does. He’s tried and tried to hate Anna to make things easy on himself, and he just can’t. He looks at the birth certificate in his hand and it makes things even worse. It’s the first step towards something changing and that’s fucking terrifying. The idea he even has a life ahead of him to change is too massive and daunting to even contemplate. There are people out there that he might affect with what he does, that he’s going to hurt and the very thought of that makes it hard to breathe. And in all of this Cas is one spark of light and he can’t even get close to him. The clothes and shoes and whole goddamn house feel too tight and constricting and he wants to scream for no reason at all.

He heads out onto the patio. There’s still a few hours of daylight left and the air is clean and fresh from yesterday’s rain. He still feels like he’s suffocating, but it’s not as bad with just the sky above him.

For the first time in years he wishes he had someone to talk to. To really talk to who would help him get his head on straight or tell him to suck it up. Or just listen. He’s going crazy stuck in his head in an empty house in the burbs going over the same problems and reaching the same dead ends.

He misses Sam. Even as a snot-nosed kid he’s listen to Dean’s rants and nod like it was gospel. He’d always have a pretty decent idea about what to do too, even for a ten year-old. He tries to imagine
what Sam would say now. Probably that Dean’s freaking out over nothing and if he just control himself and behave around Cas everything will be fine. That’d keep up the status quo, and everyone would just keep drowning and suffering and drifting apart and damnit, Dean doesn’t want that. He wants to be greedy and hang on to the one good thing he has, even if it’s not really good. Or maybe it is? Maybe doing something isn’t so bad, especially if he’s going to be out the door soon, thanks to Anna’s help. Anna. The person that least deserves to get fucked over in all of this. Though who’s to say that’s what will happen…God how is he even thinking this.

Dean stews and stares at the sky for hours, trying to distract himself listening to the birds and watching the blue sky darken to purple and pink then navy. He’s been through several very stupid and pointless plans when he finally retreats back to the couch, which is developing a Dean-shaped dent in it thanks to his limited mobility. He watches mindless TV for a few hours until he hears the garage open and his stomach drops. Shit. Maybe he should just pretend to be asleep. Because that worked so well this morning. Dean gets up anyway, hoping to retreat because he’s not as brave or as good as he should be.

Anna comes in before he can get to his room. “You’re still up,” she says. She looks nervous and Dean can’t blame her. He’d be nervous to if he was heading up for a scheduled bone session with a guy that may or may not follow through, that may or may not be cheating with the homeless guy that ended up in the house.

“I was just about to call it a night, thought I’d say hi to Cas before you two, uh…that.” Dean wants to punch himself and Anna looks like she’s going in that direction too. “I needed to ask him about a book he was going to show me.” Not a very good save, but it works.

“Well, don’t keep him too long,” Anna says. Dean winces at the clack of her heels as she heads upstairs then looks up just in time to see Cas walk in the door.

“Dean,” Cas whispers, eyes wide and jaw slack. Now, that’s the reaction Dean was hoping for. It’s been a while since he’s seen outright lust in Cas’s face but it’s a familiar as the shocked, hungry way he says Dean’s name. And the fact Dean can’t get enough of that look or that sound is not good.

“Anna helped me get cleaned up,” Dean says, mouth already dry. Cas just nods. “How was dinner?”

“Bland.” Cas is doing that thing where he doesn’t blink and Dean thinks he’s trying to stare him into oblivion. Dean can feel his skin prickling and his cheeks heating. It’s familiar and dangerous.

“You okay?” Dean asks, trying to sound casual. He fails.

“Generally, no.” Cas finally blinks and looks over Dean’s shoulder toward the staircase. ”I have an appointment.”

“Hey, if you…” Dean stops. He has no advice for this kind of situation. He doesn’t know how to do this and it doesn’t help that he doesn’t even know what he’s doing and the way Cas looks like he’s going to execution isn’t helping. “Could you show me that book that you were talking about last night. The map thing?”

“Cloud Atlas?” Cas asks in utter confusion.

“Yeah, that’s the one.” Dean has a vague memory of Cas bringing it up between episodes last night but can’t even remember why. He was distracted. It doesn’t matter anyway.

“Of course,” Cas mutters. Dean follows Cas towards the office, watching as he sheds his coat and drapes it on the banister. It occurs to Dean that he still hasn’t ever been upstairs. The space that Cas
and Anna occupy as man and wife is still vague and unreal to him. That thought makes this feel easy suddenly. Cas goes straight for a bookshelf and doesn’t notice Dean close the door and he barely has a second to react when he turns and Dean is there in his space. He drops the book when Dean kisses him.

Fuck, Dean missed this. He missed these soft lips and desperate hands on his hips and the way Cas gasps in shock and pleasure and the way kissing Cas just makes sense. He pushes Cas against the shelf and gets no resistance, Cas just moans softly and devours his mouth and it’s good and warm and everything he’s been starving for since who knows when. He grinds his hips against Cas’s crotch, blood rushing to all the right places before Cas pushes him back.

“What are you doing?” Cas pants. They’re still only a few inches apart and Dean can feel Cas’s ragged breath against his met lips. Dean tries to focus because he honestly can’t remember what the plan was supposed to be, if there was one. “Anna is upstairs and I didn’t think you…”

Right. That.

“I do. I wanted you to know that I do. Want you. That way,” Dean says, still too close to Cas and idiotically overcome by the need to keep kissing him. He settles for cupping Cas’s cheek.

“I have to…” Cas shuts his eyes and clasps a hand over Deans.

“You have to go upstairs and do what you have to do, I get that. And it’s okay.” Cas’s eyes fly open and Dean takes a deep breath. “If you need to think of me to get things done, that’s okay. I’m giving you permission.”

“What?” It’s too dark and they’re too close for Dean to discern of Cas is pissed or confused or something else.

“You don’t have to feel guilty, not about this, okay?” Dean mutters, searching the blue eyes an inch from his. “I just. I didn't want you beating yourself up or thinking the wrong thing. If it makes you feel better, I’m gonna go back to my room and get off thinking about you. And it won’t be the first time.”

Cas surges forward and kisses him again, so intense and hungry it takes Dean’s breath away. Good. Yes. Dean’s head spins and he has to keep his hips in check because he wants to grind on Cas until they’re both hard and begging but that is not the goal right now. The goal is just giving Cas something he needs to get through the next few hours. And Dean too. He pulls back slowly, Cas chasing his lips and finally steps away.

“I…” Cas breathes.

“Yeah. Same. Go.” Dean backs up even further to let Cas by. He keeps his eyes down as Cas leaves the office then waits a respectable thirty seconds for Cas to get up the stairs before retreating to his own room. His heart is beating like he just ran a marathon and he has to lie down to stop the room from spinning.

He could think about the incredibly stupid thing he just did, and he knows he should. But instead he undoes his pants with shaking hand and takes himself in hand and thinks of all the things he shouldn’t.

Chapter End Notes
I hope SOMEONE out there is getting my Grey's Anatomy jokes.
Chapter Notes

These boys, I swear, they never let me rest. This is posting a mite early because something evolved in the writing, but I hope you enjoy. Warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“In these troubled times, it is more important than ever to remember the foundation of our great nation and the path to a righteous life are built with the same stones: family. Family as God intended, not as the liberals and heathens want to pervert it. Family built on blood and the institution of holy matrimony.”

Castiel wishes Zachariah had a mute button. Or that he had some rotten fruit to throw. A fire alarm might be nice too. Maybe he could just get up and walk out, not that it would accomplish much or that he’d ever be foolhardy or brave enough to do so. The urge is there though. Zachariah only has so many sermons, and in some way this one is better than last week’s screed against the creeping danger of Sharia law and pagan worship in their midst. The one just hurts today because half of it is true. It still stings when Castiel looks down the pew to see his mother nodding, and Luke outright grinning.

He closes his eyes and thinks about Dean’s lips on his instead of screaming. He often wonders if God can see the transgressions of his heart and mind as well as those in the real world. Certainly in his house it should be clear. Maybe he’s expected to think on his sins then pray for forgiveness. Perhaps that’s why it doesn’t feel particularly evil to remember the heat of Dean’s breath mingled with his or the pressure of his hands on Castiel’s body. He never quite gets to the contrition part of the contemplation. It’s fine. He did enough mental penance the next day any way.

Dean kissed him and he went upstairs and closed his eyes and copulated with this lawful wife as God intended. It took him hours to fall asleep after, even with the release of an orgasm. He stumbled downstairs the next morning to find that Dean had made them eggs, toast and tea. Dean smiled at him like nothing had happened and Cas spent the morning volunteering in a haze, wondering if he imagined the entire thing. Then Anna had taken him to the farmer’s market and dragged him along to an engagement party to attend for some friend from work he barely remembered the name of. To his surprise Meg had been there and had helped Castiel remember who was who. Things hadn’t been too awkward, considering what the hospital thought of Anna, but perhaps this was a more liberal set of folks, considering Meg was included.

Meg noticed something off about Castiel, but he didn’t let her push him into talking. He had no idea what to say anyway. ‘The gorgeous ex-prostitute living in my house kissed me then sent me off to fuck my wife and I don’t fully understand what that means’ isn’t something even a good friend would react well too. Knowing Meg, she’d either high five him or punch him. Violence of some kind would be involved, he’s sure of that.

“Hell, is real, friends,” Zachariah’s voice breaks through the fog and Castiel winces. “The devil is real and he and his servants walk among us leading good men to sin and deviance. And often they come in the most beguiling of forms.”

Castiel doesn’t know about the devil. Hell though, he’s more certain of. He was there last night.
They made it home late for dinner and then Anna suggested watching a movie and, if there was anything more tense and hellish than trying to enjoy *Ant Man* while seated between his wife and the man he’d had an affair with, Castiel couldn’t name it. He had never really thought about it like that before; as an affair. The fact he paid Dean for what happened had made it feel, well, like something else. Something not as bad? Though he could pretend it was mutual on Dean’s part, the fact he didn’t actually want Cas made it less of a sin, at least in some part of Castiel’s mind. That isn’t the case anymore. Or maybe it never was. Dean had kissed him. Without a cent of payment and it was searing and dizzying and insane. Castiel cast glances to Dean through the entire movie and caught him doing the same and the look in his eyes and the way he licked his lips had assured Cas that the kiss wasn’t a dream. Nor was Dean’s desire.

Perhaps it was cowardice or some lingering sense of self preservation, but Castiel hadn’t spoken to Dean afterwards. He just went to bed like normal and took a sleeping pill and pretended everything was fine. He still doesn’t know what he’ll do when he gets home today.

“No one will be witnessing today,” Zachariah says and Castiel stirs from his stupor. “Instead we’ll be hearing from someone you’ve all probably met in the last few weeks and who is finally ready to take the pulpit.” There’s a clear contempt in Zachariah’s voice that has Castiel very interested in this next speaker. “Mister Shurley comes to us from…where was it again?” Zachariah cranes his neck and as a ripple of stifled laughter goes through the church.

“Illinois,” a muffled voice supplies from behind Zachariah.

“Illinois, that’s right. And I’m sure Chuck here has great wisdom to share from the land of Lincoln. Even if he forgot to give me a draft to review.” Castiel raises an eyebrow. He hasn’t really formed much of an option of Chuck Shurley, but if Zachariah dislikes him that speaks highly of his character.

The congregation is silent as Chuck takes the pulpit and attempts to adjust the microphone to his height. Except the mic won’t move and he’s so much smaller than Zachariah it’s almost hard to see him. Chuck raises a finger and rushes over beside the choir director. With no assistance and a screeching noise he drags over the director’s stepstool and climbs on it.

“Okay. Better. Way to get thrown to the lions, huh?” Chuck starts, his voice shaking and nervous. “Hope I end up like Daniel.”

Silence.

“A little Biblical humor for you there.”

In the back row, someone coughs.

“Okay, tough crowd. But that’s fine I wanted to talk about this part. The first impressions bit, and how it can be an opportunity.” Chucks voice grows steadier as he pulls out his glasses and starts reading from some crinkled paper.

“This should be interesting,” Anna mutters beside Cas.

“First impressions are important, that’s true, but they’re never quite right,” Chuck begins. “We judge people too quickly. It’s a problem. Just the other day I met a woman at the grocery store and I thought she was staring at me because she didn’t like my beard, turns out she recognized me from… somewhere else. We got to talking and ended up having coffee and now I can count her as one of my many new friends here in Lawrence. There are several, believe it or not no matter what my sister tells my mom. Anyway. It’s only after we get to know someone that we really understand them. And
that’s good. If we relied on first impressions we’d never make friends or fall in love or do much of anything. And it’s the same with the obstacles God sends us in life.”

Out of the corner of his eye Castiel sees his mother’s eyebrow raise imperiously.

“Now, I say obstacles, not punishments or trials for a reason. Obstacles can seem to stand in your way, but you learn and grow from getting around them. And that’s what God wants. I mean, I think it is, I don’t talk with him directly…” Zachariah clears his throat and Chuck cringes. “Never mind. Back to my point. Something bad can seem like a punishment or a setback, but if you look closer, if you understand that God won’t ever send you something you can’t handle, you might learn that it’s an opportunity – to grow or change or be better. God loves us, he doesn’t want us to suffer. So when you curse his name for something going wrong, thing about that first impression. Think about what God wants you to do with the obstacle and go from there. It could be a blessing. It could be that the person you think you’re meant to hate has—”

“And with that we’re out of time,” Zachariah says too loudly and Chuck jumps. “Now, before we go I’d just like to remind you all that many of our elected official are facing a wave of leftist anger for their support of traditional values and the right of businesses to refuse service to those who are on the wrong side of the Lord. If you’re on social media, please show support and cheek at them with your admiration.” Zachariah leans back as Chuck whispers something to him. “I’m told it’s called Tweeting. Apologies. Now, a final hymn.”

Castiel endures the last few minutes of off-key droning before the service ends and the congregation streams into the aisles and lobby to chit-chat, a few of them heading down to the basement for meetings. Thankfully he doesn’t have to see Uriel for the volunteer outreach meeting today. Castiel doesn’t think he could deal with that extra stress right now and the reminder that he’s completely trapped in his situation. He’s thinking out it anyway and he doesn’t know if Dean expressing… whatever it is he’d expressing makes the mess better or worse. His mother accosting them is almost a welcome distraction.

“Anna, dear, do you know how to set up one of those social things Zachariah was talking about? A tweeter?” Naomi asks before she’s even finished giving Castiel a one-armed hug.

“It’s called twitter, and I think I can help if you let me see your phone,” Anna says.

“My phone? I thought it was on the computer,” Naomi grimaces. “I don’t want those perverts on the internet getting into my phone. I have personal pictures on there.”

“That’s not how it works, Mother,” Castiel sighs. His mother is sharp woman but some technology has completely bypassed her. “You can choose what to see.”

“But what about what they see?” Naomi shoots back and Anna stifles a giggle.

“Maybe it’s better to write traditional letter. Or use facebook. I know you can manage that,” Anna says. “That’s what I’m planning to do.”

“What pressing issue is this about?” Castiel asks. He can rarely be troubled to keep up with the weekly outrages that they’re supposed to speak out against. It all seems pointless and like kicking people when they’re down, given the current state of things.

“The sodomites are unhappy about the bill that will allow good Christians not to serve their kind or be forced to participate in their ridiculous mockeries of weddings,” his mother replies, huffing.

Castiel blinks, bile burning at the back of his throat. “What?”
The religious freedom act, hon,” Anna explains. “It allows businesses to refuse to serve people based on their faith.”

“That’s horrible,” Castiel says without thinking but his mother nods.

“I know. Can you imagine it? Good Christians forced to condone that sinfulness. Did you hear about the bakery that got sued for sticking to their ideals?” Naomi goes on, misinterpreting Cas as usual.

“That is awful.”

Castiel turns to Anna, eyes wide in shock. He must have misheard her. “What do you mean?” Castiel asks blankly.

“I mean your mother is right; people shouldn’t be forced to participate in something they don’t support. And those people…” Anna lets out a sigh and shakes her head. “The fact they feel the need to strong arm others into serving their agenda instead of getting help. It’s just very sad.”

“Getting help,” Castiel echoes, fighting back a wave of burning nausea.

“Oh that’s next on the hit list for the liberals,” Naomi pipes in. “Banning therapy that can save those poor people, especially the young ones.”

"I don't know about that, but it must just be so lonely being that way; without a real family. Knowing they're...Hon, are you okay?” Anna asks. Castiel imagines he must looks pale and stricken. He has the sudden urge to start running and never look back.

“I’m just…my stomach is bothering me,” Castiel mutters.

“That’s because you didn’t eat breakfast,” Anna says. “Dean noticed too.”

“And how is Dean?” Naomi asks, sweet acid in her voice. “Any progress on moving him along?”

“Yes actually. We got his birth certificate a few days ago so he can get ID and start looking for job,” Anna replies, smug and smiling and Castiel just feels more sickened. No one had told him that either. The thought of Dean leaving...he can’t handle it.

“Well, that’s nice,” Naomi says through her teeth. “Castiel, will you be saying hello to your brothers or joining us for lunch?”

“I need to get home,” Castiel says before Anna can answer. He knows she’ll say yes and he can’t handle that right now. He’s not even sure if he can handle the ride home with her but it’s better than dealing with Michael and Luke.

“Of course, feel better soon, darling, we’ll see you Tuesday. Seven at Michael’s.”

“We’ll see you then,” Anna agrees. “Come on, babe, let’s get you home.”

Castiel follows, docile and numb. He barely engages in the conversation in the car on the short ride home. Anna doesn’t seem to notice. She’s been in a good mood all weekend, thanks to what must have seemed to her to be a successful Friday evening. That thought just makes the emotion in Castiel flare even hotter. It’s not shame now, or even fear. It’s...anger.

“What do you think you can stomach for lunch? Soup? Bread?” Anna asks when they’re in the garage. “The salad dressing you like has too much acid. Maybe some pasta?”

Castiel blinks. Why are they having this conversation? Right, because Anna thinks he’s sick because
of skipping breakfast not that he’s appalled by everyone around him. “What about cream of wheat?”

“I know we don’t have any of that,” Anna says, amused and oblivious. “But I can run to the store if that’s what you’re set on; if you promise to take some meds and take it easy. You really don’t look good.”

“That would be an acceptable compromise,” Castiel murmurs.

“Okay, get inside and take care of yourself. I’ll be right back.” They climb out of the Camry and Anna gets back into her Mazda and Castiel shambles inside. To his disappointment Dean isn’t on the couch as usual, and his door is open. That leaves on place he might be.

Dean looks like he’s asleep on the lounger on the porch. His skin is golden in the sun and his bowed legs are splayed apart, his jeans standing out in contrast to the light brown cushions. He’s so beautiful Cas wants to punch him.

“Dean?” Cas calls from the door.

Dean startles and opens his eyes. “Hey, you’re back,” he says groggily, rubbing his eyes. “How’s the God squad?”

“More terrible than usual,” Castiel says, his anger surging back. At this point he doesn’t know why he’s even shocked or surprised. Maybe he’d been so careful to never discuss anything coming close to his own affliction with Anna that he’d never known her thoughts. Or maybe he just hadn’t heard, or hadn’t wanted to. He doesn’t remember. Everything since their wedding is vague blur or slowly fading sameness. Everything until Dean.

“Are you okay?” Dean asks, standing slowly. Castiel shakes his head, his whole body going tense as Dean approaches. This is dangerous. Every time they’re alone together is dangerous but he’s so furious at his entire life right now that he doesn’t care.

“Not at all.” Dean freezes, looking at Castiel like he’s some wild animal that might snap if he gets too close.

“Do you wanna, um, talk about it?” Dean asks carefully.

“I don’t see how that will help anything.” Talking, will remind him even more of all the reasons he shouldn’t be here and all the ways his life is, as Dean might say, incredibly fucked up. Talking might convince him not to fuck it up more.

“Okay, then. Uh. I get if you’re pissed at me for Friday. But in my defense—”

He doesn’t so much kiss Dean as pounce on him, covering his mouth with his own and stifling Dean’s surprised exclamation. Dean’s hands find his jaw in a heartbeat and Cas drags him back until they thump into the siding, barely avoiding a planter. Maybe it’s that they’re kissing in the light of day, where any nosy neighbor might see them, or because Dean kisses him back with equal passion and not a cent had changed hands but this feels more real and immediate than any other time they’ve touched. Cas feels alive and whole, and at the same time like he’s tearing apart with from inside. Dean’s fingers tangle into Cas’s hair as Cas presses his whole body against Dean, hands pushing under his tee to find sun-warmed skin.

“Fuck, Cas, we—” Dean starts as Cas’s mouth moves to Dean’s jaw. Stubble scrapes against his lips and Dean’s protest dissolves into a whine of pleasure. For a few glorious seconds, everything is perfect; just their mouths and hands and breath and heat. Then the distinct sound of a back door
sliding open echoes through the quiet afternoon and Castiel jumps back, leaving Dean gasping.

It’s not Anna, but he can hear his neighbor Marv (the obnoxious one who reports people to the HOA when their laws get to brown or their Christmas light are still hung in January) talking on the other side of the fence. Dean is still braced against the wall, catching his breath, kiss-swollen lips glistening in the sun.

“Cas what the fuck?”

“I’m sorry, I thought you—” Cas’s anger is gone, replaced by a familiar miasma of shame and guilt.

“I do, I really do.” Dean gulps. “But...Anna.”

Cas bites back a few very choice words regarding his opinion of Anna right now. “I just needed to… I don’t know.”

Very gently, Dean rests a hand on Cas’s hip and uses the other to tug him closer by the lapel. “Did something happen?”

“You kissed me,” Cas says softly.

“Yeah, I remember that.” Dean’s chest bumps against his as Cas stares up to green eyes and perfect freckles.

“Because you wanted to or because I needed you to?” He draws a shaking breath. That’s the niggling thought that’s been tormenting his brain for days. The kiss, despite Dean’s words, was another service. Another exchange of goods because Dean benefits from Cas’s sham marriage staying on the tracks.

“Can’t it be both?” Cas winces and tries to draw back. “Fuck, that was the wrong answer.”

“Anna’s only going to be out for a few minutes,” Cas mutters, making a weak effort to get away and failing.

“Cas.”

“I told her I was feeling sick, I should go lay down and…”

Dean kissing him again is better than any medicine. He melts into it as they fall back against the wall, Dean’s tongue darting against his lips. Dean’s hands tangle in the material of his jacket and he lets out a low moan as he braces himself against the wall. Dean holds Cas’s lower lip between his teeth before pulling back just an inch.

“I want to kiss you. I always wanna kiss you,” Dean whispers. “It’s kind of a problem.”

“It is.” Cas proves the point by claiming Dean’s mouth again. He can here Marv’s imperious voice through the shrubs. He sounds like he’s on the phone giving some poor customer service representative a piece of his mind and Cas doesn’t care in the least. Kissing Dean, deep and thorough, feels like the first rain after a drought. He wants to move his hips, get friction on his swelling dick and wedge his leg between Dean’s, but that they truly don’t have time for. He pulls back with great effort, savoring the lingering taste of Dean’s lips. “We have to stop.”

Dean gives a low growl of frustration. “You’re killing me, Cas.”

“If we get caught…” Cas closes his eyes on a spike of pain under his ribs at the thought. He really
does need some medicine but he feel of Dean’s lips on his throat, teeth grazing skin so that

goosebumps explode over Castiel’s body drowns out the pain and all other rational thought. Dean

kneads his fingers into Cas’s hips and pushes him to flip their positions, trapping Cas between him

and the wall. The siding is so hot from the sun Cas can feel it through his jacket and sweat

materializes on his brow as Dean kisses along his jaw and to his ear.

“Come on, Cas,” Dean murmurs and grinds his hips against Cas’s. He can feel a growing hardness

in Dean’s jeans pushing against his own stiffening cock and he moans at the friction. “I can get you

off fast enough, you know I can. I’ll probably come just touching you,” Dean gives another thrust for

emphasis. “Or tasting you.”

“Dean, please…” He’s not sure if he’s begging Dean to stop or keep going.

“And so what if we get caught? Would that really be so bad?”

Castiel pushes Dean back with such force the other man nearly trips into the patio furniture. “Are

you insane?” Castiel spits as Dean gapes at him.

“Cas, I’m—”

“No, shut up!” Castiel snaps and Dean goes pale. “You have no idea what you’re talking about. I

have responsibilities, Dean. I have a family. I can’t…”

“I didn’t mean it,” Dean says moving towards him. Castiel holds up a hand to warn him back.

“Just stop. I need to go.” Castiel pushes past Dean and nearly runs upstairs. He slams the bedroom

doors and think about locking himself in the bathroom, but that would trouble Anna too

much.

He hunches over the toilet, ready to vomit out the pitiful content of his stomach. It doesn’t happen.

After a few minutes, he makes it to the medicine cabinet and downs two huge swigs of Mylanta

before falling into bed.

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Dean’s walking. It’s his new thing. He’s literally started taking walks because there is nothing else to

do to burn energy or punish himself. He can’t smoke, he can’t drink, he can’t fight, he can’t even eat

and he certainly can’t fuck. So, walking it is. He started on Sunday. Not a coincidence that he

needed air on the day Cas decided it was okay to fuck with his head even worse than before. Anna

gave him the all-clear and said some exercise was fine, even good. So he’d done a lap around the

block then lurked outside until the neighbor across the street had given him the stink-eye. His hip had

ached after, and he’d had to use the stupid fucking cane later in the evening but, damn, getting out

had been worth it.

He tried again each day since, adding a little more distance. Monday was easier, but Tuesday was

rough. He’d been left aching and angry while Cas and Anna went to family dinner at Mike’s and

Dean was left with another salad full of dried fruit and something called freekeh. To be specific,

Anna had left it for him because she’d gone to meet Cas there. He worked late Tuesday, after

avoiding Dean’s eyes for too many meals. It pissed Dean the hell off. So did Cas taking extra-long

runs and hiding upstairs after. And the fact Dean had only himself to blame for the mess they were in

made him even angrier. Dean knows he screwed up and he could make it right if Cas would just
fucking talk to him.

He did two walks yesterday. On the second one he almost made it out of the subdivision and to a main drag. The trek back had been tough. The geniuses that designed the neighborhood wanted lots of meandering streets and green spaces to interlopers driving too slow in their confusion would be easy to spot. There were only five basic house types and everyone seemed to have the same landscaping and paint jobs. Dean had wandered, lost, for fifteen minutes until he spotted Anna’s yellow roses and limped home. When he got in he discovered he’d missed Cas entirely so he took two tramadol and passed out for 12 hours. He’s convinced half of his pain meds only work because you can’t hurt when you’re unconscious.

Dean is determined to do better tonight, because he has to have one concrete goal, at least in terms of navigation. He has no idea if Cas will even show tonight or what they’re going to do when forced to be alone together. Maybe there’ll be more excuses about quarterly reports and Cas will come home after Dean’s asleep again. That possibility is why Dean is staring down the main street wondering how far he has to walk before someone picks him up. Probably a few miles. Folk in the burbs don’t pick up hitchhikers, and none of them would be headed somewhere good.

Also, Dean has nothing but the clothes on his back and a bum hip, and disappearing again would be the last straw for Sam. He’d also likely die. But the open road is still tempting. He just wishes he had his fucking car back and he wasn’t a prisoner in the house of salads and sexual tension.

“Can I help you, young man?”

Dean looks over to see an older black woman with curly hair and an all-knowing expression. “Uh…”

“You’re Cas and Anna’s guest, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. Are you a friend of theirs?” The woman has a scotty dog with her on leash. It sniffs with interest at Dean’s still-too-white sneakers.

“I knew Anna’s mother pretty well when she lived there, haven’t stayed in touch as much as I’d like.” The woman is still looking at Dean with an uncomfortably discerning expression. “I’m Missouri.”

“I’m Dean.” He offers his hand and Missouri takes it without hesitation, a first for his new acquaintances in the area. “You go to church with them? Seems like where their social circle is located.”

“No. That church…” Missouri gives a shudder. “They lay on the fire and brimstone a little thick for my taste.”

“So I hear,” Dean mutters.

“You didn’t answer my first question? Do you need some help? Because you look like you’re getting ready to make a bad decision.”

“Well, you’re not wrong. Don’t really see how you can help though,” Dean smiles.

“You’re probably right, but just in case, why don’t you walk with me back to my place. It’s only a few doors down from Castiel and Anna.” Dean raises an eyebrow as Missouri starts walking without waiting for him to agree. “Fergus here is good company but he’s shit for conversation.”

“Fergus?” The little dog between them gives a yip and Dean laughs.
“So, what happened to you to make you walk slower than an old lady like me?” Missouri looks Dean up and down as he shuffles beside her, trying his best not to limp or stumble. Apparently not trying hard enough.

“You want the family friendly version or the truth?”

“You think you can pull one over on me?” Missouri gives Dean a perfect side eye and he shakes his head.

“Mean motherfucker beat me half to death with a bat. Because I wouldn’t sell him my car.” He leaves out the part about his drug dealer friend and the mean motherfucker’s friend that wanted to get his dick wet and hope Missouri doesn’t notice.

“Well, that is something. Most of the neighborhood gossips think Cas hit you with a car and he’s making it right by taking you in.”

Dean burst out laughing, startling Fergus at their feet. “That’s…wow. Better than what the church folk think. Cas is…” Dean swallows, his laughter fading instantly. “Cas is a friend.” At this point friend seems like an inadequate and undeserved word.

“I’m sure. He’s not the kind to hurt people,” Missouri says thoughtfully.

Dean’s not sure about that, but he doesn’t argue. Cas never means to hurt people, that’s true, but he’s still damn good at it. It’s not the immediate kind of hurt like a knife but something slow and hard to notice until it’s happened. Like a fucking sunburn. “Yeah, Cas is a good guy,” Dean says, because despite all the hurt Cas is good. He’s confused and scared and frustrating but he’s good. He’s bright and warm and, fuck, Dean needs to stop thinking like this, he’s supposed to be made at the guy even though Dean is the one that fucked up.

“This is my stop, thank you for the escort, Dean,” Missouri says as the come to a smaller one story house with a beautiful garden in front. “When you’re well I’ll come over and ask you to repair something. Seems like you need more people to talk to.”

“You have no idea.” Dean knows he can’t actually talk to the nice neighbor lady about his issues any more than he can hash them out with Sam, but widening his social circle (which is pretty much a small dot right now) is something he desperately needs.

“See you again soon, Dean.”

“Have a nice evening, Missouri.” Dean watches as she and Fergus go inside and then turns his attention to the two-story house with the roses three doors down. The garage door is open and Cas’s Camry is sitting there, which is weird. Even weirder is that Cas is still in the driver’s seat when Dean approaches. Dean sighs. Better to just deal with this.

Cas jumps when Dean opens the passenger door and sits down. Dean hits the garage remote and waits for Cas’s face to lose the look of panic while the door rumbles closed to leave them in semi-darkness, but it doesn’t.

“Were you thinking of not coming inside?”

“Yes,” Cas says without hesitating. At least the fucker is honest.

“Good thing I caught you then.”

“I’m not sure about that.”
Dean huffs and bites his lips. “You being an asshole makes it real tough for me apologize.”

“Apologize?” Cas squints at him. Somehow the word sounds more absurd in the low growl of his voice.

“Yeah. It’s a thing people do. I was over the line, okay? I get that I shouldn’t have said what I said.” Dean’s cheeks are burning with shame. He’s wished all week that he could take those stupid words back and just go back to kissing Cas like a normal idiot. Then again that was what got them in this mess. “I shouldn't have even kissed you in the first place.”

“Don’t apologize for that.” Dean blinks as Cas fixes him with that hungry, desperate look that gets Dean going every time.

“You’re…still okay with that part?” Dean asks, reflexing licking his lips.

“I don’t know if that’s the best term, but…” Cas places a tentative hand on Dean’s thigh and electricity jumps under his skin. “This. Us. What we've done or could do. It’s not something that can ever come to light. The consequences for so many people would be catastrophic.”

“I get that. I do.” Dean covers Cas’s hand with his. “I ain’t ever bringing that up again.”

“And I don’t know how I can reconcile what I want with everything else.” Dean feels a stab of his own guilt as he watches Cas’s downcast face. He’s talking about Anna. And maybe God and family and laws and shit, but mainly about the nice lady whose husband Dean wants to screw around with. Good thing Dean’s been practicing this same argument in his head for four days.

“Think of it this way: we won’t be doing anything that we ain’t already done,” Dean says and Cas gives a dry laugh. “Just sliding back into bad habits.”

“It’s not the same, you know that,” Cas says softly.

“Yeah, no cash but…” This is getting too close to something Dean knows he shouldn’t say. Something that’s going to turn Cas’s world on its axis and that he should definitely keep to himself if he’s smart. “I always wanted you, just for you. From the get go.”

He hears Cas’s sharp intake of breath, feels his hand tighten over Dean’s and he know Cas believes him.

“I think we should go inside,” Cas orders, low and careful.

“Yeah. That sounds good.” Dean doesn’t know why he’s even talking, Cas is out of the car and heading inside and Dean has to struggle to keep up. He makes it into the house, somehow, and manages to get the garage door closed before Cas kisses him.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-Homophobia and general horribleness
-Nothing but respect for MY king of hell

I keep outlining and growing more chapters by the way...if this thing gets over 30 chapters, you'd be okay with that, right?
The religious freedom thing is a real dumb thing happening in many states, btw.
Holy carp, I don't know where all these words are coming from. I guess they built up during SDCC and GISH. I should probably see someone about that...but look another chapter.

Warnings in end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cas missed this. God, he missed this so much. He missed the feel of Dean’s hip bones against his thumbs. He missed the way Dean throws his head back when Cas kisses at his neck. He missed the way his hips buck up into Cas when he drags his nails down Dean’s back. He missed the taste and the smell and the heat and Dean.

“You feel so good.” Cas groans as he traps Dean against the nearest hard surface, which just happens to be the hall closet door. Dean doesn’t reply, he just tugs Cas’s hair and kisses him again.

They’re wearing too many clothes. He’s not capable of much rational though right now, but he knows that. He strips off his coat and jacket while Dean undoes his buttons and tie. Not soon enough, cold air touches his skin and he breaks the kiss to pull off Dean’s tee. They press chest to chest as Cas kisses at Dean’s neck again, cursing that he can’t leave a mark. Dean’s not as thin as he used to be, and his skin is ruddy and warm against Cas’s. Perfect. He’s also hard against Cas’s thigh.

“Fuck,” Dean breathes as Cas’s teeth graze his collar bone before he laves his tongue over Dean’s nipple. “Fuck fuck fuck.”

“Need to taste you,” Cas all but purrs against Dean’s stomach before he nuzzles against the bulge in Dean’s jeans then looks up. Dean’s mouth is agape, his plump bottom lip hanging heavy as he stares down at Cas. He gives the barest nod and Cas pops open the button of his jeans. The fabric is still new and stiff, and the zipper slides easily down. Cas pushes them down around Dean’s thighs along with his white briefs and Dean’s cock springs free, hard and flushed deep red at the crown and dripping with desire. They both groan as Cas takes it in his mouth, tonguing at the slit before sucking Dean in. It feels like forever since he’s done this and his sense are on overload. Dean’s moans and gasps as Cas bobs his head and strokes him are deafening.

“Goddamn, Cas!” Dean slams his open hand against the white door when Cas gives a long slow lick to the vein on the underside of his cock. Dean’s other hand finds Cas’s hair and tugging him just so to the perfect angle and Cas takes in all of Dean that he can. He can’t manage Dean’s whole cock but that’s fine, he uses his hand to supplement. It’s messy and uncoordinated, but with each lick and swallow if can take Dean a bit deeper each time. Dean makes high, strained noises as he thrusts shallowly into Cas’s mouth to meet him, gentle but insistent. “Cas, fuck, I’m…”

Cas hallows his cheeks and Dean comes with a cry, spilling on the back of Cas’s tongue and down his throat, bitter and hot. Dean nearly doubles over, grabbing on to Cas’s shoulder as he shakes through his orgasm. Suddenly Dean has pulled out of Cas’s mouth and is truly falling, legs giving out as he collapses into Cas’s arms in an ungainly heap and they tumble together onto the hardwood.
“Jesus fucking Christ,” Dean pants, not even trying to right himself, resting his forehead against Cas’s. “Always said no one ever made me come as hard as you. You believe me now?”

“I’m starting to,” Cas whispers. Dean responds by kissing him, deep and long, like he’s chasing his own taste in Cas’s mouth. Cas grinds up against him, adoring each rush of pleasure from the friction and Dean’s solid weight above him. He could come just like this and be happy. “Missed you,” Cas murmurs against Dean lips, and Dean gives dark, sinful chuckle.

“Same.” Dean slides down his body and undoes Cas’s belt and fly with swift precision. He swallows Cas down so easily it’s like magic and Cas groans in ecstasy. He feels like he’s been hard for hours and the feel of Dean’s lips and tongue and mouth sends his whole body into overdrive with sensation.

“God, Dean, yes…fuck…” He doesn’t even know what he’s saying or asking, Dean lets him fuck up into his mouth and takes Cas so deep he feels his cock hit the back of Dean’s throat. Dean just opens more, then swallows and Cas just about screams. It’s been so long since he’s felt this, felt Dean around him and with him. It’s a spark on a dry prairie and he’s bursting with fire. How the fuck can this be a sin or wrong or evil when it feels so fucking good and right and holy and…

“Fuck!” He arches off the floor and comes into Dean’s waiting mouth, that same fire bursting behind his eyes and racing through his blood.

He doesn’t even realize Dean has moved until he’s kissing Cas again, pushing a few drops of his own spend into his mouth with his tongue. “Like the way you taste,” Dean murmurs before kissing Cas properly, deep and filthy. They kiss for a long time, just sprawled on the floor with their pants hanging of their hips and the taste of come in their mouths until Dean hisses in pain.

“Are you alright?” Cas demands. Even in the fading light he can see Dean’s grimace.

“Uh, probably need to get somewhere a bit softer.” They struggle to vertical and fix their pants, to no one’s pleasure. Cas helps to haul Dean up and to the couch.

“Better?” Cas asks.

Dean shifts so they’re shoulder to shoulder and pull Cas in for another slow kiss. “Better.”

“That was extremely corny.” Dean rolls his eyes and Cas feels warmth suffuse him, despite his undress.

“Shut up. You scrambled my brain with the blow job. I don’t even know what I’m saying.”

“Are you alright? Really?” Cas asks, running a finger carefully over the still-bright scar that now marks Dean’s hip.

“I was gonna ask you that too.” Dean’s voice it quiet, the humor gone and replaced with gentle concern Cas doesn’t deserve.

“You’re avoiding the question.”

“So are you.”

Cas sighs, running his fingers up Dean’s side and then back down his arm until he finds his hand and squeezes it. “I don’t think I’m ever alright, but the only time I feel remotely close to okay is when I’m with you. Does that answer your question?”

“Yeah,” Dean replies, voice small and tight.
“And you?”

“My stupid hip or pelvis or whatever is gonna be hurting tomorrow,” Dean says with a shrug, running a thumb over Cas’s knuckles. “Fuckin’ worth it though.”

“Agreed.” The silence around them isn’t oppressive for once, just gentle and safe as the sun fades outside the windows. It’s perfect and suddenly the thought of losing moments like this fills Cas with complete dread. “No one can know.”

“I get that. I’m not gonna ever joke about that again, I know I—”

“I would lose everything.” Cas cuts him off. Just the thought makes his chest tighten in panic. “My family. My job. My home.” Dean opens his mouth to protest but stops when Cas looks up at him. His eyes sting but he doesn’t blink. “And I would lose you.”

“Cas.”

“I can’t risk that. I can’t. I…” Cas shuts his eyes, unwilling to let Dean see him break.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Dean’s thumb brushes his cheek as Dean moves to straddle his lap. He kisses Cas’s mouth, warm and tender, then peppers kisses on Cas’s cheek, and chin and forehead, even the tip of his nose. “I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere.”

“We both know that’s a lie.” Someday soon Dean is going to leave. Maybe they can keep this up, go back to meeting in motels or somewhere else secret once a week, but eventually it will end and…Cas just can’t think about that.

“Come on, it’s not like we’d be picking out curtains or whatever if things were different. We just gotta take what we can for as long as we can, right?” Dean kisses him again. He’s throwing Cas a lifeline and Cas just needs to take it before he drowns.

“Alright, I’ll…Alright.” He kisses Dean and pulls him close. It’s enough for now.

“Hey, you didn’t even have to get buy me dinner to get in my pants this time, I’m getting easy,” Dean jokes when he pulls away and Cas lets out a laugh that surprises him with its force.

“I guess that means you have to provide the food now, since the sex came first.”

“You serious? You’re gonna make gimp with the busted pelvis cook for you?”

“Exercise is good for you. And we both know if I’m responsible for food it will just be sandwiches.”

“I like your sandwiches.” Cas rubs his hands up and down Dean’s side and treasures the annoyed smile Dean gives him. “Fine. But I reserve the right to complain about all the weird hippie crap in the pantry.”

And complain Dean does. He keeps up a running commentary in the kitchen about what sort of crazy people don’t have cream or bacon in their house. Eventually he finds chicken sausage and pasta and Cas brings in some tomatoes from the garden. Dean works some sort of witchcraft and in a few minutes they have bowls of deliciousness to enjoy on the couch. They still haven’t put on shirts and they sit hip to hip and skin to skin as they enjoy the food and turn on an episode of Dr. Sexy.

Dean’s head finds itself on Cas’s shoulder at some point after the food is done and Cas responds by entwining their fingers. When the credits on the second episode roll, Dean hits pause and climbs back on Cas’s lap.
He kisses Cas with intention this time, fingers toying with Cas’s taught nipples and slowly rolling his hips to coax Cas to hardness. It takes longer than before, but there’s no rush. They kiss and grind and touch and Cas sucks a mark onto Dean’s chest that will last for days because he wants Dean to have a reminder of this even if it will fade like everything else. Dean only mutters about his hip once when he crawls off Cas to remove their pants then retakes his position. He takes them both in hand and Cas adds his own fist around their cocks. They rub together, perfect waves of friction and pleasure cresting and growing until Cas comes with a soft gasp. He watches Dean bite his lip at the sight of his come covering his fit and their cocks and speeds up his strokes. Dean comes seconds later, whispering Cas’s name.

Dean wakes up slowly. Just that is a luxury. Easing from sleep into wakefulness and savoring a soft bed and warm sheets; it feels good. There’s a gentle ache in his muscles, the pleasant kind that comes from just the right amount of exertion...or good sex. Very good sex that he dreamed about all night. Dean smiles into his pillow and shifts his hips so that his half-staff morning wood rubs into the mattress. He could do more, really get going and jerk off in the shower to memories of Cas’s mouth and skin, but he’s so warm and content right now. And he’d rather wait because there’s noise in the kitchen and this is the one time each week he gets to see Cas in the morning alone.

He brushes his teeth and pees quickly and the situation in his sweats well under control by the time he shuffles out of his room to find Cas buttering a stack of Eggos far too big for one person.

“Replaying you for the pasta last night,” Cas says with a crooked smile when Dean raises an eyebrow.

“I think you paid me back just fine last night,” Dean smirks. In the light of morning it’s easier to see Cas blush. And to notice the slight tension in his shoulders. “Sorry.”

“You don’t need to be sorry,” Cas says quickly. “We just need to be discrete. While we aren’t alone in the house.”

Dean nods, looking sadly at the stairs and wondering if he could actually make it up them now that he’s getting around better. He doesn’t think he wants to. Dean seats himself at the breakfast bar and takes a waffle, biting straight in and thanking God that at least Anna believes in real butter. “So, how’d you sleep?” Dean asks, grinning at Cas around a mouthful.

Cas glares at him without much bite to it. Actually getting Cas upstairs, or letting him go upstairs last night, had been difficult to say the least. They’d kept trying and then they’d just ended up kissing more. It would have ended up with them going for round three in Dean’s actual room if Cas hadn’t been the better person and wrested himself away.

“Quite well, for once,” Cas says, taking his own waffle. Dean wonders if Cas will taste like butter if he gets to kiss him before he leaves. “You?”

“Quite well.” Cas shakes his head at Dean as they finish their waffles. “You know what I miss? Coffee.”

“I can imagine,” Cas nods. “I drink it at work.”
“Of course you do,” Dean chuckles. “Do you think Anna would let me add some to the grocery list if I promised not to sneak any to you?”

“I don’t think she’d believe that, but it’s worth asking. Do you and she have any plans today?” Cas picks as a speck on the tile as he asks it, transparently awkward. The jealous bit is kinda cute.

“I think she was talking about dropping me at DMV so I can fight with ’em about a license. Super fun stuff.”

“Sounds like.”

“Silver lining, it sets the bar low for date night.” Cas’s eyes fall closed and he groans. “Holy shit, dude, how do you forget that?”

“I didn’t forget I was just…thinking about other things.”

“Yeah, I know exactly what you were thinking about.” Cas tries to send him one of those patented annoyed looks but Dean deliberately licks his lips to watch the annoyance turn to desire.

“Fuck off,” Cas growls and Dean makes a face that he hopes conveys ‘I’m up for it if you are’ in the smuggest way possible. Cas rolls his eyes. “Stop that. Unless you want to tell me where to go tonight.”

“Take her to a concert or something, come on,” Dean scoffs. “Don’t they have shit over at the University all the time?”

“That’s not a bad idea actually.”

“See, I have my uses.” Dean smiles when he says it but Cas turns to him with a look that makes it fade.

“I’m not…”

“I know,” Dean whispers.

Cas looks away towards the clock on the microwave and sighs. “I need to get to work.”

“Yeah, yeah, you’re a responsible member of society, you don’t gotta be all smug about it.” Cas’s face melts back into something warm and Dean takes his chance. “Before you go, I, uh, think there’s a screw loose on the bar thing in my shower. I mean the guest shower. You know what I mean.”

Cas follows him without argument. He doesn’t close the door behind them fully, leaving it a few inches ajar. Very respectable. He does taste like butter when Dean kisses him against the restrained white tile of the bathroom sink.

“I do actually have to go to work,” Cas murmurs against Dean lips without much conviction. “And we shouldn’t do this while—”

“You told me she sleeps like the dead,” Dean protests. He doesn’t want to say her name, not right now. Not when Cas’s hands are pushing up his tee and massaging his hips. “And we can go fast.”

“Can we?” Cas raises an eyebrow and Dean grins.

“Give me five minutes and I’ll make being late worth it.” Dean palms the growing tent in Cas’s slacks, glad that Cas apparently didn’t do anything on his own this morning either. “And then I’ll hop in the shower and you can think about me jerking off to the thought of you coming in my mouth on
your drive in.”

Dean takes Cas's wide-eyed, shocked expression as a go-ahead and slides to his knees.

“Are you okay?”

Cas sighs. He had hoped to at least make it to his desk before facing the inquisition from Meg. Hannah looks annoyed on his behalf and that's some comfort. “I’m fine. Good actually.” For once he means it. The high of an unexpected morning blow job is still buzzing in his veins as well as the thought of Dean pleasuring himself.

“No. You're late and...Holy shit, are you smiling?” Meg demands, stalking toward Cas as he heads for his coffee. He really should see about getting some at home for Dean.

“I smile all the time.”

“Not really,” Hannah says and Castiel turns to her, betrayed. “You have other ways of expressing… things. It’s refreshing, really.”

“You’re a grumpy asshole, in a cute way, is what she means,” Meg agrees. “Especially when you’re late and over-worked.”

“I’m not over-worked,” Cas protests, adding a hefty helping of cream to his coffee. He might not really need it today. Despite the acidic dinner last night, his stomach is surprisingly calm.

“You’ve stayed late like three times this week,” Meg argues.

“Alfie is out, I had to make up for him.”

“Alfie’s job could be done by a well-trained cocker spaniel and you know it. What’s up with you?” Meg raises a dark eyebrow and Castiel scowls.

“So are you concerned because I’ve been out of sorts or because I’m late? Or because I smiled? I’m unclear.” When in doubt, sarcasm and avoidance.

“Meg, let him be,” Hannah says. “If he’s happy that means whatever was bothering him is better, right?”

“Yeah, well, I’m a nosy bitch, I wanna know what was bothering him.” Meg crosses her arms and Hannah shakes her head.

“Do I need to be here for this conversation?” Cas asks.

“As long as everything is okay at home, we don’t need to pry,” Hannah pushes on then narrows her eyes. “Everything is okay, isn’t it? Things with Dean there aren’t strained?”

“Dean? As in trauma-patient-homeless-friend Dean?” Meg gives Cas a withering look. She must have pried that much from Hannah, as Castiel can’t recall giving Meg those details.

“Yes, he’s staying with us while he recovers,” Castiel says, trying to sound casual and calm. This is a
generally normal thing and there’s no reason for Meg or Hannah to suspect that his sexual involvement with Dean is the reason for his foul mood earlier in the week or his tardiness now.

“You have a man staying in your house and you didn’t tell me?” He’s not sure what Meg is more offended by. “Is he cute?”

“What? I don’t…” Castiel flushes and then relaxes, Meg was asking Hannah, though she looks just as flustered by the question as Castiel.

“I think most people would call him attractive,” Hannah says slowly.

“And I don’t see why that’s relevant,” Cas adds. “And as you’ve noted, it’s late and we have work to do.” Castiel doesn’t wait for more commentary and retreats to his office.

He doesn’t want to worry about Dean at work or what people think of him or suspect. Not that Hannah or Meg would ever do anything untoward or reveal him if they discovered something. He’s just not ready for anyone other than Dean and God to know. And Dean certainly doesn’t judge him as God does or the world will. As long as it’s just Dean and they have a safe bubble of time alone to enjoy each other…it’s fine. It’s not real and he’s fine as well. He’s going to do his work and go home to his wife and do his duty and if he thinks of Dean and his mouth and his cock and his green eyes all the while, no one else needs to know.

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“This ain’t gonna work,” Dean sighs. The DMV is staring him down from across the parking lot. It’s big and beige and innocuous, set into a strip mall next to a sushi train restaurant that screams food poisoning waiting to happen and a Christian bookshop on the other side. Dean would take salmonella over the rosy-cheeked porcelain angels smiling from the book store window and he’s take either over the fucking DMV.

“Come on, it won’t be so bad. We have all the stuff you need,” Anna says with an optimistic smile. “And if you get bored waiting, you have a phone to mess around on like the rest of us now.”

Dean’s stomach churns. This morning Anna had gleefully presented him with her old phone, loaded with a new sim card and a bill that included his name on it. He wasn’t expected to pay it of course, but it was mail with his name on it which the state apparently needed to give someone ID. The phone and bill and his birth certificate sit like stones in the pocket of his hoodie. One more step into the real world and away from the Novak house. He doesn’t like how that makes him feel.

“You really don’t have to come in with me, I’m sure you’ve got more interesting shit to do.”

“I might stop in the book store, but then I’ll come find you.”

Of course.

Inside the DMV is a dull landscape of gray and washed-out blues. It reminds Dean of being back downtown, how the color was sucked out of everything, except there everything was ashen and brown. Dean doesn’t fiddle with his new phone as he waits in an uncomfortable chair. It still feels wrong and anyway he should be looking at the complimentary copy of the driver’s manual in case there’s a test or something.
“Number 316!” A weary voice calls and Dean heaves himself up. He brought the cane today because he didn’t know how long he’d be standing and a few sympathy points never hurt anyone. The brown-haired girl at the counter doesn’t really look like the sympathy type though.

“Hi, uh, Ruby,” Dean says, reading her nametag. “How are you today?”

“I work at the DMV and I’ve been here six hours already, how do you think?” Ruby shoots back. “What do you need?”

“Uh, new license.” Dean hands her the application he filled out while waiting, along with his papers. “Where’s your old one?”

“Lost it,” Dean says. It’s true. It ended up in some truck stop in Indiana he thinks. Ruby’s face remains hard and impassive as she looks over the application.

“What’s your social? And we need proof of the number too.”

Dean sighs. This is what he was afraid of. “Okay, here’s the thing: I don’t have that. I don’t have the card, I don’t know the number and –”

“Well, then you should be at the social security office.”

“They need two forms of ID to give me a new card or look up my number,” Dean snaps back. “Which I can’t get without a damn social, so do you see my problem?”

“I see it, don’t see why it’s mine.” Ruby gives him a sneer and looks over his shoulder to the other people waiting. “Number 317!”

“Wait, wait! I need this. Come on. I was…” Dean bites his lip. He hates this part. “I was homeless, okay? I’m reintegrating or whatever and I need ID if I’m gonna do anything.”

“Sorry, should have thought about that before you became homeless.”

It takes all of Dean’s strength not to punch the bitch across the counter. He settles for balling his hands into fists. What the fuck would Cas do right now? Or Anna? Someone who knew how to talk to these smug suburban motherfuckers? “May I speak to your supervisor?” Dean says through gritted teeth.

Ruby sighs and rolls her eyes. “Fine.”

Dean thinks that Ruby must go to Siberia to find her boss, and he feels like everyone in the line is waiting and watching him as he leans on the counter. It’s a relief when Anna comes in, a plastic bag in her hand. “Oh thank God.”

“What’s going on?” Anna asks, coming up to Dean.

“What I told you would happen. No ID without a social.” Dean explains just as Ruby leads an older man with a goatee and curly gray hair up to the counter. He looks right at Dean to Anna.

“Anna? What are you doing here?” the guy asks.

“You guys know each other?” Dean says.

“This is Marv, we share a fence,” Anna smile. “Marv, this is Dean, he’s a friend Cas and I are helping out. He needs an ID.”
Marv scowls down at Dean’s application. Dean feels a nervous buzz on anticipation before Marv shakes his head. “Well, I can’t give you a new license without a social…”

“Crap,” Dean whispers.

"Marv, Dean is a good guy and he's getting over a bad patch,” Anna says and that's certainly one way of putting it.

Marv looks at Dean over the rim of his glasses and sighs. "But I can get you an ID card which should be enough to get the social."

“Yes! Thank you,” Dean hoots as Ruby glares at him.

“I am making an exception here, I want to be clear on that,” Marv adds. “You have Anna vouching for you. The laws requiring correct documents are there for a reason. We can’t have those illegals getting state IDs. A drivers license is the first step to letting them vote.”

Dean blinks. He doesn’t know what to say to that.

“We understand,” Anna says for him and Dean doesn’t argue. Whether or not Marv is a racist jerk doesn’t matter as long as Dean gets to give the camera a blue steel and get out of there.

Dean’s exhausted when they make it back to Cas and Anna’s (he still has some trouble calling it home) but he had a shiny new state ID card and a promise that next week they’ll make the fun trek to the Social Security office. Being an adult is fucking hard and stupid and he hates how much society wants to make it hard for people to actually be a part of it. The wrong kind of people especially.

“Hey, you got more mail,” Anna says as she comes in the front door.

“What?”

Anna hands him a thick white envelope and starts sorting through a coupon circular. This can’t be good, he thinks as he tears it open. No one knows he’s here beside maybe the police and the hospital. Fuck, if this is a bill he’s just going to burn it. Cas said not to worry but…

“Shit.” Dean blinks at the papers in his hands, tears stinging his eyes. He can’t make out the words right now but the picture folded in with the letter he can see just fine.

“What’s wrong?” Anna asks. “Who is—”

“Sam.” The kid – no, teenager – in the picture is gangly and taller than the little brother he remembers and his hair is too long, but Dean would know him anywhere. “I gave him the address so he could write. I didn’t…holy shit.”

“How long has it been since you’ve seen a picture?”

“Two years. I…” Dean blinks and his vision clears some, but his cheeks feel wet. It might has well have been a whole other lifetime. He starts reading.

Hi Dean,

So I’m writing a letter. Zeke said to make sure I say important stuff, not just the kind of things we talk about on our calls but I don’t really know what that is. School is okay. My bio lab smells like crap because someone left a bunch of dead frogs in there over the summer. The library isn’t very good either. Zeke is working on getting me in the advanced program or to a magnet school but it’s tough
and Mr. and Mrs. Hess aren’t really into driving me to extra classes or to some school in the burbs. I bet you’d drive me if you were here, especially if you had the Impala. Have you heard anything about getting her back and fixed?

Sorry. That’s probably not a good subject. But I’m writing in pen in Zeke’s office so I can’t fix things. I started doing the crossword in pen too. The Hesses are the last people on earth that get the newspaper. I can only really finish Wednesday, but I’m getting better.

I hope you like the picture. Zeke said you’d probably like to see one and I thought it was cool. Yeah, I know I need a haircut but I like it long. Maybe if things keep going well we can skype or something (ask your friends what that is). Can you try to send one back for me in the mean time? I know getting them printed is a pain but it will be nice to have a newer one.

I really miss you, Dean. I don’t say it enough but I do. I hope you can visit soon. Maybe for the holidays once you can afford it. We can go to the Rock and Roll hall of fame.

I hope you’re getting better and that you’re happy and that Castiel and Anna are nicer than the Hesses. It sounds like they are. Stay out of trouble, okay?

Love,

Sam

Dean rereads the letter a second time and it’s still a punch to the gut. He hadn’t thought Sam ever even wanted to see him again or that he even deserved a real place in the kid’s life beyond that weekly phone call, but suddenly Dean misses him liked a lost limb. “Fuck. He…”

Dean doesn’t finish the sentence before Anna hugs him. His first cruel thought is that she’s so much smaller than Cas – no muscle, just bones and soft edges. The second is that she smells like his mom used to: that female mix of perfume and fabric softener and conditioner and something homey and good. Dean hugs her back, trying not to sniffle into her shoulder and he just takes the comfort, even though he doesn’t deserve it. He abandoned his brother and he’s banging her husband. Dean deserves a kick in the balls and a few more broken bones, not forgiveness from anyone. But he’s a stupid, selfish bastard and he’ll take it.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to get all chick flick,” Dean mutters pulling away and sniffling.

“It’s okay, I like chick flicks,” Anna smiles. She picks up the letter and envelope where Dean dropped it on the counter and hands it to him. “I can get you some paper and an envelope if you want to write back. Wait, does that say Ezekiel Gardner?” Anna’s eyes are on the return address.

“Oh, yeah. That’s Sam’s social worker, why?”

“I went to high school with an Ezekiel Gardner, he was one of the first people to take me to church,” Anna muses. “You said Sam’s in Ohio?”

“Outside Cleveland, yeah.”

“That’s not too far from where we grew up, wonder if it’s the same guy,” Anna muses quietly, then looks between Dean and the letter. “You sure you’re okay?”

“I dunno but I just…” Dean gulps. He knows what he has to do, it’s just crazy scary to think it. “I need to get my crap together so I can get back in Sam’s life.”

“In Ohio?” Anna sounds skeptical and maybe even sad. Dean can’t blame her.
“If that’s the only way.”

“That’s going to take a lot of…a lot.” Anna definitely looks sad and Dean honestly can’t figure why. “Are you gonna tell Cas that’s the plan?” Oh. That.

“Yeah, soon, probably.” It’s not like he and Cas have a relationship or something. They’re doing what they’re doing because it feels good and because Dean’s gonna be out the door sooner rather than later. “Cas cares about family. He’ll get it,” Dean tells Anna and himself.

“He does,” Anna agrees. “I’ll get you that paper.”

Anna heads towards the office where he kissed Cas, past the spot on the floor where Dean sucked him off last night. What he’s doing feels good but it isn’t. And he’s going to keep it up until the day he has to do something that feels real bad to finally get something right.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- Oral sex
- Snowballing (a little bit)
- Mentions of the DMV

Of note: I did a lot of research onto what it takes for people to get new IDs in KS, and it’s fucked up. This is the case in lots of states and it is another barrier that stands in the way for the homeless and others.

thank you again so much for all the comments and support, it means the world to me. <3
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Hello! It's been a week so here's a nice beefy (in many ways) chapter for you to enjoy. (Mild) Warnings at the end as well as some other ephemera.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Before we get working, I’d like to introduce someone,” Uriel says to the assembled volunteers in the mission basement. “I’m sure you all already know Mr. Shurley but he’ll be joining us from now on as an outreach coordinator on behalf of the church.” Castiel watches as Chuck peeks out from behind Uriel and gives a nervous wave. He’s dressed far more casually than the rest of the group and Castiel can already see the people that didn’t like his sermon last Sunday bristling at his presence.

“Does that mean we’ll be focusing more on spreading the good news and not just feeding them?” Adina asks from the back corner.

Uriel turns to Chuck with a predatory smile. “That was actually my question as well. I think of volunteers could do with some more training on effectively spreading the word of the Lord, rather than making friends.”

A shiver runs down Castiel’s spine but he keeps his face impassive.

“This isn’t a reality show, it’s okay if people are here to make friends,” Chuck says, his voice reedy and strained. No one laughs. “But, uh, while that sounds…neat. I’m more interested in how we can more effectively serve the community, feeding people once a week is a good start, but there should be other ways we can help the mission and the people in need.”

“Respectfully, they will learn to help themselves once they have found peace in Christ,” Daniel says, suspiciously. He and Adina are a new addition to the volunteer group and Castiel has so far been successful in avoiding them.

“Yeah, that’s a good start too but so is job training or I don’t know…” Chuck looks around the circle of his parishioners and his eyes fall on Cas. “I’m sure everyone has ideas. Castiel? Don’t you have a recovering homeless guy in your house. What’s important to him?”

“Why don’t you discuss it while Castiel shows you the ropes,” Uriel interrupts before Castiel can even open his mouth to explain all the things wrong with what Chuck just said. Chuck gives him a nervous smile and Castiel doesn’t even try to hide his sigh.

It’s fine. He can handle Chuck for one morning. He’s feeling good, relatively speaking. Things with Dean are…well, his lust is satisfied if not his conscience. He was able to preform with Anna the previous night, and she seemed happy and content and that allowed him to lie to himself that he was doing a good thing. He's just annoyed Hannah was off helping her cousin look for houses or something and he'll have to endure the morning without her help. He has a specific task to attend to today.

Chuck doesn’t really tremble but there’s a nervous twitch of energy all around him when he approaches. “Hi, Castiel. Cas. Can I call you Cas?”
“I’d prefer not.”

“Right. Uh, so…” Chuck shoves his hands into the pockets of his canvas jacket. A jacket over a hoodie seems excessive to Castiel but he doesn’t know much about fashion. “What first?”

“We make sandwiches. Do you need instruction on that?”

“No. I’m – I’m good,” Chuck replied, voice strangled in the face of Castiel’s cool demeanor. They start work and Castiel is afforded a few blessed minutes of quiet before Chuck pipes up again. “Do they ever worry about peanut allergies?”

“What?”

“Like, some people, a peanut can kill them, you know? I have this thing with mangos and one bite makes my whole tongue get tingly and after…never mind. But…peanuts.”

Castiel blinks. “What?”

“Aren’t you afraid you might get sued for killing someone with a peanut allergy?”

“Peanut butter is protein rich, the whole wheat bread had complex carbohydrates, and the jelly is a good source of glucose which is essential to brain function. The sandwiches keep for a while without refrigeration, are portable and cheap to make in bulk. And no one has died yet, that we know of.”

It’s Chuck turn to blink before going back to his work.

“You sure know a lot about PB&Js,” Chuck says after a few beats, just long enough the make the comment incongruous. “But you’re married to a doctor, so…”

Castiel thinks Chuck expects him to reply to that. He doesn’t. Another minute passes and Chuck moves to start bagging while Castiel finishes more sandwiches.

“So how is that?” Castiel turns to Chuck slowly, uncomprehending. “The married thing. To a doctor I mean. Like, that’s gotta be stressful, right?”

“For me or Anna?” Castiel doesn’t know why he’s asking, he has no intention of answering.

“Both. Or you. Whatever you want to—”

“I don’t want to.”

“Sure, yeah. Sorry. I just…trying to help.” Castiel turns to Chuck, wondering if Anna has said something to him and that’s why he treats Castiel so strangely. If he has suspicions about him that could be disastrous, but that would mean Anna had suspicions and she would have said something by now if she did. Still, despite his position, Chuck doesn’t seem like the type that would expose someone. Maybe he just doesn’t know what he’s doing.

“Are you married?” Castiel asks and Chuck gives a brief explosive laugh. “I didn’t think so.”

Chuck’s face falls. “Hey, now, it's not like I don't date. I…things are complicated!” Chuck protests. “Or were. I’m not sure what tense things are but, I am definitely sure that complicated is the correct word.”

“That doesn’t inspire confidence in your grasp of marital relations.” Castiel realizes it is the height of hypocrisy to comment on someone else’s understanding of marriage when his is in such a state, but his defenses are up.
“I can still counsel people,” Chuck protests. “That’s my job. It’s literally on the description. Believe me I’ve read it many times.”

“And the many books I’m sure Zachariah has on hand regarding these topics, or others.”

“I’m still working on those, to be honest. There are…a lot.” Chuck looks green at the prospect. “I passed the test on the only one that mattered so, that counts for something.” Castiel squints at Chuck, suspecting he should know what he’s referring to. “The Bible. I’m…I’m pretty up on that one.”

“Oh.”

“Well, Numbers is kind of iffy, I never was good at math.”

Castiel lets out a ghost of a laugh through his nose and Chuck beams. “That’s humorous.”

“Deuteronomy though, tough. I don’t even like Andrew Lloyd Webber.”

“What?”

“Crap. Lost you on the *Cats* joke.”

“That’s musical theater?” Castiel asks, his curiosity and amusement at this strange, small man slowly edging away his annoyance.

“Yeah. Not a fan?”

Castiel shakes his head. If Chuck doesn’t know that admitting something like that is the first step to rumors, there’s not much hope for him. “Next we distribute the food. It’s pretty simple,” Castiel explains as he lifts a bag of sandwiches. “We’re supposed to carry pamphlets and scripture versus to use with them, but no one takes them.”

“No one?” Chuck seems confused and Castiel doesn’t know why. “Didn’t your, uh, Dean take one?”

“Oh.” Castiel has no idea how to answer. He doesn’t remember if he’s added any details to the story of how Dean and he met. He avoids Chuck’s eyes by heading up the stairs and out of the building. “We just talked.”

“That’s good. That’s awesome. I’d really like to meet him sometime.” It’s a bright day, the last warmth of summer still in the air despite a few stray clouds. Castiel is glad he’s a few feet ahead of Chuck so he can’t see him wince. “If he’s interested in coming to services, I’m sure the congregation would welcome him.”

“Like they’ve welcomed you?”

“Okay, well…”

“They’d treat him like a car wreck they couldn’t look away from,” Castiel goes on. He can’t think of anything he’d be less inclined to do than expose Dean to that kind of scrutiny. And the added bonus of bringing the man he’s sinning with into the house of God…too much. “And Dean doesn’t like crowds.”

“Oh. Me neither.”

Castiel turns to look at Chuck, who is dwarfed by the bag of sandwiches he’s carrying. “How exactly did you get this this job?”
“Good references?” Chuck replies and Castiel can’t tell if he’s joking. “I have a friend who knows Zach and he put in a good word for me. In his way, Well, I mean, I had to get out of Illinois. Not for bad reasons, but, uh, like I said, complicated. And this…friend. Well, Zach owed him a favor and, uh…”

“Your friend blackmailed Zachariah into hiring you?” Castiel balks and Chuck looks pale enough to confirm it. “Why this job?”

“Well, my friend knew I needed a job but I wasn't super specific about things, so this was kinda joke on me too? I'm trying to write a novel but I needed, you know, health insurance. So here I am.” Castiel raises an eyebrow. “I went to seminary though! Top of my class.”

“How big was the class?” Chuck sighs and doesn’t answer. “I’m sorry, that was rude. You do seem to truly want to help people. That’s a nice change.”

“What do you mean?”

“Zachariah, most of the church leadership, like Uriel, they…” Castiel shouldn’t say this. It’s not his business. It’s admission to doubt and dissent, a small transgression, but a chip in a dam that will drown him if it breaks. “They seem more interested in power and fear than good works.”

“Yeah, I’m getting that,” Chuck mutters. “How did that Uriel guy even get to be in charge here?”

“He’s not. He’s just used to being obeyed and so everyone goes along with it. It will be nice to have some real authority around here to help us focus on helping people better, as you say.”

Castiel hands out his first sandwich to a familiar man who stays in the general vicinity of the small market on Massachusetts street. The cup in front of him changes each week, but not the red wool cap he wears despite the season. He grunts a thank you to Castiel but doesn’t look him in the eyes.

“You got a dollar?” he asks Chuck. The man’s voice is slurred and his eyes are cloudy.

“I, uh…” Chuck nearly drops his bag of food fishing into his pockets. “I don’t have any ones.” Castiel tugs him away without comment. “You don’t think I should give him money.”

“It won’t do any good. That’s the first thing you’re taught around here. No cash, it just goes for drugs and alcohol.” Castiel parrots the advice he’d heard so many times, and he has no idea if it’s true.

“Damn,” Chuck sighs.

They pass out more sandwiches. To the woman with the dog in the door of a decrepit laundromat. To the panhandler that keeps his cup on a fishing pole so it hangs three feel above the sidewalk. To the black man at the edge of the park with a sign that reads ‘Starvin like Marvin.’ Castiel doesn’t know who Marvin is but he gives the man two sandwiches. They enter the park, heading towards the camp and a gaggle of young people - their clothes frayed and dirty, a thin dog on a leash between them – point and laugh as clouds of smoke waft from their circle towards Castiel and Chuck. “The young ones don’t usually take anything. Or they try to start fights,” Castiel warns.

“Fights?”

“For some reason they object to being told Jesus loves them when their parents have forced them onto the street.”

“You’re not a big optimist, are you?” Castiel looks over at Chuck, who in turn is staring at Castiel
with something curious in his eyes. Without another word, he turns and heads for the group of youths. Castiel can’t make out what he says but after a second the kids laugh and reach out to accept sandwiches from Chuck. He also hands a few of them cash.

“How did you do that?” Castiel asks when Chuck comes back.

“I told them my friend was an asshole who didn’t think they’d take anything, and I’d give them money if they would.” Castiel laughs lightly, conceding the point. “At least you’re not as big an asshole as other people. You’re the lovable kind.”

“You’re the second person that’s said that to me in two days. I’m beginning to worry.” Chuck gives Cas a smile and he feels like they’ve reached a sort of understanding.

“I do really want to know where you think more can be done, or what Dean thinks,” Chuck ventures. “I want to help.”

“One way would to not refer to Dean as a ‘recovering’ homeless person.”

“Yeah, I got that,” Chuck gulps. “But he is a success story, isn’t he?”

Castiel squints at Chuck. “He’s staying with us because he was beaten to within an inch of his life by a madman. With a bat.”

“Oh. Yeah but…”

“He’s still a long way from being self-sufficient,” Castiel goes on. He wickedly hopes it’s a very long way. He doesn’t want the day when Dean leaves to come any time soon.

“So, he’s gonna be there with you for a while?”

Chucks tone again sets alarms off for Castiel but he pushes the suspicion away. “I think so. If you’d like to talk to him, I’ll ask him.” Chuck nods. “The first thing he’d tell you to do is come here.”

Castiel turns and heads towards the tent city that he and Dean had so often frequented. He’s kept coming back even without Dean, leaving food and water for Rufus to distribute.

“New intern?” Rufus asks, looking at Chuck as Castiel places the bags on his makeshift desk.

“Go easy.”

“Never,” Rufus grins. “You seen Dean around lately?”

Castiel had been waiting for one of the people that routinely saw Dean with him to ask such a question. “Yes. He was hurt. He’s recovering.”

“Whereabouts?” Rufus ask suspiciously as Chuck looks in between them. Castiel has no intention of violating Dean or his privacy be telling people where Dean is.

“Somewhere safe,” Castiel says, firm. “Is Martin in the usual spot?”

“Nah. He went through a bad spell, did a few nights in the shelter and some fucking meth head took his spot. He’s over there for now. I’ll give him his old digs back when Creedy gets mad about the no smoking in the camp rule and bolts.” Rufus points to a spot over by the edge of the camp, near the plywood precariously dug into the mud that comprises a makeshift fence for the place. On the outside there are signs and slogans posted: “Give us Dignity,” “Our rights are human rights” and such. They’re growing faded. There’s a pile of cloth that would be indiscernible as a person if you
weren’t looking.

When Dean had pulled Castiel aside that morning, he thought it was for a kiss or more but there had been a different kind of supplication in his eyes. He asked Cas to check on Martin, explained how the man had had been in the Marines with Dean’s father and knew both him and Sam, and that Dean wanted to make sure he was at least okay. Castiel approaches carefully, aware of the eyes of the camp following him. “Martin?”

The lump startles and resolves into a human shape, complete with a wild-eyed face and a shaking hand hold up a sharpened stick. Castiel doesn’t flinch even when Chuck stumbles back. Martin won’t hurt ya, don’t worry. He hears Dean’s voice in his head. He’s twitchy is all. He goes in and out but he’s harmless as a kitten. Just make sure he gets some food and maybe some cash. He won’t use it for booze, I swear.

“Air support is on the way! I’ve called in our location! Get back!” Martin yelps.

“Sargent Creaser!” Castiel growls and Martin jumps to attention and drops the stick.

“Sir.” Martin’s eyes focus on Castiel, drifting in an out of recognition. “Sir?”

“Dean sent me,” Castiel says.

“John’s kid?”

“He wanted to make sure you got this. That you were alright.” Castiel hold up a paper bag of food he’s packed for Martin specifically. There’s an envelope of cash inside as well. Not enough to make Martin a target he hopes. “He told me to tell you to, in his words, ‘think about getting your ass to the VA if things are shitty.’”

“Things are always shitty.” Martin’s demeanor shifts again and he seems normal, if that’s possible. “Dean okay?”

“As okay as he can be. Please do think about the VA,” Castiel says.

“I’ll be fine once I get my spot back,” Martin shrugs. Castiel nods, he doesn’t really know what else to say. He shares a respectful look with Rufus as he leaves. Chuck follows him out of the camp with a look of awe in his face. “Wait, that’s it? We’re here for another hour I thought?

“Rufus does a better job at distributing them to people who really need the meals than we can,” Castiel shrugs. For the last few weeks he has lingered and worked harder to get food directly into people’s hands instead of engaging in the time saving tactics he’d used when Saturdays were about getting his mouth on Dean’s cock and vice versa. He tells himself that today going fast is about getting away from Chuck, but that’s not fully true. Sometimes Anna goes out on Saturdays.

“Oh, okay. Cool, so…”

“If you want to talk to someone that has ideas on how to help best, go back and talk to Rufus. Or just look at that place. People live there because the shelters won’t take them or they have too much stuff to move in and out of places every night. See if you can fix that.”

“That’s a…yeah I’ll do that,” Chuck calls after Castiel.

He heads back to his car behind the mission and drives five miles over the speed limit to get home. Anna’s car isn’t in the garage and his heart jumps at the sight.
“So, are the pigs fascists or communists, I’m not following?”

Castiel blinks at the sound of Dean’s voice when he walks in the door. It’s immediately apparent that he wasn’t talking to Castiel. He’s sprawled on the couch, still in his grey sweats and a tee, his phone to his ear, listening intently. His eyes widen when he sees Cas and he gives a smile and a wave.

“Okay so, they’re both. Like pork belly and bacon, kind of the same thing.” A faint squawk of consternation is audible on the phone. “What? They’re pigs! That’s a good metaphor.” Dean rolls his eyes as Sam replies. At least, Cas is reasonably sure it’s Sam. He can’t think of anyone else Dean would be speaking to. Cas seats himself a virtuous distance from Dean on the couch. “Yeah, fine. Listen, Cas just got back from good person duty, and Mrs. Hess is probably mad at you for talking so long, so I should let you go.”

“Please tell Sam I said hello,” Cas ventures as Sam says something in reply that makes Dean look wistful.

“Yes, yeah. Hey, Cas says hello.” Sam replies and Dean’s face scrunches in confusion. “Really? Why? Sam, you know he’s a real person, Zeke checked the address and stuff. I – Fine.” To Castiel’s surprise Dean thrusts the phone at him. “He wants to talk to you.”

“What?” Castiel takes the phone automatically as Dean gives him a pleading look. “Hello?”

“Whoa you do sound like Batman.” Castiel doesn’t know how he expected Sam Winchester to sound. His voice is kind and warm like his brother’s.

“Dean has made that comparison before.”

“So, is he behaving himself?” Sam asks.

“It depends on your definition of behaving, I guess.” Castiel already has the sense that lying to Sam is neither easy nor advisable.

“Is he’s following doctor’s orders? Taking it easy?”

“Generally. He doesn’t mention the pain bothering him very much, but he’s still moving slowly. Better though.”

“You move slowly,” Dean grumbles, pushing Cas with his foot.

“Yeah, he’s a crappy patient.” There’s deep care in Sam’s voice. “He got some bug when I was like, nine, and he wouldn’t go in to the doctor for days until he literally passed out. Dad nearly killed him for not saying anything.”

“Well he’s in good hands now. He’s a very pleasant guest as well. We enjoy having him.”

“How long?” Castiel is surprised at the force in Sam’s voice. It shouldn’t be a shock that the younger Winchester is just as indomitable as his brother.

“As long as he needs,” Castiel answers without hesitation, eyes on Dean. Dean smiles shyly.

“Good. And thank you. It means a lot to know someone is looking out for him.”

“It’s my honor to do it.” Castiel smiles back at Dean. He can’t imagine Dean recovering back at a place like the camp he was just in. Seeing the lost souls there makes him feel pity, though it’s distant and helpless. Thinking of Dean somewhere like that fills him with cold dread.
“Cool. I guess I should tell him bye. It was nice talking to you, Castiel.”

“You as well, Sam. And please fell free to call me Cas.” He doesn’t say that he looks forward to meeting Sam in person someday, although he’d like to. He hands the phone back to Dean, a shiver rushing over his skin as their fingers brush.

“Okay, I’ll talk to you next week and I’ll get a letter back into the mail. Bye, bitch.” Sam says something that makes Dean smile before he hangs up and looks at Cas.

“You call your brother bitch?”

“It’s an old joke,” Dean shrugs. “How were things downtown?”

“Not too bad. I saw Martin, he’s doing alright, but not well.”

Dean grimaces. “Not a shocker.”

“How’s Sam?”

“He’s good. Real good. Talking a lot more to me, which is awesome.” He’d heard about the letter from Anna first, but Dean had shown him the picture this morning. It was good to have a face to go with the idea of Sam. “He’s so fucking smart. Way better than the shitty school he’d stuck in.”

“That’s good to hear. Where’s Anna?” She’d been there when Cas had left to volunteer.

“I, uh, don’t know how long she’ll be gone.” Castiel likes the slight blush on Dean’s cheeks. It’s good to know they were thinking the same thing, though it’s disappointing they don’t really have time. “Said she was heading to the mall, buying someone a present or something.”

“Oh fuck.”

Dean’s eyes go wide. “You know, usually people like presents.”

“Not if they’re for me,” Cas sighs. He can’t ignore Dean's expectant eyes. “Monday…is my birthday.”

“Holy shit, really? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because I don’t like being celebrated,” Cas mutters. Even just the mention of it has anxiety crawling under his skin. “I’m hoping that I can get away with just a few family mentions of it tomorrow at church. Anna always tries to do something bigger though.”

“Why? Does she know you don’t like it?” Castiel sighs.

“She thinks if she orchestrates enough good birthdays she can get me to like them. It worked with kale so, I guess she’s optimistic.”

“Okay, for one, the kale thing is called Stockholm syndrome – What? I saw it on Criminal Minds – and two, it’s your fucking birthday, you should celebrate it the way you want.”

Castiel gives a tired laugh at that. “I don’t think my wife would be amenable to how I’d like to celebrate it.” Dean gives him a curious look and Cas runs his fingers up Dean’s calf, which has somehow found its way into Cas’s lap. Dean licks his lips with a wolfish grin.

“Oh. Well, I know it’s early but…”
The sound of the garage opening makes them both jump, Dean with an added wince of pain. “Another time,” Cas says softly with a sad smile as key sounds in the lock.

“I’m gonna hold you to that,” Dean replies in a whisper as Anna walks in the door.

Dean wakes up to an alarm for the first time in years. The anemic beeping on his phone eases him out of vague dreams and he hauls himself up as much as his healing bones allow. His ribs still ache once in a while, but it’s usually second fiddle to the hips. Today isn’t so bad at least.

He’s happy to make it into the kitchen before anyone is awake and decides French toast is the way to go, since it was a hit last time. Cas is the first one down and Dean can’t tell if he looks touched or annoyed or just hungry.

“Please tell me you didn’t do this because of me,” Cas sighs.

“No one should have to endure a kale smoothie on their birthday.”

“I’ll remember that for yours.” Cas takes a seat at the breakfast bar and Dean presents him with a plate.

“Well, that’s in fucking January so, we’ll see,” Dean mutters. We’ll see if I even know you then, Dean doesn’t say. I hope I do.

“Wow, way to start the big day,” Anna says as she Descends the stairs to join them, taking the air out of the moment. Strangely, Anna bypasses the kitchen and heads for the mud room, when she returns, she’s carrying a Macy’s bag.

“A., no…” Cas groans. Anna just smirks and hands the bag…to Dean.

“What?” Dean blinks at the bag.

“My husband is hard to shop for. You aren’t. Happy unbirthday.”

Dean still doesn’t understand but he pulls the box out of the bag anyway. “Oh this is just cruel,” Dean laughs as he sees what it is: one of those fancy one cup coffee makers. There's a pack of pods at the bottom of the bag too.

“Are you serious?” Cas says as Dean holds it up.

“Now Dean can have his coffee and it won’t be too much of a temptation to steal it,” Anna says. Dean is certain she knows Cas is going to get some, but he’s still strangely touched. It's been a long time since anyone bought him a present. “We’ll set it up later, today I can get you a cup on the way in to the hospital.”

“Huh?” Dean and Cas say at the same time.

Anna looks at them with an unconcerned expression. “Dean’s got his follow up x-rays and checkup today?”

“I do?” Dean is sure he would remember that.
“I’ll drive you in and get you through and then you can help me with some errands in the afternoon. I’m taking it off.”

“Anna, that better not mean you’re getting ready for company tonight,” Cas says. Dean wonders if Anna can really see how uncomfortable he looks or if it’s just something else she ignores.

“Quiet, it’s supposed to be a surprise,” Anna smiles. Dean sighs and turns back to finishing up breakfast.

Cas drags his feet leaving, but he’s gone when Dean finishes dressing and joins Anna in the Mazda. It hurts some, not saying goodbye, but it’s Dean's fault for lollygagging. He took a good five minutes freaking out after his shower about the goddamn hickey above his left nipple. It’s fading and could maybe pass for a bruise but he’s not sure. Is someone gonna make him take off his shirt? Is Anna going to examine him? He has no idea how to explain this, but he’s good at thinking on his feet. He’s sure he’ll come up with a plan.

He's still waiting for the plan to come to him when Anna leads him to a nice waiting area somewhere on the third floor of the hospital. It’s sort of familiar, but he’s not sure.

“Okay, they’re going to call you for x-rays and then a nurse will come and get you for the exam,” Anna tells him.

“So, you won’t be examining me, right? Like, not that I don’t trust you but uh, seems kinda inappropriate.”

Anna gives him a wry smile. “Dean, I see your underwear in the laundry.”

“Okay, yes, but…”

Anna sighs and shakes her heard. “The nurse will be looking at you, not me. I’ll come in after I look at the result and the x-rays. It’s gonna take a while so find a magazine.”

Dean breathes a sigh of relief as Anna goes. He’d not happy to be back in the hospital, even thinking that this is the same building as Cas. It’s fifty shades of beige and even in that waiting room, that antiseptic smell lingers. The stiff seats are hell on his hip and he doesn’t like the way the older guy with a cast on his arm is looking at him. Does he recognize Dean? It would be just like his life if he ran into a ‘client’ in the goddamn hospital with Anna hovering around. The man doesn’t say anything and Dean decides he’s just being paranoid and turns back to the wrinkled old copy of Good Housekeeping he’s been perusing. The best way to get the ten most common stains out of clothes doesn’t include come so he’d dubious of the whole article.

After forever he gets his x-rays and is sent off to another floor and another waiting room where he lingers reading US weekly until a familiar nurse calls him back for an exam.

“Hey Dean, good to see you back,” the woman smiles as Dean tries to remember her name. His brain was pretty fried last time he was here. “Tessa,” she says, saving him. “Let’s take a look at you.”

He does have to get undressed, which is great, but he hopes he can make up for his ass enjoying the breeze with attitude and a smile. Seems to work. Tessa’s pretty gentle with him and she smiles at Dean’s dumb jokes and lame flirtation. She does give Dean a look when she pulls down his gown to check his heart with the stethoscope but doesn’t comment.

“So, how’s it looking?” Dean asks as Tessa makes notes in a computer station set up in the exam room.
“That’s for your doctor to decide but, not bad.” Tessa gives Dean a once over. “Hope you’re staying out of trouble.”

“Oh yeah, straight and narrow for me,” Dean smirks.

“Good to hear. Bet you’ll be out and about soon,” Tessa flirts back and Dean grins. She leaves with a final indulgent look and Dean counts it as a win. The more straight and narrow people think he is, the safer things are for when he does misbehave. And he plans to.

After another interminable wait, Anna finally reappears with a large set of x-rays and a smile on her face. At least Dean was allowed to get dressed. “So, good news, everything is healing well, just a little slow.”

“Slow?”

“History of malnutrition and weakness from previous breaks will do that, but things are good. A few more weeks taking it easy and you should be back to normal.”

“Great,” Dean mutters.

“If you had a job I’d clear you to return to light duty but…well…”

“Yeah, yeah; don’t rub it in,” Dean grumbles and Anna’s face darkens.

“Speaking of. Did you tell Cas yet, about your plans?”

“To get to Ohio? No, I…” He doesn’t want to hurt Cas like that yet and he doesn’t want that pain for himself either. “I figure I need something more solid before I do, you know? Not just some vague ‘here’s where I’m going’ shit.”

“Uh huh,” Anna replies, eyes narrow.

“Speaking of, you got more work to do or am I in for more waiting?”

“I just have to finish up a few things and then we’ll get going.” Dean rushes after Anna out the door and down through the maze of halls. “Come on, there’s some nice benches in the atrium you’ll enjoy.”

“About that…” Dean has to grab Anna’s wrist to get her attention, and she jumps at the touch. “Sorry.”

“About the benches?”

“About the errands.” Anna’s stares at Dean in confusion. “Are you really gonna throw Cas a party?”

“Just his family. It will be fun,” Anna protests. “He says he doesn’t like it, but he does.”

“He really really doesn’t. And come on, even if he deep down like his birthday, his family is the definition of not fun.” Dean stares Anna down, pleading. He watches the argument take fire in her eyes then fade with a sigh.

“Okay, fine.” Dean lets out a breath in relief. “But we have to do something for him, okay?”

“Did you get him a present?”

“Of course.” Anna looks offended that Dean would even ask. “I got him some DVD of the last
season of the awful show you two watch.”

“Dr. Sexy? How did you…” Dean’s stomach drops in panic.

“I see the Netflix viewing history, Dean.”

“I really need to make my own profile.” Anna laughs as Dean chews is lip. “Is that all?”

“What do you mean ‘is that all?’ I thought you didn’t want to make a big deal.”

“Yeah, but…” Dean’s not sure what he wants to say or even suggest. It just feels like Cas should get something more than some DVDs and a slightly bigger salad for dinner. “I have some ideas, okay?”

The lack of other cars outside his house is promising, but Castiel still finds himself hesitating to go in. Meg and Hannah tried to take him out for lunch but the ensuing fight over where to go – Wing Stop or Sweet Tomatoes – took up half the lunch hour. They’d ended up at a Biggersons which was predictably awful. At least there hadn’t been too many well-wishers or other attention beside a few texts from distant family and facebook notifications. The yearly ritual of logging on to see that his high school classmates had been prompted by some algorithm to remember his existence and congratulate him for it continuing was even more depressing this year, thanks to the few political and news posts he’d seen.

He just wants to go for a run and sleep and wake up one day closer to Thursday.

He trudges inside, stomach churning and braced for an unwanted onslaught. It takes him several seconds before he processes that there was no yell of surprise, no lights flashing on. There’s just the normal sound of Anna and Dean’s voices and the smell of something delicious. Dean and Anna turn to him and smile. It’s strange sight for sure, but certainly not unwelcome.

“Happy Birthday,” Dean says.

“Welcome you your party,” Anna adds. “Hope the quality of the presents makes up for the number. Your family won’t be joining us.”

“That’s the only present I need,” Cas sighs in relief. “That and dinner. Do I smell-”

“One hundred percent GMO free, pasture raised, organic steak,” Dean grins.

“Dean made the compelling point that supporting good farming practices was an important part of creating positive change,” Anna says with a begrudging smile.

“Also said a man deserved a damn steak on his birthday.” Dean emphasizes the point by pulling a cast iron pan containing two gorgeous steaks out of the oven. “We got vegetables too, so, don’t get too excited.”

“Thank you,” Cas says quietly trying to keep the awe out of his face and voice. Dean has somehow worked a miracle. “You cooked this?”

“Not too hard,” Dean shrugs.
“That’s what he says,” Anna scoffs.

“These have gotta cool, open your damn presents,” Dean prompts. Cas takes a seat at the table in front of two packages. He opens the small one first and laughs at the site of Dr. Sexy DVDs. “Figure we can catch up on the season that’s not on Netflix yet.”

“I’m sure Anna will enjoy that,” Cas mutters.

“I’ll have something to read, I don’t know what yet, but it’s important,” Anna says. “The next one is better. Took us a while to find it.”

It’s the word us that sets off all sorts of feelings in Castiel. He knows that Dean didn’t have the money to buy him anything, but the fact he was involved is just as heartwarming as seeing him make dinner. Castiel tears that wrapping off the package and opens the box. It’s been so long since he’s seen a record player, he almost doesn’t recognize it.

“So you can listen to some of that vinyl finally.” Dean says it and Castiel knows instantly this was his idea. This all was his idea and it takes every ounce of control Cas has not to walk across the room and hug Dean right there.

“Do you like it?” Anna asks nervously.

“I love it,” Cas replies softly before regaining his composure. “The only thing that could make this better is dessert.”

“Red velvet cupcakes in the fridge,” Anna says with a pleased grin.

For the first time in a long while, Cas means it when he says grace and thanks God for the food and the company and everyone’s safety. And that’s even before they eat. Even Anna has to admit the steaks are amazing, and perfectly cooked. It’s not enough to convince her to let beef back on the menu permanently despite Dean and Castiel’s arguments. She does say she’ll consider bacon, so Dean calls it a win. After dinner Anna is kind enough to sit through one episode of Dr. Sexy, offering appalled commentary as usual before she gives up and heads upstairs. She squeezes Cas’s shoulder and places a kiss on his cheek before telling him not to stay down too long.

Castiel and Dean don’t touch on the couch. Not with Anna there and still awake upstairs. But they do sit close. He can feel Dean’s warmth a few inches from him, feel the way the couch shifts when he moves. It feels safe. Taken care of. It makes sense, that’s what Dean does. And what Anna does as well. He would tell himself that he doesn’t need it, but that would be a lie. He wants it too. It feels good. And he does not in any way deserve it.

“Thank you, for everything today,” Castiel says at the credits roll on the episode. "It's the first time I've had an enjoyable birthday in a while."

“I didn’t do much,” Dean deflects and Castiel catches his eyes with a glare. “I just redirected, okay? It worked out.”

“Maybe we can use the record player later this week, listen to some of those albums.”

“Just us?” the question is pregnant with meaning and that makes Castiel’s skin tingle.

“Just us.”

Dean smiles crookedly and moves to get off the couch. “Help me up, I got one more thing for you.”
Cas raises an eyebrow in interest, savoring the heat of Dean’s skin under his palms and he hoists him up. Dean’s hands trail down into Cas’s and he leads him confidently towards his room. “Dean…”

“Chill, it’s not that.” Dean shoots him a look over his shoulder and smirks. “Okay it’s sorta that.”

Dean closes the door partially, just to give them privacy with a hint of deniability. Cas’s heart pounds, the thought of Anna coming downstairs to look for him ringing in his mind, but Dean’s close proximity screams louder. It’s barely been a week of this change in their relationship and they’re already taking stupid risks and…

“Stop panicking.” Dean whispers and kisses him, deep and tender. Cas surrenders so easily its frightening. Dean pulls him close with one arm and Cas embraces him in kind, lost in the contact until Dean presses something cool and smooth into his hand. Dean pulls back with a glint in his eyes. “Used a five-finger discount to pick something up while Anna was getting produce.”

Cas looks down at the object in his hand: a small bottle of Astroglide. “You stole lube. For me. As a birthday present.” He can’t help but snort a laugh.

“Well I get to benefit too.” Dean’s cocky grin falters. “If you’re okay with that and…uh…”

“Yes, I am very okay with it.” Cas skin heats and his head spins at just the idea of being inside Dean again. "Condoms?"

"No." The simple word has Castiel starting to harden in his slacks. Not convenient.

“You probably should get upstairs,” Dean murmurs before kissing Cas again as he takes the lube back from his hand. "I'll keep this down here, but you think about what we'll do with it.”

“That’s cruel thing to say,” Cas grumbles. “Going up will be either awkward and frustrating now.”

“Why? Get some birthday sex.”

“That’s not a thing.”

“That’s totally a thing, come on.”

“It’s not Friday.” The look Dean gives him is overflowing with disbelief and pity. “Oh.”

“Yeah.” Dean rolls his eyes and tugs Castiel close for another kiss. “Go. I don’t mind. Have fun.”

It’s a stupid thing to say and Cas knows Dean knows it, but he appreciates it. He keeps a hand on Dean until he can’t reach him anymore, letting his own movement out the door make the decision for him of when to end contact.

Anna is in bed with a book when he gets to their room and doesn’t immediately look up. “You done already?” she asks.

Castiel pushes the sound of her voice from his mind, even the picture of her face, and pretends it a different room he’s walked into. Dean looking warm and safe. Dean smiling at him from their bed. Dean.

“I thought it would be nice to spend time together,” he lies as he crawls up the bed and to Anna. She puts away her book with interest in her eyes and makes a soft, surprised noise when he kisses her.

It’s not the same. It’s never the same and Castiel hates it, but it’s what’s right. The man making love to Anna is who she, and God, and his family need him to be. He’s takes longer than usual, but Anna
doesn’t seem to mind. She turns them over and rides him and Castiel closes his eyes and enjoys the
sensation when she takes a small vibrator from her bedside table. He never begrudged her the
purchase of any marital aids, in fact he hoped that she could use them to get the satisfaction he was
never good at giving her. He can feel the soft buzz of the toy and it’s not bad at all. Still he tries to
hold back. He keeps a picture of Dean in his head as Anna whimpers with pleasure above him.
Distantly he wonders if this is how Dean felt with other customers, or how they felt with him:
touching as intimately as possible and completely separate. Sex with Dean never felt that way.

He feels it when Anna comes, the way she tightens and pulses around him. It’s a relatively alien
feeling, given how long it’s been since she finished with him inside her. He body responds to the
novelty of its own accord and he thrusts a few more time and thinks of the heat of Dean’s mouth on
his cock and comes weakly with a soft groan.

He’s the first to retreat to the bathroom to clean up. He still feels dirty, tainted by it, when Anna does
the same and then snuggles next to him in bed. It’s suffocating.

“Wow, that’s one way to kick of another go around the sun, huh?” Anna says.

“I guess so,” Castiel replies. He’s not superstitious but he wonders if there’s something to that. If the
whole year will be like this. If that means he has Dean close, that’s a trade he’s willing to make. He’s
willing to endure many things for Dean’s sake. It scares him when he considers how much.

“I think it’s gonna be a great year,” Anna says beside him. “I can feel it.”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-Vaginal sex
-Sex toys (not Dean or Cas (SORRY))
-Mentions of homelessness, PTSD
-Product placement

I know this chapter was pretty tame when it came to angst, but we need a little bit of
calm before the storms, don't we? Also I'm not a doctor, I only watch them on TV so
some medical stuff is fictional, though I try to be as accurate as possible.

The book Dean and Sam are discussing is Animal Farm, by George Orwell.
Dean waves goodbye to Missouri and Fergus from the Novak front porch. He’s tired from an hour helping her sort through boxes of clothes to be donated, but it’s a good kind of tired. He watches her continue on her walk with a smile. She was the one to come to the house earlier and asked for his help, probably because she rightly guessed Dean would never get his head out of his ass long enough to do it himself, and he’s glad she did. She served him sweet tea and chatted about nothing of particular weight. Somehow she knew Dean had been homeless (or still was? He’s not sure how that works) but didn’t get weird about it. Maybe she heard from the neighborhood grapevine, or maybe she was just psychic, Dean doesn’t really care. She didn’t treat him any different and getting out of the Novak house was a welcome distraction from angsting about tonight, since it’s Thursday.

He wants to think about fooling around with Cas tonight, so of course all he can think about it that he’s got to tell Cas that he’s planning to leave. Is he really though? He has a destination, but he doesn’t have a route or a timeframe. Does that count?

He sighs as he walks through the front hall to the beautiful kitchen. Cas is taking care of dinner tonight, which is exciting, though Dean’s sorta bummed he’s not cooking. He made dinner again last night and it was a hit. Anna’s slowly letting him add things to the shopping list, which everyone appreciates. He doesn't care if it was just broccoli and chicken, it was more than a fucking salad. He also offered to take over some of the laundry because he’s honestly getting sick of Netflix and daytime TV. Whore to housewife. How the worm turns. As of now, the laundry is done and Cas won’t be home for an while yet so Dean heads back into his room and opens the laptop that found its way in there last night after Anna had responded to Dean’s complaints about boredom with the suggestion of online classes. Dean had argued against it for a while until Cas had agreed. Dean still doesn’t like the idea, especially if it means Cas and Anna paying for more shit he doesn’t deserve or truly need. He’d made it as far as a google search before he’d panicked so thoroughly he started shaking. Maybe this time he might actually check a link.

Before he can even try, his pants start quacking. Dean jumps at the noise and the buzzing from his pocket. He’s started keeping his phone there out of habit, but no one has ever actually called him. Cas or Anna will text once in a while from the store or something but that’s it. But sure as hell, his phone is ringing and showing a number he doesn’t know on the caller ID.

“Hello?” Dean answers unsteadily.

“Dean Winchester?” A familiar female voice replies over the line. “This is Detective Jody Mills. Remember me?”

Dean swallows, his mouth dry and his heart pounding. Fuck. Why are the cops calling him? What do
they know? Or did something happen to Cas or...No. He has to stay calm. “Yeah. I remember. How did you get this number?”

“The hospital had it.” And by the hospital she probably means Anna. Great. “I’ll get right to it. It’s been four weeks, so unless a witness or a victim comes forward in the case against the Hell Hounds involving your assault, we’re going to close the investigation.”

“Oh.”

“Unless you’ve remembered something about who attacked you.” There’s no mistaking the hope in her tone.

Dean shakes his head, even though she can’t see. Even more now he doesn’t want some pointless court case fucking up Cas and Anna’s lives. “Nope. Still nothin’.”

“Dean, I want you to know, there wouldn’t be any consequences, legally, for you if you changed your story. No one would hold it against you or prosecute you for any reason. Even why you were there that night.”

Dean's insides turn to cold mush. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, I was just having drinks with a friend.”

“Your friend will be out of jail for his parole violation soon by the way.”

“His...fuck.” Of course Aaron got popped for hanging around a bunch of known drug dealers and getting in a fight. He was probably safer from Azazel in county anyway. “Any other good news for me?”

“Yeah. The car that was found on the scene—”

“You mean my car.”

“Since no rightful legal owner came forward to claim it, it belonged to the state.”

“What do you mean belonged? Where is she?” There’s a cold sweat all over Dean now.

“Exactly where I thought she’d end up, sold at auction this morning to Singer Salvage.” Detective Mills pauses as Dean catches his breath. “You need to write that down? The owner's a friend and I told him to expect a call about your ride.”

“Singer Salvage, I got it.” Dean doesn’t know why the Detective is being helpful, especially if she knows what kind of person Dean was (is?). But it doesn’t matter. “Thank you, for telling me. I know you didn’t have to.”

“I can open this case back up any time for two years,” Detective Mills replies. “Just so you know.”

“Thanks.” Dean does not want to think about that right now. One shitstorm at a time.

“Hope to talk to you again soon, Dean, you have my number.”

“Bye, Detective.”

Dean doesn’t save her number in the phone. Instead he goes to the laptop and looks up Singer Salvage and dials before he can think better of it. It takes four rings before someone answers.

“Singer. What do you want?” a gruff voice demands and Dean winces. This is going to be even
more fun than he thought.

“Yeah, my car. She’s a—”

“Beat to hell Sixty-seven Impala I just spent my hard earned cash buying and towing here,” Singer snaps. “Jody told me to expect your call.”

“So she explained that the car is mine and I just didn’t have the paperwork to prove it.” Dean’s rapidly losing hope. Singer sounds as ornery as hell and Dean doesn’t have a leg to stand, legally. Anna brought him the keys at least, retrieved from the clothes they cut off him in the ER.

“Only paperwork I saw said the thing used to belong to a…” Dean hears the sound of shuffling paper. “John Winchester.”

“That’s my father. He gave her to me. Sort of. Qe—”

“You ain’t talking about John Winchester that used to work at a mechanic shop down on 65th?” Dean blinks. “Uh, yeah? He left that job like twelve years ago.”

“Well, I have a good memory. As I recall he had two sons, which one are you?”

“Dean. You knew my dad?”

“Just enough to threaten to shoot him if he came near my property again after the last time we talked.”

“Sounds like the old man,” Dean mutters. “Wait…Singer. As in Bobby Singer?”

“The one and only.”

“We've met, I was just a kid but dad took me out to your place to do some work on an old Chevelle. I was six and I climbed up one of the stacks and—”

“And nearly broke your neck. I remember.” Bobby’s voice warms, just a bit. “You get any less stupid since then, boy?”

“Not really.” Bobby laughs, dry and derisive. “But that means you know I’m not lying. That car, it’s my home. Literally my home. Everything I had was inside it and I need to get her back or at least see her.”

“Even if she weren’t trashed, I can’t just give some idjit kid I ain’t seen since last decade a car,” Bobby says and Dean’s shoulders fall in defeat. “But, if you wanna come take a look at her, swing by on the weekend, can’t have you scaring off the customers. We’ll talk.”

“Thank you,” Dean exhales. “I’ll be there around—” There’s a beep and Dean looks down at the phone to see the call has ended. “Fuck.” He falls back onto the mattress, running his hands through his hair and grunting at the pain the movement causes. Like most details of ‘what the fuck happens next’ he’d thought about the Impala in only the vaguest terms. He knew he had to get her back, but he wasn’t thinking about how because that would have meant considering a moment like this. It’s worse than a straight fuck off, because now he gets to spend the next twenty-four-plus hours not knowing and hoping and that never, ever goes well.

He tries to distract himself. He switches the ring on his phone off the quack sound and fucks around with a game while trying to keep the various warring bad thoughts at bay. Does Jody know he’s a
whore? Did she tell Bobby or someone else? What does she think of Cas if that’s the case? What is he going to do if he can’t get his money from Baby? What is he going to do if he can? Just leave when he’s healed? Fuck off to Ohio on the off chance of being part of Sam’s life and never see Cas again? How would he even get there without Baby? Where would he stay? What would he do when the money ran out – which happens so damn fast.

“Dean?”

Dean startles and drops the phone – which had already shut down from inactivity – on the bed. Cas is standing in his door looking very worried. “Hey. Cas, I—”

“I called and looked on the porch and…” Cas swallows and looks down at the floor. “I thought you’d left.”

Cas could just have punched him in the face. It would have hurt less than the look or the fear in his voice. “No, man, no. I was just in my head. Didn’t hear you.”

“Oh. Are you okay?”

“Course not.” Dean doesn’t get up. Instead he scoots over on the bed and makes room for Cas. He’s carrying a greasy bag that smells like burgers and fries, and a huge milkshake. “We sharing the milkshake?”

“It’s peanut butter,” Cas says as he hands Dean the food. He takes off his coat and jacket before climbing in the bed next to Dean. Dean distributes the burgers between the two of them, leaving the frankly obscene amount of fries in the bag and setting the milkshake between them on the bed. “Will you tell me why you’re not okay?” Cas asks after a few bites.

“You ain’t gonna like it.”

“That’s okay.” Dean gives Cas a long look. It’s not surprising that he says it, but that Dean believes him. “Tell me anyway.”

“Got a call from Detective Mills. Said they’re closing the case for now.” Cas makes an interested noise as he bites into another fry. “So that’s whatever it is. But they sold my damn car.”

“Sold it?”

“Auctioned or whatever. Got picked up by this guy, someone I sorta know actually, mean old cuss named Bobby Singer. Owns a salvage yard.” Dean takes a petulant bite of his cheeseburger. It’s so good it almost makes him forget the bullshit he’s dealing with.

“And?” Cas asks through a full mouth.

“And I called him and he said to come talk to him on the weekend and I don’t know if he’s gonna give her back and, fuck, even if he does she’s too busted to drive and I don’t know if he has my stuff or my fucking money and…” Dean stops at the feel of Cas’s hand on his thigh, soothing and gentle. “And no matter what, it’s just shit I have to worry about for when…when I leave.”

“Leave?” Dean can hear the sadness in Cas’s voice. He feels it too.

“I’ve only got a few weeks of recovery left.”

“It’s not like we’re going to dump you on the street once you’re healed, Dean.” He sounds exactly like Anna and it makes Dean smile. They do have some things in common.
“I know, and I really fucking appreciate that, but I do have to start thinking of how I can get…to Sam.”

Cas doesn’t say anything. In his peripheral vision, since Dean can’t fucking bear to look at Cas right now, he sees him roll his lips and breathe deep. “In Ohio.”

“Eventually.”

“But not…immediately?” Dean finally looks at him. One more punch in the gut. “You need employment and reliable transport and…”

“I know. And that’s why I’m freaking.” Dean shakes his head. “That’s just the long-term plan and it’s fucking terrifying.”

“It is.” Cas takes a sullen bite of french fry. Dean can guess Cas’s thoughts are just as worried and sad as his own. “So let’s talk about it later. Not today.”

“In all of our copious time together.”

“Discretion is a cruel bitch.” Cas gives Dean a worried look as he stuffs more French fries in his mouth. “Dude, I ain’t complaining. And I’m not gonna say anything or endanger you or whatever.”

“I know.” Cas sighs and picks up the milkshake but doesn’t take a sip. “When I said I’d loose everything. If people at work – certain people – find out I’m the way I am, I’d be fired. And without me there to protect her from those same people, Anna would be fired as well. And Hannah and Meg and Alfie…It would hurt Mike and Luke’s businesses and I know you don’t care for them but they have families and…”

Dean grabs Cas’s hand, forcing him to look at him. “Cas. You can trust me. I’m not gonna screw up or get you busted. I know this is shitty, all of it.” Granted he didn’t know the goddamn everyone will lose their jobs specifics. “But I don’t want to hurt people. Especially not Anna.” Cas raises an eyebrow. “I like Anna. She’s a good person.”

“But you’re okay with stealing her husband?”

“Cas, you’re a human, not a pair of candle sticks, I can’t steal you.” Cas looks down at their joined hands and squeezes. “I just borrow you once in a while.”

“Why are you doing this, if you know it’s…bad?” Dean doesn’t know if Cas is asking for himself or trying to get out of this.

“Because it doesn’t feel bad when I’m with you,” Dean says with a casual shrug because he doesn’t want this to be more of a moment than it already it. “It feels better than anything, and we aren’t gonna have it for long.”

“It does,” Cas quietly.

They eat in silence for a while until there’s nothing left but dregs if the milkshake and a few bits of fries. Dean moves the detritus to a nightstand and wipes his greasy hands on the comforter before taking slinging a leg over Cas to straddle him. It hurts but Dean tries not to let the discomfort show on his face. He must do a good job because Cas accepts it easily when he kisses him. He still tastes like salt and sweet cream and Dean sinks into the kiss like easing into a warm bath, every muscle relaxing like he’s finally come home.

“Help me out here,” Dean whispers as Cas fingers the edge of his tee. Cas complies and the shirt
hides Dean’s wince when he lifts his arm. Cas kisses at his collarbones and chest, open mouthed and hungry. Cas scoots up and Dean hisses in pain.

“Are you okay?” Cas asks in that tone that lets Dean know he won’t take any bullshit answer.

“Just, hurting a bit. It’s nothing,” Cas glares. “Let me move and…” he shifts so that his weight is on Cas and he has one leg between Cas’s thigh. “Much better.”

It is better. Dean can rut against Cas as he gets hard and kiss his perfect mouth and gorgeous neck at the same time. He unbuttons Cas’s shirt slow, his mouth moving downward with his hands and exploring each inch of exposed skin. He pays the same care to his pants, avoiding Cas’s cock to kiss and bite his way down Cas’s legs. He likes the tickle of hair against his cheek, the feel of muscle under his fingertips. He steps off the bed to get rid of his own remaining clothes and smiles at his work.

“Been a long time since I’ve had you naked. Or in bed for that matter,” Dean purrs as he climbs back on the bed. This time Cas does notice Dean’s grimace. Cas pulls him close, keeping Dean on his good side and runs his hands over Dean’s back.

“Maybe nothing to strenuous tonight.”

Dean rolls his eyes. “You’re not going to break me.”

“No. But I don’t want to hurt you, even a bit.” Cas trails his fingertips over Dean’s cheek so light and soft it gives him goosebumps.

“Fucking hell, Cas.”

Cas tugs him closer, bushing their cocks together and Dean whines at the slight friction. “I didn’t say nothing at all”

“Thank God,” Dean whispers and pulls Cas’s body flush against his as he kisses him. Cas is a blanket of solid heat leaning over him and it’s good. They kiss and touch and grind together with their cocks trapped in the tight space between them until Dean is digging his fingers into to the meat of Cas’s ass, desperate for just a little something more. “Hold up… I have… wanna try a thing.”

“What are you…” Cas’s sex-heavy eyes go wide when Dean fishes the lube from his beside drawer. “Dean.”

“Not that, just trust me.” And Cas does. He leaves Dean manhandle him into the perfect position, half on his side with a pillow wedged behind him and his legs together. He squirts a small dollop of lube on his fingers and raises an eyebrow at Cas’s adorable look of confusion. “Been thinking about this for a while. Every time you come in from a run.”

“What…”

“Keep your knees together,” Dean orders and proceeds to spread the lube on Cas’s glorious thighs. Dean slides his cock into the tight clench Cas’s legs and groans. It’s not the same as fucking Cas, or feeling him inside him, but it’s hot and close and having Cas surround him is it’s own kind of heaven. He locks one hand around Cas’s shoulder and another on his hip as he chases his pleasure, Cas’s cock nudging his belly with each thrust. He comes with a sign as he paints Cas’s thighs and the comforter with his come. It’s messy and risky and insanely good and it’s theirs. He finishes Cas off with his mouth, letting him practically ride his face as he sprawls bonelessly on the bed.

They don’t talk any more about the future after they’re done. They touch and wash the comforter and
make out against the dryer in their skivvies. They watch TV and close to midnight they end up back in Dean’s bed among warm, fresh-smelling sheets. Cas decides he wants to give Dean’s technique a try and he pins Dean gently beneath him and grinds his cock between Dean’s ass cheeks until he spills over Dean’s back with a cry. Dean doesn’t complain about the new mess when Cas turns him over, he’s too happy to feel Cas’s mouth around him. He’s too tired and too selfish and too lost in his sin to care about anything but the pleasure and release and clarity. This is one of the good bits. Stolen, maybe, but good.

Two hours later, as he lies in bed, stuck in an endless loops of ‘what ifs’ and ‘I can’t do that’ he wants that peace back. Cas mentioned something, not tonight, a week or more ago, about Anna not liking the windows open at night. Dean can’t remember if she didn’t like the noise or thought it was a waste of energy with the AC on. All the he remembers is that Cas seemed sad about it. And that’s why Dean’s window is open now, a gentle breeze, still carrying the warmth of the last day of summer, jostling the curtains. He licks his lips, still tasting Cas there and wonders if he’s asleep too. Anna will be home in an hour but as far as Dean knows, Cas never waits up for her. He listens to the crickets and wonders if Cas is listening too.

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“Are you sure you don’t want me to do this? You still look like you’re feeling crappy.” Castiel looks up from his complete lack of coffee and blinks at Anna.

“It’s fine. I want to.” He does still feel somewhat unwell, but not as badly as last night. Or as he had said he felt last night. He’d excused himself from date night sex because of a headache and his stomach, and Anna had looked disappointed but not pushed it. It wasn’t as if he could say he couldn’t get hard because he was too upset by the thought of Dean leaving one day, or that the sex he’d had with Dean, even without penetration, was better than anything he could hope to experience with her. He couldn’t even say that he was just jealous of how much time Anna got with Dean on her day off. That is the reason he’s driving Dean to Singer Salvage today.

“Okay, but both of you take it easy.” Castiel looks up. Dean has rejoined them in the kitchen, pulling on a plaid flannel over his dark tee. Anna, in Dean’s words, dragged him to the store yesterday since he would be getting out more and Dean had insisted on keeping things functional and cheap. He still looks good, if not slightly like a lumberjack.

“I’ll keep him out of trouble,” Dean says with a smile to Anna.

Dean looks less cocky when he’s in the car with Cas. It’s early still and Dean doesn’t say anything when they hit the Starbucks drive-thru. Cas orders them both large coffees and pastries and that makes things better.

“Are you sure about getting there this early?” Cas asks as they pull away.

“Yeah, wanna make sure I have some answers on this bullshit before I talk to Sam. And you gotta get to your thing.”

Cas nods. They head down a back road that takes them out of the into the twilight areas between the city, suburbs and country. Everything is rundown, even the giant “Christ Died to Save Sinners!” billboard. The “Hell is REAL!” on the opposite side has been graffitied to say “Help isn’t real” and Cas believes that just as much.
Singer Salvage sits alone off the road, just bare fields and sparse woods on the side. The morning sun makes it look like a kind of desert, a dried husk of gravel and the shells of cars piled eight high inside the rusted gate. “Well, this place sure went to shit since I was six,” Dean mutters as Cas parks on the drive in front of a weathered house that must have been blue the last time it was painted.

“Is there an office?” Cas asks. They passed what looked like a large garage with bays and tools, but it had been empty.

“Best I remember Bobby did all his business out of his living room. His wife made a fuss about it. Guess we better knock.”

Cas hangs back as they get out and head to the front door of the house – which is decorated, if one can call it that – by hubcaps and other car parts. A large pit bull sits on a chain, napping in the sun and barely blinks when they approach. Cas notes a ramp in place of stairs, which he knows Dean appreciates.

He digs his hands into the pockets of his coat as Dean knocks on the bleached wood of the door. They wait in silence for thirty seconds before Dean tries again. “Bobby? It’s Dean Winchester. We talked on Thursday?” Dean calls, pounding harder.

“Maybe he’s not home?” Cas suggests just as the door swings open.

“What?” It takes a second for Cas’s eyes to adjust downward from where he expected to see Bobby Singer. The bearded man is seated in a wheel chair, glowering at them from under the brim of a baseball cap.

“Good morning,” Cas says cautiously and he can feel Dean roll his eyes.

“Ain’t nothing good about it,” Bobby growls. “Whadaya want?”

“Ain’t nothing good about it,” Bobby growls. “Whadaya want?”

“My damn car,” Dean snaps.

“Well, guess Jody was lyin’ about you being a stubborn sunuvabitch.” Bobby’s eyes fall on Cas and narrow. “Who’s this? Your parole officer?”


“In back.” Bobby sighs, wheeling himself over the threshold and down the ramp. “Fair warnin’, it ain’t pretty.” The dog perks up as Bobby moves close, whining and wagging her tail. “You think you’re getting a scratch for letting them in?” Bobby asks, even as he knuckles between the animal’s ears. “Useless.”

Cas can tell it’s hard for Bobby to wheel over the gravel but knows better than to offer help. Dean follows behind with Cas taking up the rear until they head around the back of the garage building.

“Fuck,” Dean breathes as they round a corner and a huge, black car comes into view. “Baby, what’d they do to you?”

Dean rushes to the car like it’s a wounded friend. Cas has never seen ‘her’ before, but he can understand Dean’s distress. The Impala is pockmarked with ugly gashes, scratches and dents, every window and light smashed, the chrome fender hanging on by threads. The trunk and a few of the doors have been hit so hard they’re concave and every tire has been slashed. Dean wrenches open the hood with great effort and groans at the sight. Castiel doesn’t know much about cars, but he’s
fairly sure the hoses shouldn’t be torn and sticking up like that.

“Fuck,” Dean repeats.

“Like I said, not pretty. Barely enough in good condition to sell for parts,” Bobby says.

Dean gives him a murderous look. “Then why the hell did you buy her?”

“’Cause an asshole mechanic I used to know had a real pretty ’67 that this piece of crap reminded me of,” Bobby spits right back and Dean bristles. “Didn’t think I’d be getting the actual same car.”

“Well, how much do you want for her?”

“How much you got?”

Cas is intrigued by the lack of hesitancy in the exchange. Dean levels a look at Bobby as he grabs a crowbar from a dusty work bench and wedges it into the trunk. It comes open easily, too easily for Dean’s taste if Cas can judge by his expression. Dean’s frown only deepens as he rummages through the trunk with increasing urgency.

“Where the hell is my stuff” Dean bellows at last.

“You mean all the crap that got cleaned out of there by the police?” Bobby asks, smug as can be. “In a box in the bay. But I don’t think you’ll be paying for this girl with some jeans and old pictures.”

“What about an envelope? Big. Full of –” Dean stops himself as Bobby slowly shakes his head. “God fucking—” Dean turns and gives the airless back tire a vicious kick then hisses in pain.

“I’ll pay for it. Whatever you paid at auction,” Cas says. Dean and Bobby turn to him, equal amounts of shock on their faces.

“Cas, no.”

“This is your car. I know how much it – she – means to you.”

“What the hell do you want with her anyway?” Bobby asks more to Dean than Cas, but some of the derision fading from his voice. “You and your friend here gonna fix her up?”

“She’s all I’ve got of my family, okay? And yeah, I kept her running fine for the last few years, I can fix her.” Dean turns to Cas. “But you do not have to pay for this Cas, I swear. I…”

“So, your daddy teach you the trade?” They look back to Bobby, who has a discerning look on his face. “Or do you actually know what you’re doing?”

“I ain’t certified or nothing, but I can fix her.”

“Engine work ain’t body work. You know anything about that?”

Castiel glances over to Dean. He looks offended and defensive. “I can learn.”

“And I guess you’re gonna pay for this on the job training?” Bobby says, looking at Cas.

“If I need to,” Cas replies, refusing to be intimidated.

“Well, I ain’t gonna let you throw money at some kid who may or may not know what he’s doing,” Bobby says and presses on as Dean opens his mouth to protest. “So you can pay for the car and the
“parts when she’s fixed.”

“What?” Dean says, blinking at the grizzled man.

“You think Mr. Sensible Camry has the shit you need for a job like this? You can use the tools around here, try not to get in the way.”

“What?” Dean repeats, looking to Cas for guidance that he can’t give.

“Did I stutter? Come weekdays, I don’t care how you get here but you got to bring your own damn food. No drugs. I don’t care if you smoke.” Bobby’s already started rolling back to the house, waving Cas and Dean away. “Your shit is in the bay right by the door. It ain’t locked.”

“Wait! Why the hell are you doing this?” Dean yells, arms raised in confusion.

“What is he even doing?” Cas asks under his breath.

“’Cause when your dad wasn’t on the bottle he was a good man, and I need a half decent mechanic around for when my idjit employee is too stoned to sell my stuff on the internet,” Bobby calls back over his shoulder as he mounts the ramp back up to his house. “Now get off my property or I’ll set the hound on you.”

Bobby slams the door and the dog whines.

“Did he just…hire you?” Cas asks.

“I have no fucking idea,” Dean sighs. “But it’s a good thing right?”

“I think?” Castiel looks back towards the garage and the small corner of the car they can see. He’s honestly not sure what to think. Dean may have his car back, but he has to fix it himself. He doesn’t have the money he stored there and that will put a dent in Dean’s plans to leave. So would having something resembling a job in Lawrence. Still, it’s a change and it leaves Castiel unsettled.

“Guess I’ll see what Sammy thinks,” Dean mutters. “Still fucking pissed about that money,” Dean adds, kicking at the dirt as the head back to the Camry. “Although…” Dean trails off and shakes his head.

“What?”

“Don’t know if it feels right, you know? Paying you and Bobby back with money I got from…that.”

“You did what you had to survive,” Cas says automatically. He’s never thought less of Dean because of his past or profession, but he’s not sure Dean believes him when he says it.

“Still,” Dean shrugs as he buckles himself into the passenger set. “Sorta like blood money. Or I guess in this case-”

“Please do not say what you’re about to say.”

Dean’s breaks into a brilliant grin and a warm laugh bubbles behind it. “You thought it too.”

“You’re terrible.”

“Well, you like my terrible, so what’s that say about you?”

Cas rolls his eyes and attempts to suppress his own smile. He fails of course. He fails at most
attempts at control around Dean, but finds that lately he doesn’t mind.

The drive into downtown after he drops Dean off at home, with instructions to tell Sam hello when they speak, is even more depressing than usual. Maybe it’s the approach of fall. The few trees that dot the streets have started to change, removing the last few traces of verdant life from the landscape. The people seem colder. Even the air feels empty, foreboding, as he gets out of his car and trudges into the mission.

Hannah waves to him when he enters and he joins her in a corner with Chuck and another man he doesn’t recognize. Chuck seems slightly terrified of the newcomer.

“…are you saying you don’t support the statement or just disagree on certain points?” The stranger asks Chuck pointedly.

“I just don’t think it a good message to send to kids, or anyone.” Chuck says. “The church should be welcoming and—”

“The Church must uphold and promote the revealed word and will of God in the world,” the man snaps back. Castiel doesn’t know what they’re talking about but the tone makes his skin crawl. They’re the kind of words he’s grown used to from Zachariah and Uriel, but there’s no smarm or threat in this man’s voice. Only conviction.

“I think we’ll have to disagree on that,” Chuck says with firmness that Castiel would never have suspected.

“We’re here to help the poor anyway, not debate policy,” Hannah interjects, clearly uncomfortable as well. “Good to see you, Castiel.”

“You too,” Cas says before Hannah surprises him with a stiff hug.

“Castiel, my cousin has told me quite a lot about you,” the stranger says, jogging Cas’s memory.

“Hannah has mentioned you as well, I didn’t think you were moving to Lawrence so soon,” Cas says, shaking the cousin’s hand.

“I’m not fully moved, but I wanted to take some time to see what sort of opportunities for ministry there are here. Hannah spoke highly of…this.” He waves at the mission around him. “I’ll be here full time in a few weeks.”

“I’m glad you’re taking and interest. We do good work, I hope,” Castiel says. It doesn’t seem like he’s very impressed. “And I’m very sorry, but I can’t recall your name.”

“It’s alright. My name is Ishim.”

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
-Frottage
-Intercurral Sex
-Shameless indulgence of the author's love for Misha Collin's thighs.

Also...dunDunDUN!!! Ishim is back. The statement he and Chuck are discussing is "the
Nashville” statement which is an odious piece of homophobic and transphobic shit. The continued existence of crap like that is one of the reasons this fic exists. To any young queer people reading, please know that you are valid and loved and wonderful and brave.
Chapter Notes

Okay. Hi. This one took a lot out of me, and I whines about it a lot, so thanks to everyone who listened to my various crises on this chapter, especially Nicky. This baby is LONG, so...enjoy that.

There are warnings for this chapter, not just for sexual elements, so...check those out if you're worried.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“This feels like the first day of school,” Dean says from the passenger seat of the Camry. He doesn’t mention that the last time he got dropped off at school his dad had been so hungover he missed the turn. And forgot to give Dean money for lunch. “Paper bag lunch and everything.”

“He did tell you to bring food,” Cas says, squinting dubiously at Bobby’s house through the windshield. “Are you sure about this?”

“I dunno, man,” Dean sighs. “He said to show up. I can at least get an idea what kind of work Baby needs. Maybe start on the engine.”

“Please don’t hurt yourself.”

Dean wants to argue but Cas has a good point. He’s not one hundred percent yet, not even close, and auto work ain’t exactly easy on healing bones. “Yeah, yeah, I’ll take it easy.”

“Call if you need me to come earlier or you can use that thing Anna put on your phone to get a ride.”

“Or I can take the damn bus like a normal person.” Dean’s not going to tell Cas that using the app seems indulgent, because that’s dumb. Though it’s not like using the cash Cas gave him for a bus is any less embarrassing.

“That’s a long walk.”

“I’ll be fine.” He’s not sure that’s true, but since he Anna and Cas are squares that won’t let him borrow a car until he’s ‘legally allowed to drive it,’ they’re stuck carpooling. “See you this afternoon.”

“Good luck.”

Dean considers leaning over the gearshift and kissing the idiot. But they’re not like that. Anna’s the one that gets to kiss him goodbye and take care of him. Not Dean. He settles for squeezing Cas’s hand. It’s soft and intimate in its own way and enough of a boost to get him out the door. He doesn’t walk up the ramp until Cas’s car drives out of sight. Being here brings back memories of a world that’s long gone. Like the pictures in the bottom of the box of his things that Dean hasn’t got the balls to look at yet. Faded images of the dead and the lost. Bobby’s whole property has the same feel, like a mausoleum. Dean doesn’t want to disturb anything, so he takes his time, pausing to pet the dog and look up at the overcast sky.
“You just gonna lollygag out there or come in?”

Dean spins to see Bobby at the open front door. The dog jumps up, wagging her whole body at the sight of him. “I’m invited in this time?”

Bobby makes a harrumphing noise that Dean takes as a yes and wheels away from the open door. Dean gives the dog one more pat before following inside. The windows are all either dirty or covered, so not much light gets it, but the state of the place is still evident. It’s the kind of messy that has a purpose, some scheme to the piles of books and papers on every surface that only makes sense to the owner. The number of empty whiskey bottles is troubling, but they complement the various car parts strewn about.

“This place went to shit,” Dean says as he looks around. Bobby glares at him from the desk that take us half of the living room.

“Don’t mean to offend your delicate sensibilities, Emily Post.”

“Last I remember you had a wife,” Dean says, cutting right to it.

“Last you remember I had two working legs too,” Bobby snarls back. Dean doesn’t let the anger scare him and just keeps staring Bobby down, waiting for him to confirm what he already guesses. “Lost both the same day. Not that it’s any of your damn business.”

“What happened?” Dean asks and gets another glare for his trouble.

“Drunk driver. No need for a comment on the irony.”

“Sorry.”

Bobby shrugs. He’s heard it all before, Dean’s sure. “What happened to you?” Bobby indicates the lower half of Dean. He’d thought he was doing a decent job hiding the limp. Maybe not so much.

“Angry biker with a bat.” Dean’s shrug echoes Bobby’s.

“He angry about this?” Bobby pulls open a creaky desk drawer and deposits a thick and very familiar envelope on the desk. Dean feels the floor go out from under him.

“Shit. Why didn’t you…”

“Didn’t want Mr. Sensible Camry seeing if it turned out this was something that’d get you in deeper trouble than you are already are.” Bobby opens the envelope and runs a thumb over the stack of cash. “No law-abiding citizen hides cash like this. Or pisses off Hell Hounds enough to get made into a human piñata neither.”

“It’s not drug money,” Dean says before he can think and Bobby gives him a look that makes him want to kick himself. “You ain’t gonna believe me if I say I stole it, are you?”

“Not after what Jody told me.”

Dean would take a moment to think about what the shame he feels about his past means, since it’s a new sort of feeling, but he doesn’t have that sort of time. “I did what I had to.”

“Does your boyfriend know?”

“Cas?” Dean panics more on Cas’s behalf than his own. “Cas is married. He…”
“Don’t bullshit a bullshitter, boy.”

Dean tenses and glowers at the older man. “Fine. How the fuck do you think Cas and I met?”

To Dean’s shock, Bobby laughs. It’s quick and the sound is a decrepit and dark as the rest of the house, but it’s real. “Hiding all sorts of things under that ugly coat, ain’t he?”

“Please don’t tell anyone.”

“Who the hell would I blab to? I don’t give a rat’s ass where your dicks have been, or continue to be.”

“Cas is…like I said, he’s married. And I…” Dean sighs. He doesn’t know what to say so he flops into a dusty arm chair. “I don’t know. It’s all fucked.”

“Is giving you this gonna make things better or worse?” Bobby gestures to the cash and Dean’s pulse jumps.

“Worse, probably.”

“Well, I’ll hold on to it for now. See how much fixing up your damn ‘baby’ costs me then we can renegotiate later.” Dean nods, he’s glad the money won’t be burning a hole in his pocket at least. Dean looks around again, trying to make out the outlines of the same room in his memory. There was sunshine coming through the windows then, and Dad had asked for a second slice of pie from Bobby’s wife and smiled.

“Jesus, sometimes I think what my dad would say if he knew how I get by,” Dean mutters.

“Can’t imagine that would be pretty,” Bobby replies. “John was never a fan of moral gray areas, except when they applied to him. He ain’t around anymore?”

“I don’t know,” Dean answers. He pulls the Impala’s keys from his pocket. “Two years ago he was just…gone. Came back here to wait because I didn’t know where to look or if he wanted to be found.”

“What about your brother?”

“Foster care in Ohio. Gonna try to get up there if I can.” Dean thumbs the key. “But I dunno. I got a better support system down here or whatever.”

“Well, if you can tell your ass from tailpipe, and fix up that girl well enough, I’ll see what I can do for you here.” Bobby seems to have decided the conversation is over, returning Dean’s money to a drawer and pulling a legal pad from a pile.

“Why?”

“Well, Ash – who you’ll meet once he returns to this plane of existence from whatever he gets up to on the weekend – is leaving for motherfucking MIT in a few months. I’ll need a new idjit to help me reach the high shelves.”

“No, why me?” Dean leans forward on his elbows. His eyes are tired, tufts of gray visible from under his hat and in his beard. “I remember my dad from back then too, don’t know if he was the sort of guy I’d like enough to give his kid a job.”

Bobby shrugs. “Well, Jesus loved the cripples and whores, figured we all gotta stick together. No
one else is going to watch out for us.”

“Hey, I’m getting better. On both fronts.” Bobby waves Dean off with the pad of paper. “You’ll need this. Figure out what you need and start checking the inventory. I got work to do. And fill up Tori’s water bowl. If you don’t mind company and drool on your pants, you can let her off the chain.”

“Tori?”

“Named after the greatest actress of our generation, you got a problem with it?” Dean shakes his head. He’s starting to like Bobby.

“Okay, people, huddle up.”

Castiel and Hannah look up from their sandwich station to see Chuck standing alone on the scuffed linoleum of the basement floor. Hesitantly, they wipe their hands and join him, which is enough of a signal for others to follow suit.

“Great, thank you,” Chuck says. He tries to clap his hands together and fails thanks to the pens and index cards he’s holding. “So, today I have a new assignment for you.”

“Another?” Uriel rumbles from the outskirts of the circle. His arms are crossed and his face is deadly serious. He had objected vocally to last week’s ‘homework’ of learning the names and stories of at least four people on their rounds to deliver food. Castiel had appreciated Chuck encouraging more involvement, but both Uriel and Hannah’s cousin had expressed quiet outrage that the goal was to get to know the poor, not necessarily to minister to them. His agreement with Uriel had soured Castiel further on Ishim, and he was relieved that he’d returned to Chicago to finish up his affairs. He’d mentioned getting back a wife and child (with a cold look to Hannah) and Castiel wasn’t terribly excited to meet them or for the man’s return.

“Yes. Another. And, spoiler, there will be one next week too,” Chuck replies. “What I’d like is for you to speak to some of the people you meet, hopefully some of the ones you contacted last week, and ask specifically what they feel they’re lacking or need the most.”

“And what will we do with this information,” Uriel asks, voice dripping with doubt.

“Write it down on a card and bring those back. Then we’re going to compare all the answers and make a list of key supplies and provide them.”

“Who is going to pay for that?” Daniel asks. Chuck blinks as if it’s not a question he considered.

“I assumed you all were open to making some contributions,” Chuck mutters. “Sandwiches are nice but, uh, Winter is coming, as they say.”

Castiel looks around the room, waiting for the joke to land with someone. Castiel sighs. “Maybe we’re hoping the Lannisters repay some debts.”

Chuck’s face lights up. “I knew someone in this state had HBO!”
“Or we could do a fundraiser to pay for it,” Castiel suggests to the grim-faced crowd. “Spread the cost among among the congregation. Maybe at the fall harvest gathering in a few weeks.”

“That is a great idea!” Chuck crows and Castiel knows in his soul that he’ll be stuck organizing it. “So with that in mind, everyone take some cards and let’s get to work.” Of course, getting to work means that Chuck joins Castiel and Hannah with an expectant smile minutes later. “Great work, Cas. Tiel. Thank you.”

“Cas is fine.” He hands Chuck some baggies to start filling with food.

“Who are the Lannisters?” Hannah asks.


“It’s great!” Chuck beams.

Hannah looks dubious. “I believe I read an article denouncing it for violence, incest and fornication.”

“Well, yeah, that’s, uh, part of it,” Chuck stammers. “But there are also dragons. Those are super neat, right, Cas?”

“I’ve just read the books.”

Chuck’s shoulders fall. “Well, it’s cool. Okay. And you can watch, you know, naughty stuff and still be a good Christian. In my professional opinion.”

“I’ll look it up,” Hannah says to both their surprise.

“Don’t tell your cousin,” Chuck mutters and Hannah gives him an arch look. “Sorry. Just…”

“He comes on strong.” Castiel finishes for him.

“He does. I’m sorry,” Hannah sighs. “We don’t agree on many things.”

“He wrote a letter of concern to Zachariah,” Chuck shoots back. “Didn’t think I was taking a hard enough stance on deviancy. Friggin’ douchebag. Sorry. Again.”

“He wrote a letter?” Castiel asks, appalled. “Because you aren’t an asshole?”

“Castiel!” Hannah whispers, scandalized. “Ishim is just following his faith. He means well.”

“No, if he wants to tell kids and other people that they’re freaks or abominations because they don’t match with what a bunch of old jerks think they should be, he’s actively hurting people.” Chuck takes a tense breath. “Sorry. I know you guys probably think he’s not wrong and I get if you want to report me too but I just don’t think he’s the model Christian.”

“He had a friend. An old friend from college,” Hannah says, stiffly, her eyes down cast. “In college their name was Benjamin. Then she changed it. And other things about herself. And she was…well, it ended badly. He thinks he’s saving people from a fate like hers.”

Castiel shivers at the thought. That’s the kind of horror story about certain ‘lifestyles’ he hears all the time from his family and from the pulpit. It’s somewhat amazing that Chuck looks appalled by it and isn’t giving the knowing nod others pastors might.

“That’s awful, and I’m sorry for his friend. But…maybe if she’d had less shitty people around or just someone saying she wasn’t an affront to God or something, it could have been better.”
“Do you really think that?” Hannah asks, tilting her head curiously at Chuck.

“Yes, I…Ow!” Chuck yelps at the kick in the shins Castiel, gives him but it shuts him up just in time for Uriel's approach.

“Mr. Shurley. Hannah.” Uriel nods by way of greeting, taking a few index cards from Chuck’s pile on the table. “Castiel. How is the family?”

Castiel hates everything about the question. The threat to Anna and Dean underlying it as well as the clear judgment against Hannah and Chuck for remaining unmarried. He knows Uriel has a wife, but he just sees her very rarely. She, in Uriel’s words, keeps to her role. “Very well. Thank you.”

“Good. See you tomorrow.”

Hannah and Chuck are quiet as Uriel walks away and Castiel does not attempt to rekindle the conversation. He knew Chuck was progressive, in some ways, but not like this and he feels a target forming on his back just by association. What if someone – that ever-present amorphous someone – heard or saw? And if Chuck has those ideas, what did he think of Castiel? The thought of someone knowing or even suspecting the truth sends acid surging up into Castiel’s throat, searing and sour. How would people look at him if they knew that just two nights ago he’s spent an obscene amount of time worshiping another man's cock and hole and being adored in kind in several rooms of the house he shared with his wife in the eyes of God. There hadn’t even been convincing or rationalizing, just doing. Taking while he could before Dean disappeared from him forever.

Again, the thought of Dean’s loss had hung like a shadow over his time with Anna last night. He’d managed to get hard but hadn’t finished, Dean’s excitement about making progress on his car in his first week and the possibilities of real work for Bobby had drown out any arousing memories. Anna hadn’t said anything but she had been tense for the whole week as well. Working late and then dragging Cas to family dinners and other functions every free night. At least the few days he’d had driving Dean to Bobby’s had been a treat of sorts. It wasn’t even about sex, just the ease and comfort of being with Dean alone. Fifteen simple minutes in the car three days a week. Chit-chat and laughter and a small wisp of heaven. He’d been sad to learn Bobby was able to drive Dean home. Maybe he could convince Dean he didn’t need that every day. It kept him from going mad, those few minutes. Otherwise, he's been tired and torn, barely able to keep focus on anything. The threat, even imagined, of discovery is at least enough to snap him back to reality today.

He keeps things detached and professional as he works with Hannah and Chuck, giving them time to speak among themselves without even registering the conversation. They separate at the camp, Chuck discussing something with Rufus as Castiel makes his weekly check with Martin. He's back to his old spot and far more lucid than Castiel has seen him before. He, like most of the people Castiel talks to, asks for a new tent and sleeping bag for the coming winter, as well as socks.

“Uh, Cassiel?”

Castiel turns to the source of his misspoken name: a man of medium height with large brown eyes and a jittery demeanor. If he’s a common guest at the camp, Castiel doesn’t recognize him. “Castiel. With a t,” he replies. “Do I know you?”

“No. But according to Rufus you might now a friend of mine. Dean?” Castiel tenses, mind racing.

“What do you want?” Castiel asks, low and stern.

“I’m not out to hurt him, I swear!” the man says, raising his hands. “My name is Aaron. I was there the night he got fucked up. I was the one that talked to the cops and everything!”
“The drug dealer, you mean, who is responsible for what happened as well.”

Aaron’s eyes fall as he deflates. “Look, man, I feel like shit for what happened. It wasn’t all me though. Dean was trying to help and it got out of hand. And I did 30 days in county for the PV so… Sorry.”

“What do you want?” Castiel feels very little pity for Aaron, based on the small amount Dean has revealed about him.

“I just want to know if Dean is okay. He’s a good guy.”

“He’s fine. Safe.”

“If you talk to him, wherever he is…” Aaron lowers his voice and leans close. “Tell him to stay there, okay? The Hell Hounds, the ones that did this? They’re out for blood. They don’t like unfinished business or lose ends. Dean isn’t safe on the streets anymore.”

“He wasn’t safe before.”

Aaron recoils at the anger in Castiel’s voice. “I know. I’m trying to make up for what happened. Believe me.”

“I’ll let him know.” Aaron gives a weak smile and departs, heading away from the camp to who-knows-where and leaving Castiel with an even deeper pit in his stomach than before.

“Everything okay?”

Cas turns to see Chuck looking worried and unhelpful. “It’s fine,” Cas says.

“Are you sure? Because, if you need to talk, I’m here.”

Castiel considers it. People are looking for Dean to hurt him and that’s terrifying. If he tells Dean, that’s just another reason for him to leave Lawrence, but I could also be another reason for him to stay with Castiel, close and safe. He doesn’t know what to do and everything about what Chuck has said and done since they’ve met makes him think this man might actually show understanding. But what would be the use of understanding from someone so far from God? It would just be another comforting lie and Castiel can make those all on his own.

“It’s fine. I’m fine,” he repeats. He turns and starts the walk back to the mission. He’s not sure if Hannah and Chuck are following and he can’t care.

Tomorrow it will be October. He can feel the chill of it creeping into the air, the threat of rain like the world holding its breath before the storm begins.

“I got a pie for dessert too.”

Dean looks up at Anna from where he’s distributing produce in the fridge. “An entire pie?”

“I always see the stand at the farmer’s market and I figured since it was the last of the season I should try it.” Anna’s smile looks a bit forced, like the pie is an apology for something Dean doesn’t know
about. “Cas said you liked pie.”

“That’s kind of an understatement.”

“Then this will be good. I figure I owed you since you’re making dinner.”

“You bought the food, I think that evens out. Friggin’ three-dollar onions deserve good treatment.” Dean’s actually kind of sad that the farmer’s market is done for the year. He knows what a chick that makes him, but what the fuck ever. Anna brings home good stuff and she’s finally letting him cook it. Not like she’d ever take him along, he thinks and that’s fine too. He doesn’t think he could stand watching a bunch of soccer mom’s load their BMWs with all the rainbow swiss chard they can carry when two miles away he knows people that eat out of dumpsters on the regular.

“Maybe I wanted to suck up to you.”

Dean turns to Anna. She sounds nervous more than joking or flirtatious and that’s weird. He’s been caught up in Baby and Bobby and Cas so much he hasn’t really noticed Anna at all. Cas keeps it mostly quiet but Dean can usually tell on the morning after if Cas was able to perform. This morning Cas’s face had been grim and Dean spent the morning and his call with Sam wondering what had gone wrong. Dean knows he can get Cas’s motor running, but maybe it’s not enough? Still, he’d been thinking of only one half of the couple.

“What’s up?” Dean asks, closing the fridge.

“I’m guessing you told Cas you’re planning on heading to Ohio when you can.” Anna crosses her arms over herself and leans on the counter. It makes her look small, closed off and defended.

“Uh, yeah. Did he say something about that?”

Anna shakes her head. “No, he’s just been a little off. He doesn’t do well with uncertainty.”

Dean’s not sure if that’s true, but if that’s where Anna’s going in her mind he’d not going to steer her to the truth. “Me too. And things are pretty damn uncertain. Sorry.”

"I know you keep talking about when you're going to leave, but--"

This is the conversation he’s been dreading. Anna wants to know when he’s going to book it. “Once I get some cash I’ll—”

“I think you should make a firm plan to at least stay through the holidays.”

Dean blinks. “What?”

“I know you want to get moving, but you’ve just started this new…thing with Mr. Singer, and you have to actually start earning some money and get work history and we won’t be able to get your license for a few weeks and…” Anna shakes your head. “And you shouldn’t be alone somewhere strange at the holidays, it’s not right.”

Dean can only stare. That’s at least three months in this house with Cas right there and that might kill both of them. “Anna…”

“We need you here.” Anna looks away when she says it, so it makes even less sense.

“You what?”

“Things are better with you here. It’s more of a home and just…It’s better.” Dean sorta wants to
laugh, because it’s not like he’s actively involved in Anna’s husband cheating on her under her nose or anything. He’s not sure how anything he does makes life better there at all. Anna can’t hate laundry that much.

“I gotta think about it,” Dean says dumbly. Putting that much of a hold on getting back to Sam fills him up with guilt.

“Of course. I just think it would be the best.” Anna looks pleased, like she’s already gotten a yes and before Dean can make more weak-ass arguments the garage door rumbles open. Cas enters a moment later, the same grim expression as usual on his face. Unlike usual, it doesn’t lift when he sees Dean.

“Hey, babe, we were just talking about you,” Anna says.

“Why?”

“Wondering where you were,” Dean says, picking up the lie. “Bit late for you to get home.”

“We had a longer debrief than usual. And I’ve been press-ganged into helping organize a fundraiser for the homeless outreach,” Cas mutters.

“Really?” Anna says.

“Let me guess, you had a bright idea and ended up the one doing all the work to make it happen?” Dean tries and Cas finally cracks a tired smile. “Knew it.”

“Do you want to help?” Cas asks. “We have lists of supplies to focus on but your input would be helpful.”

Dean considers protesting. He doesn’t like feeling that he’s just a source of information, a means for some part time crusaders to do their weekly good deeds more efficiently, but this is Cas. Cas is trying to help and if Dean can be close to him for a brief time while he does that, all the better. “Yeah sure. I gotta look at your wife’s stupid car first. Again.”

“It’s fine,” Anna groans

“You said the check engine light has been on for five days,” Dean argues.

“When was the last time you got an oil change?” Cas adds.

“I don’t know, Easter?”

Dean grimaces. “Not too bad.”

“Last year.”

“And they won’t let me drive a car.” Dean shakes his head. “Come on, Cas.”

“Why me?” Cas asks, squinting.

“Because this is what men do, we go into the garage and make noise and fix things. Move it.”

Anna’s giggle doesn’t cover up Cas’s powerful sigh.

“See, you’re indispensable,” Anna smiles and squeezes his shoulder as he passes by her.

Cas and Anna aren’t very touchy-feely people. Dean doesn’t know if it’s a Church thing or
incompatible sexualities thing or just how they are, but they don’t touch each other much when he’s around. Sure Cas touches him a fuckton when they’re alone, but when it’s the three of them or him and Anna – hands are kept to themselves so that makes the touch even more jarring. Anna’s hand is warm and sears his skin and it feels wrong.

He waits until he’s out of the house, the garage door closed behind them, to touch Cas. Just a brush of his hand on the small of Cas’s back. Nothing funny. It’s an experiment, really, as much as it is an attempt to balance out the dissonance Anna’s touch created. And it’s successful. It’s grounding, calming. Cool water on a hot day.

“Everything else okay?” Dean asks as Cas looks fondly in his direction. “No problems downtown?”

“Not really. Anything interesting here while I was gone?”

“Not really.”

———

“So what’s with the new schedule?”

Castiel looks up from putting on his coat to see Meg staring at him, her dark eyes calculating. “I don’t know what you mean.”

“You’re not so Johnny on the dot lately, and you’re actually leaving early today.”

“What’s wrong with that? You’re leaving early.”

“I’m a shitty employee and you know that.” Meg shrugs on her jacket with a smirk and follows Castiel out the door.

“Sometimes I like to get out early, that’s my business.”

“Uh uh, Clarence, something is up.”

Castiel sets his jaw and keeps his eyes forward. “You know I hate that movie, it’s over-long and saccharine and—”

“What’s going on with you, Cas? You’re up and down so much lately I can’t even keep track and your work is suffering.”

“My work is exemplary,” Cas scoffs.

“Then why did you completely forget to file the claims for a patient?”

Castiel freezes and turns to her. “What?”

“Kelly Klein. I know you probably didn’t want to deal with it because baby-murder or whatever, but you being squeamish isn’t an excuse. I fixed it and got it all filed after she called in with questions, but that could have cost her thousands on top of the hurt of losing a pregnancy.” Meg sounds indignant, but more concern than suspicious.

“You-you fixed it?” Castiel stammers, wondering if Uriel knows and what that means for Dean…
sh*t.

“Yes, I saved your ass. Your welcome. But I’m worried,” Meg presses on. “What’s tying you in knots? Your asshole family or your uptight wife? Or are things getting weird with the ‘house guest?’

“Dean has nothing to do with it,” Cas says too forcefully and Meg’s perfect dark eyebrows go high. Castiel sighs. He just told her that Dean has everything to do with it.

“Cas…”

“How many times do I have to tell people I’m fine before they believe me?” Castiel growls and pushes out the door into the October air.

“Saying something over and over again doesn’t make it true!” Meg calls after him. “Cas, I’m your friend I just want to help.”

“You can’t help,” Castiel snaps, rounding on her. Meg doesn’t even flinch. “My personal life if my own. I apologize if I’ve concerned you by letting it affect our work, but I can assure you it’s under control.”

“Are you sure?” Meg asks, low and doubtful.

He is. Despite his conflicts about Dean leaving, things are under control. He has an easy outlet for lusts and in the long run this will help his marriage because it allows him to be the man worthy of Anna at least. He may not love her enough not to do this, but he is trying to make his weakness into something good. “Yes. I’m sure.”

“If you need me I’m—”

“Here if I want to talk. Yes. Join the line.” Castiel scowls as he gets in the car and scowls the entire ride home. The sight of the empty garage pops the anger pressing in Castiel’s chest like a balloon. It’s Thursday. He had left work early because he was coming home to Dean. Walking into his house from a day at work used to feel like moving from one prison to another. Not now. Not when he walks into the smell of spices and the sound of rock and roll coming from the tiny speakers of Dean’s laptop. Dean is swaying and singing along to ‘Faithfully’ by Journey as he stirs something in a skillet and it makes Cas so happy for one incandescent second that tears spring to his eyes.

Home. He’s home.

He breaths and gets a hold of himself, laughing as Dean leans back to howl the crescendo of the song, then jumps when he sees Cas there.

“Jesus, Cas! That’s creepy.”

“I didn’t know you could sing,” Cas replies. “You have a nice voice.”

“Usually need a few beers in me to really get going.” Dean shrugs and turns his concentration to the food. Maybe the blush on his cheeks is from the heat of the stove, but Cas doubts it.

Cas hangs his coat, drifts back into Dean’s space and makes a show of looking over Dean’s shoulder into the skillet of sausage and peppers before pressing a soft kiss to the back of Dean’s neck. “I like listening to you.”

He feels Dean still then shiver as he whispers in his ear, his lips barely grazing the lobe as he does. “Definitely creepy.”
“This looks good.” Cas leans against Dean before grabbing a slice of browning sausage from the pan and popping it into his mouth over Dean’s protests.

“It’s chicken sausage, which is stupid because sausage should be pig, but it’s still pretty tasty. Hey!” Dean sways at Cas’s hand with his spoon. “Give me two minutes and I’ll have it on an actual plate for you! Go get us drinks or something, you barbarian.”

“You just called chicken sausage stupid, and I’m the barbarian?”

“Shut up or I don’t feed you at all.”

Dinner is easy. Talking. Laughing. Just being together. It’s usually easy, lately. They talk about Dean’s second week at Bobby’s. He’s made decent progress on repairing the Impala’s motor and think she might even start sometime soon. He had to find or order new parts and somehow that turned into doing a full inventory check for Bobby with the help of the other ‘employee’ at Singer Salvage, a person named Ash who sounds so improbable Castiel is inclined to think he’s an elaborate joke until he meets him in person. A man who doesn’t own anything with sleeves, insists the government is spying on him and is somehow a computer genius that makes enough for Bobby selling things through a website is certainly impressive.

“It sounds like you’re getting back enough strength to start on the body soon,” Cas says, poking at the few remaining bits of rice on his plate.

“Yeah, soon I won’t need to carpool. If everything goes okay at the DMV tomorrow.”

“I like driving you,” Cas says quietly to his plate.

“Yet you still keep saying no to pulling over and fooling around.”

Cas’s cheeks heat. “I only say no because we would never make it to work if I did and that would be unproductive in the long term.”

“So…Speaking of, uh, terms. Has Anna talked to you?”

Cas looks up, brows knit. “About what?”

“My plans and shit.” Cas shakes his head, dread growing. “She asked me to stay through the holidays.”

“What?”

“Okay, guess she didn’t clear that with you.” Dean shakes his head, and blows out a breath. “Great communication you two got going.”

“When did she suggest this?” Cas asks, dumbfounded.

“Saturday?” Dean grimaces, shoulders high and voice unsteady. “Don’t be pissed. I wanted to talk about it with you alone. When we had time.”

“I saw a friend of yours on Saturday. A man named Aaron.” Dean squints at him in confusion. “I didn’t bring it up to you for the same reasons.”

“Um. Okay. So great communication going for everyone. What’d he want?”

“To tell me that the people that hurt you still want to hurt you. You’re a loose end, I guess.” It fills him with a certain cold dread just to say it aloud. “And I don’t know what that means for you.
You’re certainly not safe if you go back to your old stomping grounds or—"

“Or fucking people for money.”

Cas shudders. He hadn’t even considered that was an option for Dean. “Are you thinking…”

“No,” Dean swallows. “I don’t want to. I can’t. Not if I’m gonna get my life together.” Dean bites his lip, unaware of the tension that goes out of Cas. “Which is probably wishful thinking, considering, but…Bobby’s got my money. I’ve been trying to figure out when to tell you that too.”

“Are you going to use it?” Cas tries to keep his mind from racing but he can’t. He feels like he’s on a rollercoaster, losing Dean and getting him back over and over in his mind.

“I dunno, man. I told you, it feels wrong.” Dean drops his head into his hands. “I don’t know what to do. This whole thing is so far past complicated I can’t even see straight.”

“Is it?”

“What?” Dean looks up at him.

“Is it complicated? You have money and several good reasons to leave town.”

“I got several good reasons to stay too,” Dean replies, something offended and hurt in his eyes. “And I ain’t talking about the job or Anna asking me to.”

“Are you asking…what I want?” This doesn’t make sense. Dean has no obligation to make any choices based on Cas’s happiness.

“What the fuck does that mean?” Dean’s eyes are bright, searching his.

“Dean, you know I want you to stay. Here. As long as possible, but that’s not what’s best. For anyone.”

“Workin’ fine so far,” Dean says, running a knuckle up Cas’s shirt front, grazing the buttons one by one. “I don’t see why you’re so afraid of having what you want.”

“You know exactly why.”

Dean nudges Cas’s head up and kisses him, molasses-slow and sweet. It’s an effective way of derailing the discussion and avoiding a fight, so Cas is happy to let it happen. Dean moves him, positioning him to that the counter digs into Cas’s back as Dean presses against him, the granite cold through his shirt. Dean is warm though, stoking an answering heat in Cas that he’s been fighting down since the last time they touched.

“Your room,” Cas breathes and Dean pulls back from him with a nod. It’s a simple thing, following Dean into the privacy of his room, kissing every second they can while divesting each other of
clothes. It’s a routine by now: the door shutting behind them, the soft sound of someone, Dean this time, sinking to their knees. But every time it’s still heaven, still intoxicating and hot and his.

“Hey there,” Dean purrs and Cas honestly doesn’t know if he’s speaking to him or some specific part of Cas’s anatomy. The kisses on his thighs and the pleased noise Dean makes as he nuzzles Cas’s hard cock would point to the latter.

Cas makes an inarticulate noise – something between a ‘yes’ and a groan – as Dean takes him into his mouth and hand. He’s slow and teasing but the diligent attention of Dean’s tongue has Cas’s breath coming fast and his legs shaking in minutes.

“Get up. I – bed,” Cas pants. Dean jumps to comply and they practically fall to the mattress. Dean makes as strangled sound as Cas ruts on top of him.

“Are you alright?” Cas demands, springing back and taking his weight off the bewildered man below him.

“Fuck yes, that was a happy noise.” Dean looks down to Cas’s hand on his hip. “Oh that. Uh…I think I’m good.” Dean experimentally pulls Cas back down to him, wrapping one leg behind Cas’s thigh. “I think I’m very good.” Dean kisses his throat as they grind together, cocks caught between them.

“Can we—” Cas starts to ask it before he can even think, the thought of being inside Dean again wiping out every last trace of hesitancy and caution in his mind.

“Fuck yes,” Dean says before Cas can apologize. “Finally get to use your birthday present like the lord intended.”

“Let’s not bring him into this, please,” Cas murmurs, kissing Deans side as he leans over to retrieve the lube from where it’s hidden in the nightstand. “Fine. Let’s bring you into—”

He kisses Dean to shut him up but he laughs anyway. The few traces of his rational brain left marvel at how different this feels, not just from the last time they fucked but from every time before. There’s warmth behind it, a bubbling sense of joy that’s both alien and welcoming. They snicker when they get caught in the covers, and the sound Dean makes when Cas first teases his hole with a lubed finger is different, real and raw, not a hint of performance. Cas kisses him just for that glimpse of the real Dean. Dean with his eyes fluttering closes, throat working and sweat on his brow and utterly vulnerable as Cas works into him. Dean’s been with more people than he can count or that Cas really wants to consider but this? Only Cas gets to see this.

“God, I missed you,” Dean says, voice breaking, as Cas slides a finger deeper past the tight ring of muscle. “Fuck.”

“You’re tense,” Cas whispers, resting his forehead against Dean’s.

“So relax me.”

Cas obeys, licking at Dean’s collar bone then down to his nipple while caressing him with his free hand. Dean whimpers at the attention and Cas pumps the finger inside him, until his tension starts to uncoil. Only then does he add one more finger, savoring Dean’s sigh as he does. It’s easier from there. He works Dean open, avoiding his prostate just long enough that Dean whines in need before Cas adds a third finger and nudges the bundle of nerves so that Dean gasps. His own cock remains hard and neglected between his legs, but it doesn’t matter. Seeing Dean like this is its own pleasure, stretching him and exploring and watching each reaction.
“Cas, please…” Dean breathes, all pretense of bravado gone, his eyes half-lidded and dark. “Please.”

“Alright. Are you sure about…”

“Yes. We’re clear. Come on.” Cas withdraws his fingers and fumbles for the lube, surprised to find his hands shaking. “Hey.” Dean sets a hand on his face. “Are you okay?”

“Yes. I am, I just never thought…” Something tightens in his chest that he wants to ignore. “Never thought I’d have this.”

“It’s all yours.” Dean smiles.

Cas takes a steadying breath and slicks his cock. It feels colder without the condom to shield him, slippery and smooth. He’s so caught off guard by the sensation that Dean’s hand joining his is a surprise. It’s welcome, familiar, an echo of their first times together as Dean guides him to his entrance.

It’s not the same at all when he pushes into Dean. Surrounded by tight, griping heat with nothing between them, Cas moans as he slides home. There’s nothing but this, Dean beneath him and around him, kissing him and wrapping him in his arms as Cas starts to move. Breath and the slap of skin on skin and the rustle of sheets fill the silence, the scent of sweat tingling the air. Cas’s every nerve is singing, lost in sensation. Dean keens when Cas gets a hand on his cock, thumbing at the precome dripping over the head. He jerks Dean in time with his thrusts, keeping the rhythm steady even as the pleasure begins to crest inside him. He’s unhurried, falling apart along with Dean in slow motion, like ice around them steadily melting away. He knows Dean’s signals, the catch in his breath and the tension in his thighs when he’s close. Only then does Cas speed up, chasing that pinnacle along with the lover beneath him.

Dean comes, spilling over Cas fist with his mouth a silent o. Cas follows him over seconds later, hips stuttering as the release bursts inside him and the lights of a supernova dance behind his eyes.

He comes back to reality to see Dean smiling up at him. “Happy birthday,” Dean mutters with a hand through Cas’s hair.

Cas laughs, rolling his eyes as he falls back onto the mattress. “I’ll be right back.” His legs are wobbly but the walk to the bathroom and back with a wet cloth isn’t too hard. Dean takes it gratefully, cleaning up then tossing the washcloth back over Cas and through the bathroom door where it lands with a splat on the tile. “Very sanitary. Please don’t slip on that and break anything else. I like having you in one piece.”

“No guarantees,” Dean smirks as they settle under the sheets. Dean props himself up on one elbow and regards Cas thoughtfully. “So. Real talk. Why do you hate your birthday?”

“That’s what you want to talk about?”

“Better than the weather.”

Cas sighs and looks at the ceiling, the afterglow still warm around him. He doesn’t want to drive it away talking about this, but maybe it’s the only time and place he can. “You won’t like it.”

“Did your nutso family do something back in the day? Or does the church says birthdays are evil?”

Dean looks so smug and satisfied with himself, it’s comical.

“Nothing like that. I…” Cas shakes his head. It’s not the kind of thing he usually says outloud. Ever. “Each birthday is a reminder I’m one year closer to death.”
“Holy shit, morbid much?”

“I told you that you wouldn’t like it.”

He turns his head on the pillow to see Dean staring at him, trying to figure him out. “It just makes me think of how much time I’ve wasted and how little time I have before I go…” The words dry in his throat, like so many other confessions.

“To hell.” Dean finishes for him. Cas shivers and nods, trying not to imagine the fire or pain or whatever void awaits. “You really think you’re headed that way?”

“I’m a sinner. I haven’t had the strength to change or resist.” He repeats the words, reciting from so many hundreds of sermons and lectures and AM radio polemics.

“I thought the whole Jesus gig is that if you accept him or whatever, you’re saved.”

“It can’t be that easy,” Cas replies. “Gods laws have to matter, don’t they?”

“Yeah, I guess, but not stupid ones about where you stick your junk.” Cas shakes his head. He’s had this debate with himself so many times. “Hey. Look at me.” Dean palms his cheek, forcing Cas to meet his eyes.

“I know you don’t think I need to be fixed, but…”

“Not just that. Cas, I don’t even know if there is a God, but if he’d send you to hell for living the way he made you, he’s a fucking dick.”

Cas laughs at the same time tears sting his eyes. “God is a dick?” he asks, covering the hand of the impossible man next to him with his own.

“Fucking yes, if he sends good people downstairs because of who they fuck or how they pray or whatever.”

_I love you._

The thought comes so clearly and with such certainty Cas nearly says it aloud. He keeps it inside, thanks to some shred of self-preservation and reason, just letting the shock of it push the air from his lungs. It’s not a revelation though. It’s something that’s been there, steady and true, for a very long time. He’s just been too much of a fool to see his feelings for what they were, too caught up in the tangles of his other sins to see something much deeper and more dangerous behind them. He loves Dean, entirely and unquestioningly. It changes very little, to know it, but it’s important even so.

“It still scares me,” Cas says softly, turning on his side to curl closer to Dean.

“It’s okay to be scared. Everyone is afraid of dying.”

“I’m less afraid, when I’m with you.” It’s not the same as admitting love, but it’s close. Dean knows it if the gentle look in his eyes is any indication, or his reply with a gentle, seeking kiss.

“Me too,” Dean says when they part, barely above a whisper.

“I don’t want you to leave,” Cas blurts out. “I know I have no right to ask you, but I want you to stay. As long as you can.”

“Cas, I…”
“You don’t have to answer now. Just…take it into consideration when you decide.” He feels himself retreating and Dean stops him, kissing him again and holding him close. It’s a comforting kiss, not seeking to build into something more. Knowing there is love behind it, at least on one side, should make it feel like less of sin, Cas thinks, but the change is negligible. It’s always felt like this: something gentle. Something holy.

Dean says yes the next morning. It’s simple. Muttered through a kiss over their morning coffee, like none of it is a crime or something they shouldn’t be doing. It had been so impossible to consider when Anna asked. Unthinkable even. Cas though…Cas he can’t say no to, just like he knows Cas can’t say no to him when he presses their lips together with Anna asleep upstairs. It’s a cycle of addiction and bad decisions now, and even though he can see it he won’t pull away. That’s a problem for next year’s Dean. Right now he can make Cas happy. He can make Anna happy. And hell, he’s happy when he’s with Cas too. In his way. That sad, aching sort of happy that hurts as much as it helps.

God gives him two weeks of happy. Of peace and routine. Days under Baby’s hood and sneaking swigs of Bobby’s liquor. Dinners and Dr. Sexy. Walks with Missouri and a brand new driver’s license that he doesn’t use much because he likes the ride with Cas, for the company and conversations and for the kisses they start to sneak before they turn past Bobby’s gate. It’s a taste of the heat when Cas is inside him, hot and fierce, on those stolen nights together, once a week. Two weeks of something like normal, like the eye of a storm.

The call comes an hour after Cas leaves on Friday, the 20th of October. Anna’s still asleep and Dean’s heart stops when he sees an Ohio is the source of the call.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Dean?”

“Yes?” He doesn’t recognize the voice.

“This is Ezekiel Gardner, I’m your brother Sam’s social worker.”

“Is he okay?” Fear rushes through Dean more intense than anything he’s ever felt. If something has happened to Sammy and he wasn’t there…

“I’m fine, Dean.” Dean blinks at the sound of Sam’s voice.

“Sammy, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know. Zeke took me out of school and said he needed to talk to both of us.” Sam says. It sounds like they’re on a speaker phone together somewhere.

“I’m very sorry to do this, and do it this way. But I wanted to tell you both at the same time as it pertains to both of you and I believe that after you’ll need—”

“What the hell is going on, Zeke?”
“I’ve just been in touch with law enforcement in Salvation, Iowa. They’ve identified a body as your father. He’s dead.”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-mentions of death/minor character death off screen
-mentions of transphobia (Ishim)
-Anal sex
-unprotected sex
-religious discussions
Hey! It's a day earlier than usual. Mostly because this chapter asked to be shorter and I obliged. Also, I wanted to keep the content in here to mainly one chapter. In that vein, since you probably read the last chapter, I'm putting a warnings up front for on this one. There's lots of talk about death and the death of a parent in this chapter. I know that can be tough, so...fair warning. Specific content/trigger warnings at the end.

Chapter 22

Castiel’s heart is racing when he parks at home. Anna’s text had been cryptic at best: “canceling date tonight, come home early if you can.” He tells himself that if it were an intervention or a discovery of some sort, Anna would be less casual. He doesn’t see Luke’s over-compensating truck or his mother’s Buick on the street, so that’s a good sign, but he’s still on the edge of being violently sick as he enters the house. Anna jumps up from her spot in front of her easel when he comes in. She's painting, which means she's emotional but she looks serious, not angry or hurt, which is reassuring.

“What’s going on?” Castiel asks as Anna wipes her hands.

“It’s Dean. He…It’s his information to share with you.” This does nothing to calm Castiel down, but he tries not to show his distress. “He’s out in the back.”

It’s not summer anymore, and most of the lawn furniture is covered and put away now, the leaves either on the ground and fading. There’s a chill in the air when Cas steps onto the porch that makes him glad that his coat is still on. Dean isn’t wearing a jacket, just a flannel over shirt. He’s sitting on his favorite lounger at the edge of the porch, back to Cas, shoulders hunched and eyes fixed on the overcast sky.

“Dean?”

Dean doesn’t move, just blinks slowly as Cas pulls a chair up beside him. “Hey, Cas. What are you doing home?”

“Anna said I should come home early. She didn't tell me—”

“My dad died.”

Cas doesn’t know what he was expecting, but it wasn’t that. “Dean, I’m sorry…”

“Why’re you sorry? You never met him.” Dean’s voice is brittle, a complete contrast to the warm tones Cas enjoyed last night when they were tangled in bed.

“I’m still sorry for you.”

“What? For my loss? The bastard’s been dead to me for two years,” Dean spits back.

“That doesn’t mean you stop caring.”

“Lay off, Cas, I don’t need therapy, you’re worse than Anna.”
“Anna’s been through this, she might have insight.” It’s that knowledge that’s keeping Cas calm now. He remembers Anna’s bursts of anger after her adoptive father’s death, the way she shut everyone out for days. The loss of her mother had been worse and easier in different ways. The grief had been more familiar, yet more profound for the space the loss left in both their lives.

“Yeah, yeah. Insight. She tried to tell me he was in a better fucking place. That he was at peace.” Dean snarls the word.

“Most people find that comforting.”

“Yeah, well, they're idiots.” Cas waits as Dean flexes his hands and breathes. “My dad died in truck stop bathroom in Iowa. He was dead for hours before a fucking janitor found him and called the cops. The needle was still in his arm, so that made the cause of death pretty easy to figure out.”

“You never said anything about drugs.”

“Yeah, well, guess he took going off the rails pretty serious.” Dean shakes his head, unshed tears in his eyes catching the evening light. “He died alone shoving poison in his veins at the end of a life full of booze and bad decisions. There ain't no better place for people like him.”

“I’m sorry,” Cas repeats. This time it isn’t an automatic platitude, it’s sincere regret for the pain that radiates from Dean. For a long while there’s no sound but the crickets and the distant murmur of traffic.

“He died alone.”

Cas doesn’t know what to say to that. There’s nothing that could make it better, and maybe that’s the point. He can’t erase this grief. All he can do is be present, watching helplessly as someone he loves suffers.

They sit together in silence as the sun sets, the chill rising as the sky deepens from pink to navy. Eventually the door opens and Anna’s soft steps sound behind them.

“I got dinner from the Thai place,” she says softly. “Including the sticky rice.”

“Thanks, I….” Dean starts and then bites his lip, looking at Cas. He sees the moment Dean's mask settles back on him, a smirk on his face that doesn't reach his eyes. “We sure that won’t kill this one?”

“I asked them to make it mild, and he’s been doing okay lately.” Cas’s stomach has indeed been calm for a while, something he attributes almost entirely to Dean, rather than his diet. Anna doesn't need to know that.

“I’ll be fine, come on,” Cas says.

Dinner is quiet. Anna asks about work and Cas’s answer bores even him. At least there have been no threats or implications from Uriel recently. If he knows his punishment for the Klein woman was undone, he hasn’t said anything. Anna saves them from lingering on the topic by asking how the new season of Dr. Sexy is. Luckily they’d found some time last night to get out of bed and actually watch it, wrapped naked in Dean’s sheets on the couch. It had been exceedingly pleasant.

“Any specific plans downtown tomorrow?” Anna asks.

“Yes, actually. I’m meeting with someone from the VA before starting out, they may have a bed for Martin.”
“Really?” Dean perks up.

“Yes, but it will take some convincing to get him to come. He knows me now, so wish me luck.”

“I’ll come with you.”

Castiel looks up at Dean over his pad thai. “I don’t think that’s a good idea, Dean.”

“I’m not gonna start sobbing in the street if he calls me dad, come on.”

“That’s not why. Some of the other volunteers are closeminded.” Dean huffs a sigh and rolls his eyes. “And there are people are still out there that want to hurt you.”

“Come on.”

“I think Cas is right, it’s safer if you stay home. I promised Missouri we’d help her with her gutters tomorrow anyway.”

“I don’t know anything about gutters, but I do know…” Dean stops at Anna’s arch look. He’s outnumbered. “Fine. Just…keep me updated okay?”

“Okay.”

The rest of dinner is subdued, which is an unfortunate change from the norm of the last few weeks. Afterwards they watch *The Philadelphia Story* and Castiel spends most of the film stealing glances at Dean. His eyes remain fixed on the screen but unfocused. Dean excuses himself quietly after, no different than any other night. Cas wishes he could follow Dean to his bed, hold him and wake up next to him. Also the same as other nights, but tonight the feeling is more pronounced.

“Hon?”

Cas looks up. He didn’t even notice going upstairs into their room. Anna is staring at him, her shirt off and her eyes expectant as if she asked a question. “I’m sorry. What?”

“I was saying I hope Dean is okay. I’m sure what he’s going through is pretty complicated.”

“Oh. Yes. I can’t imagine,” Castiel mutters as he undresses. “Actually, I can. If my father was found dead…I think I would feel anger and guilt as well.”

“You think he feels guilty?” Anna asks, pulling off her jeans and tossing them into the hamper.

“Dean takes responsibility for everyone.” Cas shrugs and heads to the bathroom to get ready for bed. He’s not really tired but he has a book to read or he might watch the news if decides he feels particularly masochistic. He turns while brushing his teeth to see Anna leaning against the bathroom door, changed into her sleep clothes.

“I think I’m gonna just head to bed unless you want to…” Anna raises her eyebrows and looks Castiel over. It takes him far too long to realize she means sex. He can’t be blamed, things there have been going as well as possible under the circumstances. Dean had ribbed him enough about ‘fucking on a schedule’ that he’d initiated relations on other nights a few times in recent weeks. It had been boring and generally unsatisfying for him. It certainly made Anna happy and took the pressure of Castiel.

“But tonight, if that’s alright.”

Anna smiles but doesn’t move to her sink. Instead she comes to Castiel, snakes her arms around his
middle and presses herself to his back. She likes to sleep that way sometimes, plastered to him. It always makes him feel so confined, but it’s pleasant now, with her cheek against his shoulder blade. “Thinking about Dean’s father, or when I have a bad case at work, it just makes me so grateful for you.”

“I’m not going to die, A.. Not tonight at least.”

Anna just squeezes him tighter. “I don’t know what I’d do without you, babe. Without us as a family.”

“I know.” Castiel whispers it. It’s all he can get out past the surge of guilt. Sometimes he thinks Anna has to know there’s better out there for her, someone that will love her the right way and give her all she needs. He thinks about how he’d feel if Anna was dead and the first impulse is that he’d feel free, which is utterly horrible. She deserves a husband that doesn’t think with such sin. But she loves him, that much he knows, and love is rarely logical or under one’s control. If it was he certainly wouldn’t have chosen to love a man with whom he has no hope of a future. He turns in Anna’s arms and kisses her forehead. “Let’s get to bed.”

He doesn’t read. He watches mindless TV while Anna falls asleep on him before rolling over. He turns it off after to stare at the ceiling and go through his usual catalog of dread before rest. It hasn’t been as bad lately, but it’s in full force tonight. Thoughts of death, of Dean’s pain, memories of the night before and how he cried out as he came buried deep in Dean, such a contrast to the silence now.

At 12:04 his phone buzzes on his nightstand. It’s a text. From Dean.

>>you awake?

Careful not to wake Anna, he types his reply.

<<Yes.

<<Do you want to talk?

The little dots that indicate Dean is typing remain for a minute, long enough for Cas to get nervous before his phone buzzes again.

>>no

Cas blinks and more words appear.

>>just wanted to know if you were there

>>you know what I mean

Cas smiles sadly at his phone.

<<I do.

<<I’m here.
It takes Dean a second to realize the car has stopped. A second more to process that Cas is staring at him. He needs more coffee. He’ll grab a mug of Bobby’s sludge before heading out to the yard later. He has to check the paint job and buff up the chrome on Baby if he can stand to look at her. And then Bobby wanted him to take a look at an old Charger to see if it was worth restoring or should be gutted. Then he has to find Ash about the…what was it?

“Dean.”

He looks up. Cas is still there. Right. He’s still in Cas’s car. There’s something he should be doing here first. They’re parked on the dirt drive outside the main gate. Last time they were here he got a hand job. Or was it Cas? Someone came and they had a scare about staining the upholstery.

“Dean.”

Fuck.

“Sorry. I was just…” he waves at his head like it explains everything. “Didn’t sleep well.” He hasn’t really slept more than an hour at a stretch for the last three nights but Cas doesn’t need to know that.

“Are you sure you don’t want to take the day off? You don’t seem fully present.”

“Like another day sitting on my ass is gonna make a difference.”

“You’ve hardly been sitting on your ass.”

“You’d know, you keep a good watch on it,” Dean leers at Cas and gets a deepened frown in return. Cas isn’t wrong. Dean had thrown himself into being useful. He’d fixed Missouri’s gutters, and oven, and trimmed her trees and Anna’s roses and made enough food for a week. Literally, everyone had perfect little lunches to take to work and Dean still wanted to set something on fire.

“Dean. Please. Are you okay?”

No. Cas is gonna try and talk again and Dean…he can’t do that. He already nearly cried on the guy on Friday and he’s not gonna be that weak. Nothing has changed, and no matter what his smartass teenage brother says, getting his feelings out is not something he needs. And it’s not like Sam knows since he doesn’t even care. The kid had wanted to talk about school and his fall dance and not the fact their dad wouldn’t even have a funeral...

“I’m fucking fine, how much do I have to say it?”

“You know I said that to a friend recently.”

“You have friends?”

Cas ignore him. “She, knowing that I was lying, said that saying something enough times doesn’t make it real.”

“Doing something until it’s real is like your entire life philosophy,” Dean shoots back and Cas purses his lips in a thin line of anger and hurt. Good. “Did you stop us here for a chat or something else?”

“What?” Cas looks scandalized, which is frankly hysterical given the various ways Dean’s learned to twist himself around a Toyota gear shift get his mouth on Cas’s cock in the last weeks.

“Whadaya want? Hand or mouth?”
“I don’t…I don’t want anything. I just wanted to check on you.”

“And I said I’m—” Cas glares at him. “Good. I’m cool and I do not need to be babied. So either you let me be useful to your closeted ass or I can go to work.”

Cas stares at him, something inscrutable in his eyes. “Go to work, Dean. I’ll…See you later.”

“Whatever.”

Dean huffs before slamming the door, not looking back for the whole time it takes to walk to Bobby’s door. He breezes past Tori and she whines in offence as not getting her usual five minutes of scratches. He stashes his stupid lunch in Bobby’s fridge and doesn’t make any threat about buying Bobby non-liquid food before slamming the fridge door. The old man is at his desk as usual. He’s got a bed somewhere in the bottom floor, past all the books and car parts. But Dean doesn’t know where it is and he ain’t asking today.

“What crawled up your ass and died, princess?” Bobby asks without looking up from his ancient laptop and the pile of papers next to it that only he understands.

“Shut up.” Dean stomps towards the door.

“Oh, I’m sorry, was that offensive?”

“You need me to do anything before I start? Within limits. I ain’t chasing another raccoon out of your basement.” Bobby narrows his eyes as Dean then looks back at his work.

“I’m fine. Your suppervisor ain’t coming in today so you’re on your own with the Charger. I got some orders need going over while Ash is on the dark side of the moon.”

“I’m on it,” Dean sighs before heading out, the door banging shut on lose hinges behind him. Bobby’s house is falling apart worse than him and it suddenly makes Dean furious to see that kind of neglect. So he finds Bobby’s ancient toolbox first and fixes the door, and then pounds a few fresh nails into the deck and fixes the loose board on the stair. His phone keeps buzzing so he leaves it on the deck.

He spends an hour with the Charger, then two more deciphering Ash’s notes and scouring the yard for the parts on order. It’s one of those rare, sunny October days that Kansas will spit out, where it’s summer-warm but the light isn’t quite the same. Dean sweats among the rusted skeletons of cars, piling parts into a cardboard box to take back to the shop. It’s monotonous, hard work but wrenching the guts out of cars feels just as good as swinging a hammer, maybe better. He avoids looking at Baby. Sort of the same way he pushed the box of pictures and shit from her trunk into the closet in his room and didn’t think about it. He’s felt it in the room like a physical thing the last few nights, waiting for him. And today Baby feels the same, another ghost to run from.

The crash of a box of carburetors slipping off the rusted hood of Pinto jolts Dean out of his thoughts. Dean stares at the mess, metal and wire smashed in the gravel. An hour of work lost because he was stuck in his own idiot head.

Knew you were useless.

Suddenly the mess is different. It’s a bowl of spaghetti shattered on the floor and Dad is yelling and Sammy is screaming because he’s hungry. Dad spent hard earned money on that damn dinner and Dean ruined it like he ruined the job the week before when he ran when he should have been on the lookout for cops and…
What fucking use are you?

The crash of the Pinto’s window shattering under Dean’s fist echoes through the yard. He looks down at his hand, red blood from his knuckles glistening vividly in the sun. It doesn’t hurt yet. It’s that moment of shock before the pain really hits and all Dean can think is how bright that blood looks in autumn light.

Tori starts barking in the distance and the pain shoots up Dean’s arm like a shock. Dean pulls off his shirt to wrap his hand. The parts aren’t a total loss, but he’s just made it damn hard to get them picked up. Another stellar fuck up. "Son of a bitch..."

“Glad you took it out on that piece of shit instead of your own ride.” Dean looks up to see Bobby, eyes glinting under the brim of his cap. “You want a crowbar for the rest of ’em?”

“Sorry. I’ll pay for it,” Dean mutters, trying to hide his hand.

“It’s a fucking Pinto, you can do whatever you like to it. Set it on fire if it’ll help you work through the grief or whatever. Can’t think of a better way you honor the memory of a bastard like John.”

Dean blinks at Bobby, the pain in his hand forgotten. “How did you-"

“Your man called.” Dean open his mouth to correct the misconception but Bobby talks over him. “Said you weren’t answering his texts and wanted to check that you were still alive or something?”

“Jesus, Cas...”

“Before you get your panties in a twist, I asked what was up with you and he spilled. Sorry to hear it.”

The ‘sorry’ makes Dean’s blood prickle sickly under his skin. If he has to hear that word again he’s going to start punching more windows. “You said it yourself. He was a bastard.”

Bobby shrugs. “Come on inside, let’s get you patched up.” He rolls away before Dean can protest, not paying Dean a second glance until they’re back in the house. “First aid kit is in the bathroom.”

“I can do this myself,” Dean protests when he joins Bobby in main room with the ancient plastic box of bandages, swabs and ointment. Looks like it was military surplus.

“I was a field medic, I know what I’m doing better than you.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “You were in the service?”

“Marines. Figured volunteering was a better deal than the draft. Viet Kong didn’t know what hit ’em.” Bobby reaches into a cupboard and pulls out a bottle of whiskey, pops the lid and hands it to Dean. “It’s medicinal.”

“Guess I’m off the clock,” Dean mutters before he takes a swig. It’s not the good stuff, not that Dean would really know the good stuff, but this swill isn’t it. It burns and tastes like smoke, and the first sip hits him like a truck. “Jesus fuck.”

“Don’t tell me you can’t hold your liquor after all this clean living that’s been forced on you..” Bobby yanks Dean’s hand towards him, forcing Dean to sit on his couch, sending up a puff of dust. and drop the shirt. “These ain’t deep, you’ll live.”

“Hallelujah.” Dean hisses as Bobby dabs alcohol on the cuts then takes another swig of the rotgut.
“Cas tell you anything else?”

“Nope. Very respectful.”

“Always a gentleman, that one.” Dean laughs to himself even though it’s a shitty joke.

“He’s real worried about you.” Bobby places a bandage on the worst of the cuts, eyes intent on his task and hands steady. “He didn’t say so, but you can tell with those sincere types.”

“Told him not to, I’m…”

“You ain’t fine, boy.” Dean looks up to see Bobby’s eyes boring into him. “A piece of your life just got yanked away without a damn warning. You’re angry and you’re hurting and you’re acting a fool, but you ain’t fine.”

Dean stares at him, the whiskey slowly working through his vein and warming him from the inside. It’s nice so he takes another sip then offers the bottle to Bobby. He takes a hit without blinking and Dean wonders how bad his liver is.

“You should drink less.”

“We’re drinking to the dead, this don’t count.” Bobby sets down the bottle anyway. “I know how you’re feeling…”

“No, you-”

“My daddy, he was a mean drunk too.”

Dean’s mouth snaps closed. He thought Bobby was talking about his wife.

“But unlike yours, he wasn’t even decent when he was sober. He smacked my mother and me just the same no matter what, just hit harder when he was on the bottle. He put a shotgun in his mouth when I was fourteen.”

“Holy shit, I’m…” Dean stops himself before he says sorry. This isn’t that kind of story.

“I found him. Out in the woodshed. And do you know what I felt? The feeling that was bigger than all the anger and hurt and fear? The thing you probably felt too when you heard?”

Dean takes a deep breath. This isn’t a rhetorical question, but it feels so fucking wrong to say it out loud. “Relieved.”

“Damn right.”

“I shouldn’t feel happy that my father is dead,” Dean protests, his fingers itching to grab for more whiskey.

“Relief ain't the same as happy. And there ain’t no should or shouldn’t in this.”

“Fuck, yes, there is!” Dean shouts, the words bouncing against the faded wallpaper. “I should be sad. I should be angry. I’m not a fucking robot like Sam: I can’t just say I saw it coming and move on. I should be mourning or some bullshit and I…”

“No one’s sayin’ you’re not, son,” Bobby says, calm as anything. “I’m just sayin’ that it ain’t all grief. That part’ll come. Believe me. It’ll come. And then it’ll go. Then come back again.”
Dean sinks back into the chair and it creaks under his weight. “When do I stop blaming myself?”

Bobby gives a hollow laugh and picks the bottle back up. “I’ll let you know.” He takes a long swig and Dean wonders if he’s seeing his wife’s face when he closes his eyes to savor it. “Not that you’re gonna listen, but it wasn’t your fault.”

“Thanks for saying it anyway.”

“Some people, they get broken. Or they’re born that way, I dunno. But they spend their whole lives trying to find that thing that makes them forget the pain. Or ends it. Usually the same thing.”

The image that Dean can’t get out of his head for more than a few seconds comes back to the forefront. Of his dad dead on some dirty tile, eyes glassy, mouth slack. Needle in his arm. He pushes the thought away and grabs the bottle from Bobby. Then stands and tosses it so it shatters in the sink.

“What the hell was that for?”

“Cause I don’t wanna see you chasing that peace till it kills you either. Like I said, you drink too much.”

“Excuse me, this little chat was about setting you straight, not my issues.”

“Ain’t nothing straight about me, old man, thought you knew that.”

“Idjit.” Dean shrugs. Maybe it’s the booze, maybe it’s the words, but he feels a little less like shit. “Now you’re gonna have to get sober before you drive home.”

“Well one of us is.”

Bobby wheels to his desk and fetches a few papers then hands them to Dean. “No, you are.”

Dean has to blink a few times to understand what he’s looking at. “This is…”

“Title to your ride. Registration too. All in your name.”

Dean’s feels like an idiot that this, of all things in the last few days actually hits him enough that the tears that have been trapped forever finally escape. “Bobby.”

“She’s all fixed up, and she’s yours. I’m just hoping you don’t use her to make a run for it. I’ve still got work for you, if you need it. You gotta fill out the shit at the bottom of the pile to make it all official.”

“I won’t,” Dean says quietly, pushing moisture from his cheeks. “I mean, I won’t bail.”

“Good. Sam may be far off, but you got family here too now.”

Dean wants to laugh at that but it doesn’t make it out of his throat. “Thanks, Bobby.”

“Don’t get too excited, this means I can officially fire your ass next time you bust a bottle of my liquor.”

Dean shakes his head, overcome, because he knows Bobby won’t.
Castiel has to rub his eyes when he pulls up to his house, because the sight of a black car the size of a boat in front is so unexpected. But, no. It’s really there: a huge, mean-looking thing that he barely recognizes from the last time he saw it. Parked right on the street so conspicuously, he can see the letter from the homeowner’s association right now.

Anna’s car isn’t in the garage, which is odd for so late in the day, and the house is quiet when Castiel walks in. He checks his phone and sure enough there’s a text from Anna that must have come while he was driving.

>>Home late. Big accident on interstate. All hands on deck.

Castiel types a reply.

<<Take all the time you need. We’re fine here.

He stows his phone and looks around. The porch is empty but the door to Dean’s room is ajar. Castiel still knocks gently before pushing it open.

Dean it seated on the edge of his bed, a cardboard box open in front of him, holding some pictures in his hand. “Hello, Dean.”

“Hey, Cas.”

“Anna’s going to be late. Are you hungry?”

“Not really.” Dean finally looks up over his shoulder at Cas. “You gonna come in or just lurk?”

“Are you done being a jackass?”

Dean rolls his eyes and scoots over on the bed, which means yes. Cas takes his place next to Dean, close enough that their legs brush and he can see the faded photographs in Dean’s hand. “Sorry. For…you know.”

“You’re grieving. It’s okay.” Cas shrugs. “You got your car back.”

“Don’t worry, I already promised Bobby I’m not gonna fuck off.”

“Good.” The burn of stress in Cas’s chest ebbs as he examines the picture Dean’s holding, his thumb running absenty over the edge. It’s a family. A husband with dark hair and a wide grin next to a beautiful blonde wife. Between them is a young boy with a familiar smile holding a fat infant. “How old were you there?”

“Eight. And three quarters.”

“Your hair was actually blonde then.” He sees Dean’s mouth tick upwards from the corner of his eye. “Like your mother’s.”

“Yeah.”

“She was beautiful.”

“She really was.”

It’s sunset, and Dean hasn’t turned the lights on but the window is open. The room is suffused with
fading golden light that takes the edge off the silence.
“I barely recognize Dad,” Dean says after a long pause. He moves the picture to the bottom of the
stack in his hands, revealing another photo of just his parents. His father’s arms are slung around his
mother’s neck, both of them grinning at each other rather than the camera.
“I don’t remember what my father looked like,” Cas says, leaning just a bit closer to Dean.
“You don’t have pictures?”
“Mother made them disappear and I was too young to save any. I only have a vague notion of what
he looked like. Apparently somewhat like me, but not quite.”
Dean turns to him and Cas meets his eyes. “Would you want to know? If he was dead?”
“I don’t know. I used to think about that. Years ago. Usually it would hurt more to imagine him with
a whole other life. Some other family he chose over us. Kids. A nice wife.”
“Or a husband.”
Cas smiles at that. “The thought has crossed my mind, that he left because he was…like me.”
“That still ain’t an excuse for abandoning your family.”
“I know.” Cas doesn’t say that he wishes it was. He doesn’t need to. “But still. I wanted to believe
he was taken, not that he chose to leave. Made missing him make more sense."
"Yeah. I feel that."
"Do you miss him?”
“It’s weird, knowing he’s gone. It’s like…Nothing about my stupid life has changed. I’m still pissed
at him for leaving and all the shit he did. But…” Dean bites his lip and Cas doesn’t push. These
things aren’t easy to say. “I’ve missed my dad for a long time. Not the guy that ditched me or hit me,
but the guy he was. The guy in the pictures that died the same day as mom. And now…”
“He’s really gone and never coming home.”
Dean nods, eyes slipping closed and the first tears Cas has seen slipping down his cheek. “Fuck,
man, I don’t even know why I care. But all I can think is that I don’t even remember the last thing I
said to him.”
Cas doesn’t think he’s supposed to talk here, even if he knew what to say. So he takes Dean’s hand
and squeezes tight. He doesn’t remember it being like this with Anna, when she lost people. There
were more tears. More prayers and words of comfort that they were safe in the arms of the Lord.
Neither seems appropriate now.
When Dean tilts his head up and kisses him, that does feel right. It shouldn’t. It’s a terrible angle and
Dean is moist in all the wrong ways, but he can feel how Dean relaxes, the way something uncoils in
him and he melts into Cas when he wraps his arms around him.
Cas draws back and looks at Dean in the amber light. “You don’t have to do anything for me, if…if
that’s what you’re trying right now.”
“It’s not. This is for me.” It’s good to hear that aloud. Still, Cas hesitates, trying to read all he can
from Dean’s eyes as he runs a thumb over his cheek. “You’re scared less with me. I hurt less with


you.”

Cas could tell him, he thinks. Tell him right now that he loves him. But he doesn’t think it’s the moment for that. Or that it ever will be. It makes life too much of a tragedy to confess it, and Dean would just take it as another burden. Another job to do and fulfill. Cas doesn’t want that. He doesn’t need Dean to know, or even be shown. All he can or should do is love him. So he kisses him, soft and without any expectation until it’s dark and someone’s stomach rumbles with hunger.

“Come on, let’s get some food,” Cas says. “I’ll make you a sandwich.”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- mentions of death throughout
- discussion of addiction and drug use
- mild self harm and alcohol use
- mentions of suicide
- general need for hugs all around

We’ll get back to some plotty plot plot plot in the next one, but I hope this little mediation was interesting. Remember to subscribe, leave kudos, drop a comment or say hi to me over on tumblr if you’re enjoying! <3
Phew. I'm so glad to get this one up and I'm sorry for a slightly longer wait than usual. I was SUPER sick with what we think was norovirus for a few days, and I also had to post my Tropefest fic (link at the bottom). I hope a nice long chapter makes up for it.

Warnings are in the end notes. One of them was tricky so if you feel I need to tweak anything, lmk.

Putting a note here because there have been some comments - if you don't remember who Ishim is, make sure you've read or re-read Hide and Seek, which is the first part of this series.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Dean waves to Bobby and closes the Impala door. Settling into his Baby's worn leather is more comforting than slipping on his favorite coat or settling into bed after a long day – mainly because his favorite coat is torn to shreds and stained with blood now, and his bed isn’t really his. The point stands however that nothing feels more like coming home than sitting down in his Baby. Well, almost nothing. Kissing Cas for the first time after days of separation feels pretty damn good too.

He gets to do that tonight. The promise of it makes him smile like an idiot, but fuck it, no one but God can see so he’s not hiding it. For the first time in nearly a week he doesn’t feel like dried up shit and he’s gonna go with it. He put in a good day’s work and the weather is decent. He gets to drive home in his car. Sure, having her back means no alone time with Cas is the morning, but the purr of the engine is almost as sexy. And he’s got plans tonight to fix up something delicious and ride Cas until they’re both screaming (he’s not picky who). The perfect way to forget their cares. He pulls out his phone, buoyed by his good mood.

<<you need me to grab anything from the store?

>>No. Thank you for offering but there’s adequate food in the fridge that we should use.

Dean smiles at the politeness.

<<fine

>>And if I said yes how were you going to pay for it?

<<shut up

<<I’m not technically talking.

<<eat me

>>I intend to

Dean laughs out loud at the forwardness and prays that Anna doesn’t check her husband’s texts.
Dean rolls down the window and enjoys the air as he drives home among the autumn leaves. Kansas doesn’t have nearly enough trees, compared to corn and wheat and soy, but it’s still nice this time of year, before everything goes pale and barren with winter. He wonders idly what he can do with the stuff they have at home. There’s some chicken and too much garlic so maybe he can do something with that? They still have the makings of some fancy salad thing Anna was going to foist on Cas’s family on Tuesday but that torture got postponed because someone’s kid was puking. Do they have lemons? He knows they have onions…

Dean’s contemplation of the menu is cut short when he sees an unfamiliar Buick taking up his regular space in front of the house. Dean pulls into the driveway instead, telling himself he’ll move before Anna gets home. The doors give a familiar creak as he gets out, examining the car and then stopping as the Buick door opens. Shit.

“Naomi? I mean, Mrs. Novak?” Dean asks in horror as Cas’s mother approaches, sizing up the Impala with a discerning eye.

“No, Mrs. Novak, Dean. Unless you’d like me to call you Mr. Winchester.”

“Please no.”

“Then Naomi is fine. This is quite the machine you have here.” Naomi runs a finger over Baby’s frame and Dean shivers. “You repaired it yourself?”

“I had some help with her, but yeah.”

“And this was the car you were living in?” Dean blinks. It’s rare anyone can make him feel actually embarrassed about much of anything but the way Naomi says that makes him want to crawl under a rock and never get out.

“Yeah. Home sweet home,” Dean replies, summoning up every ounce of bravado to smile at her.

“Indeed. Well, are you going to show me in? I seem to have misplaced my key.”

“Uh, Cas isn’t here yet…” Naomi stares him down, since that much is obvious. “And he didn’t mention that you’d be coming.”

“Since we missed family night on Tuesday I thought it would be nice to have it here tonight. It makes me so sad thinking about Cas sitting at home all alone while Anna works.”

“He’s not home alone. He has me.” Dean probably shouldn’t say that, but judging by how Naomi is already walking to the door, she doesn’t care.

“Will you grab that bag from the back for me?” Naomi calls and Dean suppresses and eye roll before obeying. At least she brought her own food.

“So, is it just you?” Dean asks as he meets Naomi at the door and digs for his keys while trying to keep her bag of groceries from falling.

“Oh no, Michael and Luke will be joining us. It’s been too long since I’ve had an evening with just me and my boys.”
“That oughta be nice. For everyone.” Dean deposits the bag in the kitchen and Naomi gets to unpacking. “I’m gonna go, uh, wash up…and…” Naomi doesn’t even look up but that’s fine. He ducks into his room and has his phone out and Cas dialed in no time.

“Dean?” Cas answers, concern in his voice since Dean never calls him. “Are you-

“No. Red alert. Your mom is here for a surprise family dinner. Statler and Waldorf are on their way too.”

“What?”

“Exactly.”

“Shit.”

“I’ll try to keep her entertained or whatever but…” Dean hears the sound of the fridge opening and cringes. He knows it’s not his house but he’s been here longer than anywhere in the last few years and he’s territorial.

“I’m already in the car. I’ll be there soon.”

Dean glances at the time. “You left early.”

“I was excited to get home.”

Dean smiles despite himself. “Drive fast anyway.”

“I will.”

Dean washes a few lingering bits of grease from under his fingernails and changes into a clean shirt before returning to the kitchen. Naomi has an some cans, a thawing bag of peas and steaks out and is rummaging through the pantry

“Can I help you find something?” Dean asks.

“Where on earth do they keep their oil?”

“Right there by the stove. Green bottle.”

“Olive oil is for salads, Dean, not cooking. I need canola.”

“Uh, Anna only gets the healthy stuff. Trust me, the olive oil works great. Are you using it for the veggies or the meat?”

Naomi finally looks back up at him, her eyes narrow. “Do you do a lot of cooking Dean?”

Jesus, with that tone she might as well be asking if he likes it up the ass. Same answer either way at least. “Yeah, I do, I’ve been taking care of dinner a few nights a week lately. Gotta earn my keep somehow, right?”

“Somehow.”

“Anything I can do to help?” Dean grits out, determined to kill her with kindness. “Saw you got some steak. I can go clean up the grill and get it hot.”

“I was just going to broil them, thank you though.” Dean looks over to the four (of course) steaks she
has out and shakes his head. They’re cheap cuts that will turn to shoe leather under a broiler.

“Can I get you something to drink then?”

“I was under the impression Anna didn’t allow alcohol in the house, due to the effect drink had on her father.” Fuck, if the women did want a drink she could chill it herself, she’s so cold.

“I meant like, a soda.”

“Dean, you’re very polite but one guest doesn’t need to play host to another. I’m fine on my own if you’d like to go do whatever it is you usually do these evenings.”

“I usually make dinner for Cas and hang out with him.” Dean’s even more annoyed because he already told her this.

“Hm. I can’t imagine you have much to talk about. Your backgrounds are so different.” God, Dean hates these suburban ladies that can insult you to your face and make it sound like idle chit chat.

“Sometimes talking to someone of a different background is a good way to learn things. Expand your mind and such,” Dean says with a tight smile. “And we’ve got more in common than you’d think.” He keeps the ‘including how much we love dick’ to himself.

“I do hope that he’s continued sharing the gospel with you,” Naomi says, setting down a can and fixing Dean with her full attention. “Especially since your recent tragedy.”

“My…”

“Your father. Anna told me, on Sunday when I asked after you. Well, when I asked why you still hadn’t joined us at services.” There’s a whole story in Naomi’s tone that Dean feels like he’s missing.

“Services? I’m invited?”

“Love of the Lord is what brought you into Castiel and Anna’s life, isn’t it?” Naomi says and Dean is really proud for not laughing. “Showing your devotion and joining the flock is the next step in the Lord’s plan for you. And it’s only right.”

“Uh…I don’t know. I feel like I’ve already caused enough of a stir just being here.”

“That’s true.” Naomi shrugs. At least she doesn’t sugarcoat things. “I lost a parent when I was close to your age. It was hard. I felt like there was no justice in the world when so many bad people kept on living and she…well, it’s in the past. The church helped me. Even if I just felt less alone in my grief. It could help you too.”

For one long, strange moment, Dean feels like Naomi Novak is looking at him like another human, not an obstacle or an oddity. Just another person in pain that she can relate to. It throws Dean off balance completely.

“Uhh…I’ll think about it.”

“Good. I am very sorry for your loss.” Those familiar, awful words snap Dean out of his stupor just in time for the doorbell to ring. “I didn’t hear that awful truck so that must be Michael.”

“I’ll got let him in.” Dean’s not sure if he’s jumping into the fire or frying pan. He opens the door to see not one but two Novak men waiting. Fire it is.
“Hi. Guys. Uh, your mom is in the kitchen. Cas is on his way.”


“That bad?” Dean grimaces.

“Mom’s a literal cook,” Mike says. ”Mashed potatoes are just…mashed potatoes. That’s it.”

“No butter?” Dean asks in horror

“No even salt,” Luke replies.

“Holy crap.”

“Hey,” Mike says, elbowing his brother. “Remember the time she put a canned ham in the oven in the can?”

“Or the pot roast that was just a roast in a pot with nothing else?” Luke adds, laughing.

“I can hear all of you. I’m not that old,” Naomi calls from inside the house.

“How bad do you think she’ll take it if I try and take over?” Dean asks under his breath.

“Don’t risk it. Anyway, leaves room for dessert.” Mike holds up a store bought cake and smiles.

“And these,” Luke says as he pushes a six pack of beer into Dean’s hands and heads insides, his brother following.

Dean looks out the still open door to see the blessed sight of Cas’s Camry pulling up. “Thank God.” Cas parks on the street, since the driveway is completely blocked and meets Dean’s eyes with an apologetic frown the second he’s out of the car. “Dude, you almost missed the party,” Dean calls as Cas strides quickly to the door.

“I am so sorry,” Cas exhales. “She didn’t say anything.”

“Castiel, how many time am I going to have to tell your wife to buy you a new coat. That thing is ancient,” Naomi says as Dean and Cas return to the kitchen.

“I’d probably just buy a new one of the same style,” Cas replies and Dean can see how tense he already is.

“You need a damn pair of jeans before you get a new coat,” Dean says before he can check himself and gets a withering glance from Naomi. “You know I’m just gonna…go.”

“No, please stay,” Cas says instantly, which makes Dean feel a bit better. Especially when Naomi says “If that’s what you feel is best,” at the same time.

“HECK no, Dean, you’re staying here. We’ll make room for you,” Michael says cheerfully.

“You can even have my steak,” Luke adds with a shit-eating grin.

“My middle son is a snob about meat,” Naomi sighs, somehow forgetting the conversation she claimed to have heard about her cooking.
“Are you sure I can’t help cook?” Dean offers one more time.

“Nah, come over and have a beer,” Mike says. Dean’s not sure why he’s thrown by the guy’s friendliness. He’s only met him one other time and he was decent then too, if patronizing. Maybe he just thinks he awful by association with Naomi and Luke.

“Sure. I…sure,” Dean says. Luke passes them warm cans of Heineken and Dean’s surprised to see Cas take one as well.

“Don’t get any stains on that nice couch!” Naomi calls and Dean chokes a bit. He’s real familiar with how to get stains on and off that material. By the look Cas gives him he has the same thought.

“So, Dean, how is the job search going?” Mike asks, clapping Dean on the shoulder in that overly-familiar, dad way. “If you’re still in the market we have an opening at the station in janitorial. It’s rough, but it’s a good start for a fellow like you.”

Dean’s not sure what kind of fellow Mike thinks he is, though frankly nothing he could be thinking would be as bad as the truth, so he has no right to be offended. He still is. “Thanks. But I got a gig. Salvage yard, edge of town.”

“Dean restored his own car. The one outside,” Cas says with a proud smile.

“The Impala?” Luke asks, eyebrows high. “I was saying to Mike what a gorgeous car that was. Nice job.”

Dean braces himself for the backhanded compliment or snide addition but it doesn’t come. “Thanks. I’m doing a few classes, just on line, to learn more about restoration and sh-stuff. And brushing up on the mechanic stuff too.”

“I hear you have to practically be an engineer to work on the new cars, all computers,” Mike says. Dean nods enthusiastically. “Yeah. Lucky for me Bobby – the guy I’m working for – he only gets the old stuff so far but I do want to learn the new technology.”

“Another reason the classic cars are better,” Luke says. “I don’t want to worry about my car getting malware and a flat tire.”

“You’re worried the internet is going to kill you in your sleep,” Mike replies with an eyeroll.

“No, just that it’s watching him. Very different,” Cas corrects over the rim of his beer and Luke rolls his eyes.

“Hey,” Mike nudges Cas. “Do you remember our first car?”

“Very fondly,” Cas says with that warm smile Dean sees so rarely when they’re not alone. “Though I think my shoulder is still recovering from using that gear shift.”

“Wait, whose car was it?” Dean asks the brothers.

“Everyone’s,” Luke replies. “Where the heck did you find it, Mike? Some farmer had it for sale in his front yard, right?”

“Yup. For $600. This busted up old Ford truck,” Mike grins.

“It had a family of racoons living in the bed,” Cas tells Dean.
“Hey, we needed pets,” Luke says.

"And so I thought it would be a great way to spend the money I was supposed to be spending on college…” Mike goes on.

“I don’t hear any of you mentioning how furious I was,” Naomi calls from the kitchen and the Novak men all smile and laugh.

“I drove that thing for a few years until Luke needed it and then Cassie took the reins at the end.”

“That thing could barely get me to school at that point,” Cas remarks.

“Better than walking in the snow,” Mike says.

“And none of us ever had to worry about ladies making any untoward advances when we were driving that thing,” Luke adds and Dean smiles.

“Yeah, not sexy like your black beauty out there, Dean. Where’d you get her anyway?” Mike asks, looking over and taking a sip.

Dean’s looks down, weirdly shy about being included in the conversation. “Uh, she was my dad’s. He got her right before he asked my mom to get married. He was supposed to buy something responsible but he came home with that. He left her to me.”

“Good to still have a piece of him, huh?” Luke says and Dean’s pretty sure it’s sincere. There’s also the briefest look between him and Cas and then over to Naomi.

“Yeah. Yeah it is,” Dean replies quietly.

They chat about cars and other inconsequential things for a while. Turns out Luke has an old mustang rusting on his property that he’d like towed so Dean says he’ll talk to Bobby. Eventually they’re summoned to the table. Naomi takes her place at the head and Mike and Luke naturally fall into place together on one side, with Cas and Dean on the other. As promised Luke donates his steak to Dean. It hits his plate with a disheartening clang and Dean picks up his fork to give it a poke before Cas kicks him under the table. He looks up to see everyone’s head bowed and hands clasped. He copies the posture as Naomi takes a deep breath.

“Lord, thank you for this food and this company,” Naomi prays. “Thank you for this day when those we love are safe and whole. Please continue to give us patience, wisdom and peace, through you and your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

“Amen,” everyone echoes, including Dean. The word feels alien on his tongue, but if he’s gonna get to church with the fam, he might as well get used to it.

“So, how is Rachel? The first trimester is always the hardest,” Naomi asks as most of them start to saw at their steaks. Cas slathers his in A1 first.

“She’s well. She’s able to take things a little easier with Muriel in pre-school now,” Mike replies and Dean starts to tune out the conversation. He finally gets a piece of meat cut and, yep, shoe leather in dire need of salt. It takes him so long to chew his jaw is sore when he can finally swallow the lump of sawdust.

“…we’re going to wait an be surprised on the gender,” Michael is replying to Cas as Dean samples some tasteless boiled green something and looks for the steak sauce.
“Are you sure? What if you don’t have the correct clothes?” Naomi asks in concern.

“We have plenty of baby clothes left,” Michael laughs.

“But they’re girl’s clothes,” Naomi argues.

“They’re baby clothes, mother,” Cas argues.

“Still, I don’t want my possible grandson getting confused. That sort of thing can do lasting damage you know.”

Dean feels Cas tense beside him. He really wants to rub a soothing hand on his thigh but that’s not a good idea.

“We’ve got Jack’s stuff in a box somewhere if that’s the case,” Luke offers.

“Guess we were both hoarding the baby clothes for this one, huh?” Mike smiles at Cas. “When are you two gonna get on that?”

If Cas was tense before he pretty much turns to stone at that point. Dean casts him a look and finds him intent on his ‘steak.’

“That’s what I keep asking,” Naomi says, swallowing a dainty mouthful. “But I imagine you don’t want to add anyone else to your home while it’s so crowded.”

Dean grips his utensils tighter and stabs at the crime against cow-manity on his plate.

“We’re certainly not ready now,” Cas says. Dean wonders if these people, his family that’s known him all his life, can hear the contempt and defensiveness in his voice. Cas straightens up minutely and looks directly at his mother. “We may never be ready.”

“No one is ever truly ready for a child,” Naomi replies, simpering sweet.

“Mother, I’m saying…”

“I know what you’re saying, Castiel,” Naomi snaps, her voice suddenly cold. “But I also know you don’t mean it and will come to your senses eventually. Be fruitful and multiply. That’s what God asks of us, it’s very simple.”

“We need to raise good children to fight the evils in this world,” Luke agrees. “Especially when there are parents out there letting their kids grow up as fags or transwhatevers.”


“I dunno, I can think of worse ways for kids to grow up,” Dean says darkly. He’s sure Cas is going to bust an ulcer if he keeps talking but he’s so damn furious he wants to beat Naomi over the head with her shitty steak.

“Yeah, like as democrats!” Luke guffaws. Naomi and Mike both laugh politely and Cas deflates.

Dean keeps his mouth shut for the rest of the meal unless he’s addressed, which doesn’t happen much with Naomi leading the conversation. It’s a weird mix of normal chatter, brotherly ribbing and blatant bigotry that leaves Dean’s head spinning. Everyone is finished pretty quickly, bits of meat tucked discreetly under vegetables to make it look like more has been consumed. Dean is the first to rise and take his and Cas’s plates to the sink.
“Dean, you don’t need to do that,” Naomi says, managing to sound polite and offended at the same time.

“No worries. Whoever cooked doesn’t have to do dishes, it’s like the 11th commandment,” Dean says and the joke lands like a stone. “You talk to your kids.”

Naomi nods and she, Mike and Luke retire to the couch as Cas gathers the rest of the plates for Dean.

“Thank you,” Cas says quietly as Dean starts the water.

“It’s no problem, Cas.”

Cas catches his elbow and Dean looks up into earnest blue eyes. “Thank you, Dean.”

Dean just nods. He doesn’t want to say anything, not right now. He takes his time in the kitchen, first with the dishes and then making coffee, one cup at a time for him, Mike and Cas. Luke and Naomi turn it down and Dean wonders if that’s a religious thing until Luke explains he has to be up early and Naomi mentions a delicate stomach. Must be where Cas gets it. Dean and Cas for their part don’t care about their stupid stomachs and intend to be up very late. The cake Mike brought is dry and too-sweet but Dean still puts back a huge slice because it’s at least edible.

“Really, Dean?” Mike exclaims happily and Dean looks up from moving the crumbs on his plate and glances to Cas in panic.

“I’m also glad you’re interested in services, finally,” Cas says slowly and Dean realizes Naomi must have spilled that. Great.

“Well, your mom’s really persuasive,” Dean smiles back.

“Castiel says you’ve been helping with the planning for his little fundraiser at the carnival afterwards,” Luke says.

“Just giving him ideas, mostly,” Dean replies. “Should be a fun Halloween party.”

“It’s not a Halloween party, it’s a harvest festival,” Naomi corrects.

“Halloween is a pagan orgy. This is a celebration of family and the season,” Luke adds.

Dean so wants to argue with that but he’s too tired and not suicidal. “As long as there’s candy, I’m there.”

“So, you’ll be staying for the carnival as well?” Naomi asks sweetly. Shit.

“It’ll be great to see you around the congregation more,” Mike says. “People are always ready to help.”

“Yeah, I’m…excited about it.” Cas looks about as dubious as Dean feels but nods along.

It feels like forever until Naomi pats her legs and sighs. “Well, I do think it’s about time to get home. Most of us have busy days tomorrow.” She gives Dean a glance with that one and he has to fight not to roll his eyes.

“We all have busy days planned tomorrow,” Cas says as he guides his family to the front door. His brothers pull him into manly, back slapping hugs and then shake Dean’s hand while Naomi kisses
Cas on the cheek.

“See you on Sunday, Dean,” Naomi says before heading out the door as Mike and Luke bid their goodbyes. She doesn’t wait for Dean or Cas to reply.

The second Cas has the door locked behind them Dean slouches against the wall, sighing and rubbing his eyes. “Jesus Fucking Ch—”

Cas cuts him off with a ferocious kiss. Dean’s eyes fly open, which is always weird when you’re kissing someone, but it’s the shock of it all. Cas catches Dean’s face between his hands and deepens the kiss and Dean melts, eye falling closed again and letting Cas press him against the wall. Right when Dean’s head starts spinning, Cas pulls back resting against Dean and panting.

“Sorry, I just needed to…”

“Hey, you can spite kiss me all you want,” Dean smiles and Cas lets out a shaky laugh. “Just promise to spite fuck me too.”

“Done.”

Cas doesn’t go easy on him and that’s just fine. It reminds Dean of the desperation Cas had the first few times they were together, and he understands it more now. It’s not just about want or even need. It’s rebellion. It’s taking something, one thing, because Cas has nothing else. Dean probably shouldn’t like that, but it makes him feel important to mean so much to someone, to Cas. When Cas opens him up, hands nearly shaking with impatience, when he fucks into Dean…it’s glorious. Dean is the only one he’s willing to rebel for, the only one Cas wants to steal and take and hide. He’d never do this with anyone else, somehow Dean knows that and the idea of Cas with someone else makes Dean ache inside. Sure he gets horizontal with Anna, but he never fucks her so hard the bed shakes and he could never do that with another man. Dean can’t even imagine that. And he can’t imagine himself with anyone else like this either. That’s kind of insane, but he’ll blame the mind-bending orgasm.

Cas collapses beside Dean on the bed, panting and basking in the afterglow. He looks beautiful and wrecked and Dean grabs someone’s pants to scrub the come off his stomach because this is too good to leave.

“You should come for dinner more often.” Cas chuckles, eyes bright as he watches Dean from the pillow. “Thanksgiving is gonna be amazing. For me at least.”

“God, that dinner was awful, wasn’t it?” Cas groans, raking his fingers through his hair.

“Yeah. And not just your mom’s crap cooking. But you know what’s weird? It wasn’t all awful.” Cas looks at him curiously. “Like, half the time, they were decent humans. The way you and Mike and Luke were talking reminded me of Sammy so much.”

“You miss him,” Cas says quietly.

“Like hell.” Dean moves closer to Cas so that they’re touching more. It would be considered snuggling by some, but Dean’s okay with that. “But like…it was nice. Some of it. Being around a family that cares about each other. Forgot what that was like.”

“Yeah.” Cas runs his hand through Dean’s hair. “Sometimes I wish they would be terrible all the time. It would make it easier. I hope you don’t mind…having to be quiet. About yourself.”

“You mean like, not telling them I’m queer? Honestly, man, it’s fine. I’ve never been out or
whatever. That’s a whole other basket of issues I don’t need to deal with.”

“Still. I find it unfortunate that you have to.” Cas sighs. “I can’t believe she convinced you to come to church.”

“Yeah, well, I can help with your not Halloween party thing after, it’ll be fun. Or something.”

“Or something. I have to warn you, our current pastor is...”

“Boring?”

“An asshole.”

Dean laughs, trailing his knuckles over Cas’s biceps. It feels so good just to be able to touch him with no reservations. “Sounds like that’s going around in the congregation.”

“It didn’t used to be that way,” Cas says, touching Dean back, not sexual, just exploring and soft. “The pastor when I was younger, his name was Joshua. He knew my father before he left and he was the only one that would really talk about him when I asked. He always knew the right things to say, about God’s wisdom and forgiveness and plans. He made me feel better. Zachariah…he just makes me remember what a sinner I am.”

“You’re not a sinner,” Dean says automatically and Cas gives him an indulgent ‘thanks for lying to me’ look. “And at least old Zach sounds better thank the fucko that beat me up in Benny’s bathroom.”

“That’s a low bar.” Cas grimaces. “The last time I saw Joshua was at my wedding. He did it specially since he was already retired. Told me my father would have been happy. But I think he was lying.”

Dean’s heart breaks a bit, thinking of Cas on that day. He doesn’t even need to ask about the wedding night, he knows it was a horror show from the few snippets about the early years of their marriage Cas as shared. He wishes Cas’s dad had been there to tell him not to do it.

“Speaking of daddy issued, when are we gonna listen to those records?”

Cas raises an interested eyebrow and looks over at the clock that recently made its way into Dean’s room. “It’s getting late.”

“Not like we’re going anywhere. And we had coffee.”

Cas looks back at him and smiles, indulgent. “Okay. Come on.”

They slip their boxers back on and Cas leads them out of the room and to the staircase. Dean hesitates before mounting the stairs. It feels like crossing some final boundary, but it’s the only way to follow Cas, so he keeps moving. The upstairs hall is smaller than Dean would have thought, but he figures since the great room takes up two floors of space, that reduces what’s left upstairs. There’s a set of double doors he assumes lead to the bedroom, three normal doors and narrow linen closet.

“Here,” Cas says, beckoning Dean away from the bedroom, thankfully. “That’s the second guest room we don’t use and this was supposed to be another office. We just never got around to organizing it.” Cas opens the door to the not-office and reveals a jumble of boxes and old furniture in stacks. “Most of this was from my first apartment. Anna wanted nicer things but I’m sentimental so we’ve kept them.”
“Hoarder,” Dean mutters and Cas swats him gently.

“Here.” Cas moves a few boxes to reveal one that looks older than the rest and kneels to open it. Dean joins him on the floor and pulls out the first album carefully.

“Bob Seger. One of the greatest song writers of all time. Nice.” It’s actually sort of hard to make out all the details of the cover, besides Seger’s epic mustache, since they haven’t bothered to turn on the light. Cas pulls out what looks like Sergeant Pepper’s and Dean nudges him to the side. They thumb through the dozens of albums, smiling, the scent of old paper and wax in the air. “Oh yes…”

“What?”

Dean grins as he pulls his prize from the box. He’d know the cover of Zepp II anywhere. “Go find your record player.”

“It’s over here.” Cas clatters around for a second, plugging things in and moving a few boxes until he had the player set up on the floor near them. Dean delicately removes the record from the sleeve and paper sheath and sets it on the turn table. It’s been forever since he’s played a record, but setting down the needle is still easy and it’s so satisfying when the first chords of “Whole Lotta Love” fill the room.

“You know this band?”

“You don’t?” Dean balks.

“The voice sounds familiar.”

“It’s Zeppelin, man, come on.” Cas shrugs. “Your dad was much cooler than you.”

“Probably.”

Dean settles back on the carper. The music takes him back years, to the record player at their old house, to cassettes on a long drive, even to Robin’s basement in high school. Dean grins at the memory and nudges Cas with his shoulder. “This is prime make out music you know.”

“Is it now?”

“Hell yeah. When I was in high school, put this on; Second base by the 5th track, never fail.” Cas laughs fully at that, which is almost as good as getting the make out session Dean’s angling for.

“Our high school experiences were very different.”

“Yeah, well, you went to one the whole time and graduated, so that’s a given.”

Cas gives a crooked smile. “I wish I’d know you. Back then.”

“I was like five when you were in high school, creep.”

“You know what I mean,” Cas says, butting Dean with his shoulder. His bare skin is cool and smooth and Dean doesn’t ever want the contact to stop so he leans on Cas to prolong it. The song ends and fades into “What Is and What Should Never Be.”

“Yeah. I know.”

“I wish things were different,” Cas whispers as Dean rests his head on his shoulder.
“Yeah. Me too.”

It’s a weird thing to think about. Meeting Cas in some other life, where they’re not broken and trapped and fucked over by fate. It could be worse, maybe, but there are so many ways it could be better. They could be out and open and…just together. Really together. That’s a thing Dean’s never even considered with any one, especially with Cas, but the idea is suddenly so real it steals the air from his lungs.

“Are you alright?” Cas asks, Dean must have made some sort of sound that he didn’t notice.

“Yeah, I’m fine just…the music…makes me think about stuff.”

“Stuff?”

“Just, you and me and if we could…” Dean swallows. They can’t. “And, you know, my dad and shit. He loved this song.” It’s a good cover. Not really a lie because he is thinking about his dad. And Cas’s dad and mom and Sam and Anna and all the people that they love and life stuck them with that make being with Cas the stuff of dreams. Fuck it’s a good dream, though.

“Can I do anything?” Cas asks, impossibly kind.

“Yeah, time for the make out session,” Dean smirks. This is one thing he can do.

Cas smiles, eyes glinting in the orange light from the streetlamp outside. “Alright.”

Kissing Cas doesn’t make it easier to keep the dream away, but it makes it hurt less to dream it and that’s good enough. He loves the way Cas kisses him, and for a little while he decides to let go. There in the dark, with ghosts of the past and impossible futures hovering around them, he lets himself want it. Want everything. He kisses Cas and imagines a life they can’t ever have, and he wants it more than anything.

———

Cas wakes up at three a.m. Sunday morning and lies in bed. He’s not sure what woke him up, other than the usual creeping sense of dread. Waking up like this is becoming more common for him, which is concerning. He’d wake in the night and check his phone, reading over the text conversations with Dean and wondering if he should erase them. There was nothing really incriminating, but it was flirtatious sometimes. He should delete them, actually. But every time he started, his courage failed. There were only so many remembrances of Dean he had that he could keep. A few texts, a copy of the picture he took and printed for Dean to send to Sam, tucked away with a pile of receipts in his desk as work. Beyond that he has nothing but memories and useless dreams.

He figures three a.m. is maybe the only time he can indulge in fantasies safely. Sometimes he still will masturbate in the shower, but not lately. It’s better to keep that frustration and lust in check and use it for Anna. He often lets his mind drift when he runs or drives, but it’s not the same. Here in the small hours, he lets himself be free. He thinks of the physical things, of course. The perfect curve of Dean’s ass, the bow of his legs, the way his freckles dust his cheek bones…but tonight Cas thinks of more than that. He thinks about walking with Dean somewhere bright and green and holding hands for the world to see. Shopping together, arguing over groceries. Christmas, just them.
You and me and if we could...

If things were different.

He falls asleep and drifts into vague dreams, the sort that almost make sense. Dean is there, wearing suit for some reason. He looks wonderful. And Castiel is his. Just his and it’s fantastic and bright and holding him feels better than anything in the world. There’s also a large rhododendron trying to eat one of their neighbors, but it’s not of import. He’s kissing Dean, holding him close and drinking in his heat as he ruts against him. Dean is suddenly not in a suit and in Castiel’s bed, sliding a delicate hand up his thigh and cradling his hardening cock. His hands shift from human to a bird’s claw and that should be disturbing but he straddles Castiel and pulls his sleep pants down and coaxes him to full hardness. Soft thighs bracket his legs and Castiel groans.

“Does that feel good?”

Castiel’s eyes flutter open to see Anna above him, framed in the early morning light, red hair tumbling over bare breasts, eyes hooded as she strokes his cock. “Anna…”

“You started it,” Anna giggles. “Let’s have some fun.”

She doesn’t wait, just maneuvers Cas into her entrance, and begins to move her hips. She’s tight and warm and physically, Castiel feels himself respond but inside he’s all but trembling with revulsion. This is not what he wants, not what he was dreaming of and it’s all wrong. The whiplash going from the imaginary paradise to this is too much.

“Anna, I…”

“Come on, babe, doesn’t it feel good?” Anna never speaks like that, never tries for sexy and it’s jarring. Castiel blinks, his mind and body crashing into sync and his erection flagging.

“I’m sorry,” he says automatically

“Here, touch me.” Anna grabs Cas’s hands and forces him to grab her breasts and knead them.

“Better?”

“No.”

The word falls out of his mouth unbidden and Anna stills, her face filling with confusion and hurt.

“What?”

Castiel’s pulse pounds and he can feel his gut burning. “This isn’t…Please get off.”

“Cas.”

“I don’t want to do this.” Cas struggles away, his chest tightening and his head spinning.

“I can do something different!” Anna says, desperate. “I can not talk or turn around or whatever you need to pretend to make it better.”

“No. No more pretending. I can’t…” He’s worried he’s going to be sick before the words make it out.

“You can. I know you can.”

“Anna, I’m…”
“Stop!” Castiel recoils at the force in her voice. She shakes her head. “I’m sorry for surprising you. We have things to do today. Go for your run. I need to shower.”

“No, I want to talk. If we don’t do this now…” He doesn’t think he’ll be as brave or foolish in an hour, or even in a few minutes. He’s not even sure what or how much he wants to share but, it’s suddenly all too much to keep in anymore.

“We’re going to be late. We can talk later,” Anna declares and retreats to the bathroom. Castiel realizes exactly why she doesn’t want to talk. Their entire married life has been a series of avoided conversations and willful ignorance. And it can’t go on.

Castiel pulls on his running clothes in a fog and heads out the door into the chill October morning. He doesn’t know what just happened, or what just nearly happened, just that he’s angry it didn’t. He runs hard and fast, trying to drown out the cacophony of thoughts until his lungs are burning. He doesn’t know what broke or why. Maybe it was the violation of sex without his knowing participation. May it was the dream. Maybe it was all the things Dean and he almost said alone with those records. Maybe it’s just everything building up. Every day lately it’s be harder, harder to not look at Dean, to not want to grab him and run away and not look back. Everyone would be fine without him. And then they could…what? Date? Does Dean want that?

Castiel nearly stumbles off the sidewalk. He doesn’t know if Dean wants that. He hasn’t ever asked. He’s just guessed and assumed and before he explodes his own life there is one person he has to think about as well. Or wants to think about. And doesn’t he owe it to Anna not to destroy her? Unless he already has. He has to talk this through with Dean. He’ll know what to do. After church they’ll find some time and figure it out.

He manages to avoid Dean and Anna when he gets home, showers and dresses for church. His mind is slightly clearer when he gets back downstairs to find his wife and his lover chatting quietly over plates of eggs. Dean has on a button-down shirt with jeans, perhaps an attempt at Sunday best.

“Do you need to bring anything in particular for the carnival?” Anna asks brightly.

“No, Daniel and Adina are in charge of supplies. I’m on set up,” Cas mutters.

“Hope supplies includes candy,” Dean says.

“You’re literally eating right now,” Anna laughs.

“But not candy,” Dean grins. “Cas you want some grub?”

“No, I’m not hungry.”

“Suit yourself,” Dean says. Anna opens her mouth then closes it, likely rethinking telling him he should eat.

The drive to church is quiet and more than a little awkward. It makes no sense for Dean to sit in the back, since he’s so much taller, but it would also be wrong for Anna to give up her place. It’s a not a long ride, thankfully and soon they pull into the tree-lined lot. Dean smiles at the church as they get out. Castiel has no illusions about the building’s aesthetic appeal. It’s mid-century modern, angular and covered in windows. The white cross on the top is too big for the building, but there’s no reason to change it.

“Are you sure about this?” Cas asks Dean as they watch people begin to file in.

“Yeah, it’ll be…fine,” Dean says unconvincingly. “New adventure or whatever.”
He watches Dean brace himself as they head inside. It’s not so bad, they wave to friends and not too many people give them looks when they walk through the lobby. Naomi greets them warmly when they reach their normal row and Rachel manages not to glare daggers at Dean, so it’s successful.

The pew feels even more stiff and uncomfortable than usual with Dean beside him on the aisle. It feels like the whispers are louder as the congregation takes their seats and Castiel keeps his eyes resolutely forward.

“Good morning, everyone,” Zachariah says, stepping to the pulpit. “I hope everyone is feeling seasonal today. Now you’ll note I say seasonal. Not ‘spooky’ or ‘in the holiday spirit.’ I made a choice there. And that’s what I want to talk to you about today: choices.”

Dean sighs beside him and Castiel can practically hear the sarcastic remark.

“Every day we face choices. Some are simple, like whether you reject a so-called holiday devoted to occultism and indulgence and chose the way of the Lord. When you find a wallet on the street with money in it. When your employer wants you to say ‘happy holidays.’ You know to do the Christian thing in those situations. But what about others? What about those little lies you tell each day? ‘No one will know if I break the speed limit.’ ‘It’s a secret ballot, I can vote however I like.’ ‘No one saw me looking at that attractive woman.’” Zachariah sends a simpering smile to his wife in the front row that’s frankly disturbing. “But God knows. God knows. And that is why you must make the right choices. God knows how you hurt others, even when they do not know it was you. God knows when by inaction you allow evil to flourish. God knows your hearts and sins. That is the truth of choice – you always have it, but there is only one right choice in the eyes of the Lord.”

Castiel focuses on the back of Burt Peterson’s head in front of him and tunes Zachariah out. His own continued inaction and sin is the last thing he needs to contemplate and pray on. Eventually the sermon is over and Bartholomew Boyle takes the pulpit to speak. He’s not sure if it’s proper for a politician to make what amounts to a campaign speech at a church, but Castiel isn’t in charge. He goes on for too long about supporting families and law enforcement and small business and American values. It’s all terrible code for keep the wrong type of people where they belong and people like Bart in power.

After that the choir performs and Castiel notices Dean cringing at that more than anything else. Community announcements and then it’s time for reading from scripture.

“Before we read, Mr. Shurley would like me to remind the volunteers setting up for the harvest party that they are needed now. Everyone else will just have to wait to enjoy yourself and help us raise some funds for a good cause.”

“That’s my cue,” Castiel says to Anna and Dean. He’s very careful not to touch Dean as he exits the pew. He wonders what Dean will think of Corinthians, but he’s somewhat relieved to get away himself.

Hannah greets Castiel with a stiff smile when he makes it down to the large basement, he glad to see a friendly face. Less so to see Ishim beside her.

“So, what can I do?” Castiel asks.

“Mr. Shurley is handing out tasks,” Ishim says and manages to make it a sneer.

“He already told me he’d like you to help me setting up the fishing and photo booth. It won’t take too long,” Hannah says. “Ishim is moving hay bales.”
“Did Luke donate those?” Castiel attempts to joke but Ishim doesn’t smile.

“Yes. Very good man, your brother,” Ishim says in that low, dangerous way that communicates exactly what aspects of Luke he admires. “It’s good to have righteous people in your family.” He gives Hannah a glance and Castiel’s hackles rise.

“Come on, Castiel,” Hannah says, tugging him away before he can comment. When they’re out of ear shot Castiel sighs and relaxes incrementally. “Don’t worry about Ishim, he’s just mad that I told him again I have no intention of marrying a nice man and settling down.”

Castiel turns to Hannah. She’d never said anything so openly before. “That’s a good plan,” he mutters and starts working on the photo booth set up. He can’t recommend married life very well, then again he’s not even sure if what he has is a real marriage. Not the way it’s supposed to be at least. The flagrant adultery is a main factor.

“Castiel, are you alright?” Hannah asks after a ten minutes of setting up backgrounds and a painted board for the Go Fish game.

“No,” he answers, utterly tired of lying.

“What’s wrong?” He knows social interactions aren’t Hannah’s forte so it means a great deal that she’s attempting to help. He kneels down, avoiding her eyes to organize a bucket of fishing polls with clothes pins on the end.

“It’s Anna and me…”

“Can I help finish up?” They both spin at the sound of Ishim’s voice. He looks suspicious, but maybe Cas is imagining it.

“No, we’re done,” Hannah says. “And I think they’re finished upstairs. People should be coming in soon.”

“Good,” Ishim says. “This…party. It’s a good start for helping the community move away from the devil’s so-called holiday. Maybe next year we’ll be able to so a full hell house.”

“A what?” Cas asks.

“No. They’re horrible,” Hannah says with surprising force. Haunted houses with room depicting different ways to hell to frighten people.”

“Abortionists torn apart like the children they kill. Sodomites wasting away from AIDS. You know the drill.” Ishim smiles. “And they’re effective.”

“It sounds appalling,” Cas says, as his eyes flit to the first people coming down the stairs.

“It’s the kind of thing this town needs,” Ishim replies. “There’s already far too liberal an attitude creeping in here.”

“I doubt that,” Castiel says, firm and almost threatening. Ishim sneers and looks like he’s about to argue but Castiel sees a familiar flash of red hair approaching, with Dean looming behind. “Ishim, let me introduce my wife and our friend.”

Ishim turns to Anna first. “Hello, I’m Anna Novak.”

“Ishim Sunder,” Ishim shakes Anna’s hand with a smile then turns to Dean. Cas’s heart drops. In all
the time he’s known Dean, he’s never seen him look so afraid.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
- homophobic and transphobic language
- sex initiated without the consent of an unconscious person
- mentions of death
- anal sex

other notes:
Yes. Sorry to leave you on a cliffhanger (read: not sorry at all). If you want a relief from the angst check out my non-angsty, very funny tropfest fic "I Put a Spell on You". Also, the cooking disasters mentioned by the Novak boys all actually happened to me, via my grandmother. Lovely woman. Couldn't cook to save her LIFE. AND FINALLY, If anyone is at Geek Girl Con in seattle next Saturday (the 30th) please look out for me! My panel is at 5 and I'll be around all day!
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Hello, a bit early this week, which is franky surprising because this was not an easy chapter. Their are very spoiler-y warnings/disclaimers in the endnotes. No sex acts but other stuff that's pretty heavy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shit.

This is bad. This is scary bad. Dean had come ready to deal with some assholes today but not the one that left him broken and bleeding on a dirty bathroom floor. Dean meets Ishim’s icy eyes and sees a spark of recognition.

Shit shit shit fuck.

“And this is Dean,” Anna says before Dean can stop her. “He’s staying with us for a while.”

“The homeless man?” Ishim says, low and thoughtful. Great, Ishim, like fucking everyone, knows what the deal is.

“Cas and I met downtown,” Dean says carefully, he feels like he might throw up but he can’t let Ishim think or guess that Cas was a client. “Bonded over sandwiches. Cas and Anna here took me in after I hit a bad patch.”

“A bad patch?” Ishim repeats.

Dean can see Cas watching him from the corner of his eye. Cas knows Dean isn’t okay, because he knows Dean. Dean does not deserve him but he’s the only reason Dean feels even a sliver of safety right now. “Yeah, some assholes beat the crap out of me.”

“They did more than that, they nearly killed you,” Cas adds.

“It was awful,” Anna agrees.

“Yeah, it was. Can’t imagine what’s wrong with a person that they’d wanna hurt another human like that,” Dean says and Ishim narrows his eyes. If Ishim recognizes him, Dean wants him to know that is goes both ways. Somehow he thinks that Ishim wouldn’t want the respectable folk to know about his extracurricular activities. Even this crowd would think that was too far…or most of them.

“What did you do to deserve such treatment, Dean?” Ishim replies, smirking and Dean’s hands contract into fists. He can hear the subtext: did you fuck them or not fuck them? Or was it just because you’re a whore and a fag?

“You know, I think I left my phone upstairs, I gotta…” He doesn’t finish the excuse, just turns and walks away. He needs air. He needs to figure this out and…fuck. Cas says something behind him that he can’t make out. His feet take him back up the stairs and straight out the door. There’s nowhere to go from there, since Anna and Cas are his fucking ride and bailing completely would be beyond suspicious. He hangs a left and trudges through some bushes to get to the back of the
building then collapses against the rough beige siding.

“Fucking hell,” he mutters and pulls out his phone. At least he can text Cas and give him a heads up.

“Um, are you okay?”

“Jesus Christ!” Dean exclaims as he jumps and turns to the source of the voice. It’s a short man with a raggedy beard and a too many layers who looks as spooked as Dean.

“Sorry! I just…you looked like you were having a shitty day too. And you know, also hiding,” the guy says. “ Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“It’s okay, man. I didn’t mean to take the Lord’s name in vain or whatever.”

“It’s fine. Great actually. Don’t hear it enough.” The guy pulls a silver flask out of his coat and takes a swig, then offers it to Dean. “You want some?”

“Hell yeah.” Dean takes a deep drink from the flask. It’s cheap vodka that burns all the way down but, man, it’s a relief to his frayed nerves. “Thanks,” Dean says as he hands back the flask. The guy takes it then offers his hand to Dean.

“I’m Chuck, by the way. Shurley.”

“Chuck as in the pastor?” Dean laughs as he shakes his hand.

“Assistant pastor.”

“Do you offer your congregation drinks very often?”

Chuck shakes his head. “I’m pretty sure I’d remember if you were part of the congregation. Unless you’re new. In which case…fuck.”

“It’s fine. I’m just here with some friends. I’m Dean.”

Chuck’s eyes go wide. “Dean? Like Castiel’s Dean?”

“Does everyone here know who I am?” Fuck, he doesn’t even want to know what a pastor, assistant or otherwise, thinks of him on top of everything else.

“No!” Chuck yelps. “Well. Yes. Okay. Probably. But like, I just know ’cause Cas has talked about you. He’s a really good guy, Cas.”

“Best guy I know,” Dean mutters.

“It’s really great to finally meet you,” Chuck says, sticking out his hand again. “Shit. Did that already.”

“So, why’re you out here?” Dean asks as Chuck retracts his hand and goes for the flask again. “Shouldn’t you be managing the harvest shindig instead of hiding in the bushes drinking with a stranger?”

Chuck takes another drink and automatically passes the flask to Dean. “Come on, would you rather be out here or stuck in the basement with a bunch of bigots that want you fired?”

“Dude, no arguments here. That crowd; even the nice ones are jerks half the time and the not so nice ones…” Dean lets out a whistle, a twinge in his ribs from old wounds. He takes a swig of vodka. It
doesn’t help.

“And like, I’m trying, I really am! But there’s only so much I can do before I’m just hitting my head against a wall. They’ve been taught so many lies, it’s horrifying. There are good good people in there, but they’re so fucking scared of the assholes; Zach and fuckers like Ishim.”

“Ishim?” Dean echoes, queasily reminded of why he’s even out here.

“Yeah. Total tool. And I think he wants my job,” Chuck huffs, grabs the flask from Dean and takes another drink.

“Sounds like you don’t want this job.” Dean wonders if it’s worth it to tell Chuck what a psychopath Ishim really is, but that involves revealing things about himself he’s really not ready for a man of God, however reluctant, to know.

“I dunno. I didn’t want it when I got it, but I feel like I’m responsible for people now, you know?”

“No.”

“Maybe like, God needs me here,” Chuck goes on, half-breathless, Dean wonders if the guy’s tongue is looser because of the booze or if he just doesn’t have a filter. “There’s gotta be some balance. Someone has to speak for the oppressed people, the ones Jesus actually cared for, or nothing’s ever gonna change.”

“How did you even end up here?” Dean asks. In his hoodie and scuffed converse, Chuck certainly doesn’t look like the rest of the congregation.

“My ex thought that the church was a joke. Or maybe God was the joke. I’m not sure. Hated that I went to seminary. So last time we broke up—”

“Last time?”

“Dude, it’s a whole messy story. But he thought it would be so funny to get me a gig working in Hicksville with a bunch of family values nuts. Really show me what the God I want to serve gets used for.”

“He…what?” Dean can’t process any of this. “How?”

“He runs a porn company. Knows exactly how much naughty school girl content Zachariah enjoys, among other things.”

“Oh fuck, I don’t wanna think about that.”

“Right?” Chuck’s eyes are wide and slightly unhinged. “I have to have that image in my head every time I see him. Not great for a productive working relationship.”

“Wait, wait, go back to the part about your ex.” Dean’s sure he hallucinated. “You said…he?”

“Oh. Yeah.” Chuck digs his hands into his pockets.

“You’re gay?”

Chuck shrugs, his cheeks slightly red but otherwise he looks un-freaked. “Bi. But, yeah.”

Dean stares at Chuck like he just told him he was a unicorn. He’s never heard someone just…say that in a normal conversation. Hell, half his old clients spent half the time he had their dicks in his
mouth saying how straight they were.

“Shit,” Dean whispers.

“Don’t tell anyone.Fuck, I know that’s unfair to put on you but, obviously it…wouldn’t be great if that got out. Which sucks.”

“Why the hell did you tell me?” Dean demands. As if this day needed to be weirder.

“Oh, I, uh, just figured that since you were, I mean, are…” Chuck is scrambling.

“I never said I was queer.” It’s been a whirlwind conversation but Dean’s pretty sure he’d remember dropping that bomb.

“Fuck.” Now Chuck looks scared.

“How did you know?” Dean advances on the much smaller man and he raises his hands, cowering.

“I didn’t, okay? Not, like, officially, just I had heard.”

“From who?” He knows Cas would never tell anyone about him. He knows that but…fuck. “Was it Ishim? How?”

“It was Anna!” Chuck yelps.

“What?” Dean heart falls so fast it possible reaches the earth’s core. “Anna?”

“She didn’t know, okay? She just had…suspicions and the way Cas was acting and…I do have some gaydar okay.”

“You cannot tell anyone,” Dean growls.

“I won’t! I--”

Dean grabs Chuck by the collars and practically lifts him off the ground. “You cannot tell anyone.”

“Okay! Chill, man, I don’t out people!” Chuck squeals and Dean drops him. “Especially around here. Christ…”

“I can’t do that to Cas,” Dean says, catching his breath. And fuck, that brings the reason he was out here right back to his mind. “Shit.”

“What?”

“Can you do me a big fucking favor?”

“Are you gonna strangle me again?”

Dean gives Chuck a glare that he’s free to interpret anyway he likes. “That Ishim asshole, I’ve…he makes me hella uncomfortable. That’s why I came out here.”

“Feel you there,” Chuck mutters and Dean almost feels back for asking this. Almost.

“Can you go down there and keep him the fuck away from me? And Cas and Anna.”

Chuck looks at him thoughtfully. “You really care about Cas, don’t you? Anna too?”
“Yeah.” Dean answers without hesitation, even though the way he cares for them is very different. "They're good people."

“Okay. I’ll keep Voldemort busy,” Chuck sighs. “But, in exchange maybe think about…showing Cas that you care. And Anna too.”

Dean has no idea what the fuck that means, so he just nods.

“And if, you ever want to talk…” Dean purses his lips and Chuck flinches. “Too much. Okay. I’m just gonna go back in now. Thanks. See you. Uh, God bless.”

Dean rolls his eyes and collapses back against the church wall. Fuck, Dean does wants to talk to someone. He wants to call Sammy or weep into a beer at Benny’s or bitch to Bobby but none of them would understand this, not really. No one would console him or tell him it was going to be okay, because it’s not. They’d tell him to do the right thing and get the hell out of Cas’s life right then and there. Only one person would tell him to stay; the one person he can and should talk to.

Dean’s phone starts buzzing just as he opens his texts, Cas’s name and the dorky picture Dean snuck of him filling the screen.

“Cas—”

“Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” He can hear Cas glaring. “Ish. I just needed a second.”

“Why are you frightened of Ishim?” Jesus, the guy is perceptive.

“Are you around him right now? Did he say anything?”

“He left with Hannah right after you, I think he was offended by your exit. Where are you and what is going on?”

“I’m around back. I ran into Chuck. I’ll meet you at the front, okay?” He knows it’s stupid to be alone with Cas here, but he can’t say this over the phone, or let Cas be in the same room as Ishim when he finds out.

“Fine.” Cas hangs up without ceremony.

Dean makes his way out of the hiding spot. It must be a regular hang out for someone because there are cigarette butts ground into the dirt. Man what he wouldn’t give for a smoke right now. Or a joint. The vodka barely took the edge off and he’s already missing Chuck’s flask.

“Dean,” Cas calls, exiting the church just as soon Dean comes around the corner.

“I’m fine,” Dean says as Cas rushes to him. He’s sure he doesn’t look fine but it’s brave face time. “It’s just…Ishim.”

“How do you know him?” Cas’s face falls. “Was he a…” Cas can’t say john or even client here; not where people might hear.

“No! I mean, he was gonna be, I thought. Until he beat the shit out of me.”

“What?”

“I told you, right before we met. Some religious guy with a weird name got me alone and beat me all
to hell for being a...well, all the things I am.”

Cas doesn’t respond, he just turns back to the door with murder in his face.

“Cas, no!” Dean cries, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him back. “We cannot make a scene. We gotta...I don’t know, make a plan.”

“A plan? For dealing with the man that beat you in the name of God,” Cas growls. "He deserves to be punished."

“The man that could out me and you to the whole goddamn congregation if we’re not careful.”

Cas relaxes and turns to Dean, looking stricken. God, had he not even thought of that before barreling off to go medieval the guy? What the hell? “Fine. What sort of plan do you have in mind?”

“I don’t know!” Dean yells as a car door slams in the parking lot, as woman in a sweater set walks by giving them the stink eye. "We can head it off at the pass maybe? Keep up the same story about me and you if this comes out? There’s no reason you have to take a fall for me.” Dean doesn’t like the possibilities this is raising at all, but if he has to get out to keep Cas’s reputation and job and everything safe, he’ll do it. “We might be okay.”

“I don’t think so,” Cas mutters and Dean’s thoughts screech to a halt.

“What?”

“Anna. This morning. I tried to talk to her. After she...never mind why, but I almost told her.”

“About us?” Dean balks.

“About me.” Cas looks ill just at the thought and Dean doesn’t know if he’s freaked out or amazed. “That I’m...” Cas swallows and sighs. “Fuck. I can’t even say it to you and you know.”

“Maybe she already knows.” Cas looks up at Dean with an expression that’s more realization than surprise. “Listen, that’s the other thing. I was talking with Chuck and he...he knew I was queer because of something Anna said to him. Or suspects. I dunno.”

“We need to talk to her.” Cas says it with the same enthusiasm one might have about having to go to a grandparent’s funeral.

“Seriously?”

“If you’re alright with it.”

“With Ishim around and her knowing something, I don’t think I have much of a choice. But you...”

“We always have a choice,” Cas says with a bitter, half-smile.

“Then, I chose whatever you need.” Cas gives him a look Dean’s not accustomed to seeing outside of Thursday nights. It’s warm and intimate and too much for so public a setting. “So what do you need, Cas?”

“I don’t know,” Cas whispers. “I don’t know. I hate hurting her and I know I am, but if this gets out I’ll lose my family. My job. My friends...But she doesn’t deserve this.”

“Neither do you, Cas,” Dean says, tender and fervent. He knows it makes him a shit person to think it, but he couldn’t care less about Cas’s family. Or even Anna. He just doesn’t want Cas to hurt.
“I deserve to suffer. I’ve lied and betrayed her, used her and you. I’ve defied God again and again.” Cas looks up towards where the church’s white cross stands out against the grey sky. “I deserve all of this. I should tell her. Or confirm what she probably guesses. But if she leaves me…”

“Do you want her to leave you?” Dean can’t even contemplate that. Cas being free. Cas choosing him. It’s impossible. “Do you want to leave her?”

Cas looks back at the sky and the church and shudders. “I don’t know. We’ll tell her what Ishim knows. And ask her what she…what she thinks she knows. And go from there.” It’s another cop out, but Dean can’t blame him. He has nothing to offer Cas at all. He has nothing to offer anyone.

“Okay. I’ve got your back, whatever happens.” Dean’s surprised that the words come out of his mouth, even though they’re true. Whatever Cas wants, he’ll do, be it lying or leaving. It’s the sort of thing you’re supposed to do when you care about someone.

“Thank you,” Cas sighs. “We should get back in. You don’t think Ishim will—”

“Nah, Chuck is running interference.” Cas raises an eyebrow at that. “We bonded. And seriously, I know you have…thoughts and feeling and whatever about God and being—” He stops himself. It’s Cas’s choice to say it first, not his. “You know. He might be helpful.”

“Why do you say that? What did you two talk about?”

Dean’s not sure if, given everything, he has any right to out Chuck, even to Cas. “Just talk to him.”

“Fine. Let’s get back inside,” Cas grumbles and Dean follows him back into the church and down to the basement. Cas spots Anna talking with someone Dean doesn’t know over by the art station. He gives Dean a worried look but Dean waves him off. He doesn’t see Ishim around right now and he doesn’t feel like socializing.

Things are already jumping, as much as they can be for an over-cast Sunday afternoon. The kids are running around the very small hay-maze, getting their faces painted and nibbling on candy. Dean snags a piece from a bowl and peels off the foil. It’s the shitty, off-band chocolate, grainy and nearly tasteless. He hopes at least some of these kids go trick-or-treating and get some of the good stuff. Personally, he’s ready to kill a man for a Butterfinger.

“Hello, Dean.” Dean turns to see Hannah standing beside him. She looks about as uncomfortable as he feels. “You left earlier before I could say hello. So. Hello. Again.”

“Sorry I bailed. Just…remembered a thing.”

“My cousin is not a pleasant man,” Hannah says flatly. “I don’t blame you.”

“Thanks. Uh. How are you?” He sounds like an idiot pretending to be a normal person, which to be fair, he is.

“Bored,” Hannah says and Dean chuckles at the honesty. “I don’t like children. But the volunteers are required to be here.”

“Well, my ride is a volunteer so, I feel ya.” Dean looks around, there’s an imposing black man scowling at him from a corner and to his dismay the pastor catches sight of them and starts heading their way.

“Oh wonderful,” Hannah sighs.
“Don’t leave me alone,” Dean mutters back. Hannah gives the smallest nod, straightening her shoulders as Zachariah joins them.

“Ah, the singles corner,” Zachariah says. He smiles like they lawyers Dean used to have to deal with in juvie: fake, condescending and (rightly) sure he’s guilty of something.

“Somethin’ like that,” Dean replies and holds out his hand. “I don’t think we’ve formally met, I’m Dean.”

“Yes. I’m aware of who you are,” Zachariah replies, keeping his hands clasped behind his back. “I hope you enjoyed the service. There’s always lessons for the Lord to teach.”

Dean’s hand droops back to his side. “Yeah it was real nice. Especially liked the politician talking about cleaning up the city.”

“I found his remarks inappropriate for a service, personally,” Hannah says with some quiet defiance and Dean decides for certain that he likes her. “As was the implication that our faith or membership in the congregation should influence our votes.”

“Well, there are only so many politicians that have the true soul of the country, or the city in this case, in mind,” Zachariah says back. “Surely you support his platforms? I know your cousin has been very active in his campaign since joining us.”

“What I support is my business. I chose to show my faith in other ways,” Hannah replies.

“And I don’t see good old Bart down here supporting the community,” Dean adds and Zachariah’s smarmy smile withers into a sneer.

“He has a very busy schedule.”

“I bet,” Dean says, holding Zachariah’s gaze. Ishim may scare the crap out of him for what he’s done or could do to Cas, and him, but he refuses to be intimidated by this asshole.

“Well, I’ll leave you two to it. It looks like you’re getting along. Good luck with that.” Zachariah turns without another word, plastering on his grin again to greet a smiling, Stepford couple a few yards away.

“Was he implying we should…get together or something?”

“Appallingly, yes.”

“Awesome,” Dean groans, then catches Hannah’s smirk. “I mean you’re cute. But uh, I…”

“You’re not my type,” Hannah says flatly.

“Great. That’s...yeah. You're not my - well, you could be but I'm...Never mind.” At that Hannah finally cracks a smile.

“Would you like to help me get the donuts set up for…whatever we’re calling the eating a donut on a string game?”

“Do you want me to make sure you didn’t get a poisoned batch?”

“I think it would only be prudent.”

“This way then.”
Dean guesses donuts aren’t so bad for a last meal before the execution.

The drive home is only slightly worse than the carnival. Castiel spent the whole time looking over his shoulder, worried about Dean yet wary of speaking to him too much or at all. He’d let Anna take the lead and guide him through the crowd, careful to dodge Uriel and Zachariah and Ishim and Luke… and pretty much everyone. He’s exhausted and worn, but ready to get home and talk. Better to pull the bandaid off quickly.

No one talks when they get out of the car. Oddly, Anna checks her phone and sends a text, pointedly avoiding Castiel’s eyes when they get inside.

“Anna, we still need to talk,” Castiel begins.

“Tomorrow,” Anna sighs. “More important things are happening today.”

“Um,” Dean says. “I don’t think this can wait.”

“Of course it can.” Anna’s false confidence and smile are paper thin and it hurts to see her trying so hard to keep them up.

“A., we can’t keep avoiding this,” Castiel says gently. Anna retreats into the kitchen, placing the counter between them as if it might protect her.

“There’s nothing to avoid, Cas.” She glances uneasily at Dean. “You had a bad morning, I crossed a line but it’s all okay. We can talk in private later.”

“Anna, this is about me, okay? Something I haven’t told you,” Dean says and Anna gives him a bewildered look.

Alright, go ahead.” There’s a challenge in her voice that’s disconcerting.

“That guy at church, Ishim. Hannah’s cousin. You probably noticed he freaked me out,” Dean begins and Anna nods. “Well, it’s because I know him. From before I knew Cas. I met him in a bar downtown.”

“What? What was he doing there?” Anna seems genuinely confused now.

“Guess he was in town visiting. And his idea of a good time was looking for people like me.” Dean is being very careful with his words, like walking a mine field.

“People like you,” Anna repeats slowly.

“I, uh, solicited him I think is the right word.” Dean straightens his spine, visibly pushing away his shame and Castiel feels a strange ripple of pride. “For sex.”

“Anonymous sex?” Anna’s voice is no longer steady.

“Paid sex.”

There it is. Castiel watches Anna’s face and waits for her anger, or her suspicion or hurt, but there’s
only contemplation. “Did you and Ishim…”

“No. It was a con. On his part. He got me alone in a bathroom and he beat the shit out of me.” The look of horror on Anna’s face is encouraging at least. “But I’m pretty sure he recognized me. And I wanted to tell you before he did that…that’s what I used to do for money.”

“You’re a prostitute,” Anna says carefully, her eyes unfocused. “You get paid to have sex with men,”

“I—” Castiel thinks Dean is going to correct her tense, but Anna cuts him off with a high, hysterical laugh. “Not really the reaction I was expecting.”

“Anna?” Cas asks, completely thrown as Anna continues to laugh. She smiles and turns to Castiel.

“He’s not really homosexual. You pay him. For sex. It’s…it’s just sex.” Anna rushes to Castiel and hugs him tightly. “This is…this make more sense. Oh my God, you paid him. It’s not real.”

“What are you talking about?” Castiel looks down at Anna’s face, there are tears in her eyes but she’s smiling.

“You and Dean. I was worried you had feelings for him, but…it’s not like that.” Castiel can’t understand this. How is she happy about this?

“So you know?” Dean asks before Castiel can. “About me and...us?”

Anna scowls at Dean. “Of course, I do. I’m not an idiot. I know my husband has certain…proclivities. Why do you think I’ve let you to stay here?”

“Let him…” Castiel echoes, completely lost.

"I thought you didn't want me to die on the street," Dean says, flat and shocked.

"Dean, I didn't. I do care about you and like you. I want to help you. But the most important thing to me will always be my husband," Anna turns back to Castiel. "Cas, this was always for you. So you can get better,” Anna says. “So I…so we can help you.”

Castiel needs to sit down. He feels ill and dizzy, too many emotions swirling inside him to bear.

“What do you mean, help?” Dean asks, his voice low and threatening as Castiel gropes for a kitchen chair.

“Cas is sick. And confused. But he just needs to learn to enjoy doing things the natural way,” Anna says. It sounds rehearsed but completely sincere.

“The natural…are you insane?!” Dean yells and Anna’s eyes fill with cold fire.

“I don’t expect you to understand, Dean. But this is what God intends.”

“Anna…” Castiel mutters.

“Why else do you think I would allow my husband to fornicate with you if it wasn’t for his own good?” Anna pushes on. “Do you know how hard it’s been for me? Knowing what you two do when I’m gone…” She shudders.

“But you let it happen because you knew it made Cas, what, happy?” The bitterness in Dean’s voice is palpable.
"I knew it made him better. It made him able to be with me like God intended. Cas…” Anna comes towards him, her face plaintive.

Castiel looks up. He feels cold and half an inch to the left of reality. How is this happening? “I…”

“It was getting better, I know it was, and it can keep getting better. You started before he was hurt, didn’t you? The first time things changed, I didn’t know what the difference was. Then after…”

“How did you know?” Cas asks numbly.

“Tessa. She saw you two when Dean was there. And after. Sometimes I can’t believe that you don’t know she’s my best friend at the hospital.”

Dean winces and shakes his head. “Damn it.”

“It’s alright. It was worth it because you started to change. And you can keep changing.” Anna’s eyes are wide and plaintive as she sits and covers Cas’s hand with hers. Castiel recoils, darting his hand back and Anna sighs. “I know it’s difficult, but with prayer and counseling and other help, we can cure you.”

“Cas is not sick!” Dean bellows. “How the fuck can you say that? I thought you weren’t like those Jesus freak Neanderthals. For fuck’s sake you’re a doctor!”

“You don’t have an objective view of the situation, Dean. You’re confused too.” Dean clenches his fist like he’s fighting the urge to strike Anna. “I can’t imagine the horrible things you’ve done to survive, and what that's done to your feelings, but God will forgive you. He can help you too.”

“Don’t give me any of that Christ saves crap! I’m not some victim. I have sex with men because I like it,” Dean spits. Anna flinches and looks between Dean and Castiel.

“You like condemning your soul? You chose to be homosexual because you enjoy it?” Anna says it like he’s choosing to lose a limb.

“Dean is bisexual,” Cas says quietly and both of them turn to look at him

“That’s not even a real thing,” Anna replies, cool and stiff, waving Dean off as she sets her focus back on Castiel. “There is one natural order, you know this, Cas. It is ordained by God. I love you, and I want to help you enjoy it and thrive in it.”

“By letting us fuck around behind your back so he could get it up for some at home conversion therapy?” Dean barks. “That’s is fucked up and horrible and you know it!”

“Don’t you dare try to act innocent and offended here!” Anna yells, rising again and making Dean cower. “You lied to me from the moment we met, you put me and my husband at risk and helped him to break a vow he made to me before God. Just because you’re paid to do it doesn’t mean it’s not wrong.”

“Cas hasn’t paid me for long time,” Dean replies, voice cold with fury.

“That’s very unfair of him, after all you are providing a service,” Anna spits back and Castiel finally snaps. He slams his hand on the table and Anna jumps.

“That is not what it was,” Castiel growls. “Not what it is. Dean and I, we—”

“No. Stop,” Anna snaps. “Don’t act like what you two do – whatever it is – is real or comparable to
us. It's just sex. Not even real sex. I know your heart is still in our marriage. That’s the only way I was able to endure that humiliation.”

“Anna, this isn’t you,” Castiel says in horror. “You’re not cruel like this.”

“Me?” Anna barks out a sour laugh. “I’m cruel? I’m not the one that cheated, Cas. You lied to me and betrayed me for months! Do you think this was easy? Do you think it hasn’t made me sick having to watch the man I love with everything I have hurt me every day? To see the way you look at him? You don’t know what it was like, Cas. All those nights, away, trying to do my job and help people while I knew what you were doing? The only thing that kept me from going insane was seeing how it made you better, how it made you happy. My prayers were answered and all I had to do was endure long enough for you to learn.”

“Anna, for fuck’s sake he’s not going to learn to be something he’s not,” Dean counters and Anna shakes her head.

“Yes, he will. I thought, before, that I just needed to remove the temptation and be the woman he needed, but it wasn’t enough.” Castiel squints at her, uncomprehending. “Cas, you don’t think I’ve known since college? The way you looked at the filthy professor. You were so sad after I reported him, but then you got better and I thought you were saved. You can get better now it will just take time.”

“You…” Castiel can’t take this. “You got Balthazar fired. You’ve known the whole time we’ve been together that I—”

“That you have certain impulses that need to be controlled and redirected,” Anna finishes and Castiel leans on the counter, a new wave of sickness overcoming him. “Now that everything is out in the open, we can work together to help you.”

“I got some bad news for you, bitch,” Dean says and Castiel looks up. His face is stony and resolved. “Your fucked up therapy: not gonna work. Cas ain’t gonna change and I sure as hell will not be a part of it.”

“Yes. You will,” Anna declares with surety that chills Castiel to the bone. Castiel looks up at her. “Anna. No. This, all of it. It’s over.”

“This is our marriage and your soul we’re talking about, Cas. Don’t be foolish,” Anna says. “I see no reason why we can’t just continue as before, with a few adjustments.”

“I’m gonna ask it again: Are you insane?” Dean snarls. “I am not going to stick around and let you use me to fuck with Cas.”

“Well, you two won’t be fornicating anymore,” Anna replies. “But you have to stay because Castiel has to stay. You make him happy and functional, and soon he’ll come around and see what a family can offer.”

“No. I won’t,” Cas protests and looks to Dean.

“See, this is why you have to stay here, Dean,” Anna sighs, her attention drifting back to her phone as it buzzes with a text. She looks back at Castiel and shakes her head as if he’s a stubborn child. “He’s not ready and if you leave, so will he. And if that happens everyone loses. Jobs, homes, families, reputations. We can’t have that.”

Castiel hears the words like the clanging of prison bars, but he can’t do this. This is not what was
supposed to happen tonight…and it’s only now that he realizes what he hoped for. He stares at
Dean, begging him for a signal that there’s something on the other side.

“I don’t give a rat’s ass about your jobs, or any of this. I’m leaving,” Dean says. “Cas, you can come
along or not, but I’m not staying here.”

“Don’t be rash. Either of you,” Anna says before Cas can ask what that means and if Dean truly
wants him to come or is ready to leave him to this. “I need you to take a few moments to compose
yourselves. Calm down and think about the consequences here. I know we’re all emotional…”

“Calm down? Are you high?” Dean balks.

“I wish you hadn’t insisted on doing this today,” Anna sighs, as if Dean said nothing. “Things were
going to change anyway, but now you’ve gone and made it awkward.”

Dean throws up his hands and turns away, stalking into his room, presumably to get his things. He’s
really leaving.

”Anna, I think things are far beyond awkward,” Castiel says, numbly. “Is my suitcase still in my
office?” For the first time Anna looks truly worried and it gives Castiel a horrible sense of
satisfaction.

“Cas…”

“I’ll go look.” He walks to the office in a daze and stares at his desk. Wedding pictures. Family

"For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm
you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Seems like a lie now.

The sound of the doorbell shocks Castiel from his stupor. He has no idea who could be there. Maybe
confused trick-or-treaters. He considers no answering until the bell rings again, accompanied by an
insistent knock. Anna lingers in the hall when Castiel exits the office, waiting as Cas opens the door.

He doesn’t recognize the man and teenager on his front step. They look nervous and tired in the
weak light from inside the house.

“Can I help you?” Castiel asks. The adult opens his mouth but a crash from behind Castiel in the hall
cuts him off. He turns to see Dean, a box at his feet. His jaw is slack and his face pale, like he’s just
seen a ghost.

“Sam?”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-homophobia like whoa
-biphobia/bi erasure
-discussion of conversion therapy
-generally awful and bad attitudes towards sexuality.
So yes. Those that guessed Anna knew - you got it right. Hopefully there were still some surprises and feels for you.

This was a rough chapter, I know. It was difficult to write. What Anna is doing is wrong, just as what Dean and Cas have been doing was wrong, albeit in a different way. Everyone has a lot going on, but her attitude toward's Cas's sexuality is a sentiment that really exists, and I wanted to explore and confront that. But hey - Chuck is bi! And did you guess who his ex is?

In other news, as I mentioned I'll be in Seattle for Geek Girl Con this weekend on the Squee! Panel at 6 on saturday if you are there. The trip may take a chunk of time from my writing schedule and I'm also contributing to the "Seasons" short story anthology, but I will try to have a new chapter up by next Friday or Saturday. And I will try to catch up with comments!
“Dean?” Sam’s face breaks into a smile and Dean’s heart starts beating again. He approaches carefully, like walking to a mirage, as Sam looks up at the guy he’s with. “Holy crap, Zeke, why didn’t you tell me?”

“We didn’t want to get you too excited in case something went wrong,” Zeke says looking over Dean towards Anna and Cas.

Dean stops next to Cas in the door way, all his anger and disgust forgotten as he stares at his brother. It’s pure reflex to ruffle his hair. “When did you get so tall, kid?” Dean asks, voice shaky and thick.

“When did you get so old?” Sam asks back and they break at the same time. Sam drops his bag and tackles Dean into a hug that makes his ribs smart and Dean crushes him right back. He can’t help the tears, it feels like half of him has been missing and suddenly it’s back; a phantom limb returned.

“God, it’s good to see you, Sammy,” Dean mutters into the kid’s hair before finally letting go. He roughly pushes the tears from his eyes and looks at Zeke. He’d been thinking of someone bookish and small, but this guy is actually pretty handsome, with short hair and a square jaw, and about as tall as Dean. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Zeke looks slightly worried, glancing over Dean’s shoulder to either Cas or Anna, Dean can’t tell. “This is Sam’s new foster placement.”

“What?” Dean’s mind races back to reality. “How?”

“Well, it wasn’t easy.” Zeke says with a kind, if thin, smile. “We had to rush the interstate compact and certification for the Novaks; and waive the home study, but I was willing to do a favor for Anna and to get Sam here.”

“You…” Dean turns to Anna, keeping a hand on Sam to steady himself. That means Anna’s been planning this for a long time. Working behind his back, all part of her plan. “You didn’t tell me,” he says looking between Anna and Cas. The slight twitch of Cas’s head and the look of shock on his face is all Dean needs to know that he had no part in this.

“We also didn’t want to get your hopes up,” Anna says. “Come on in, you two. No reason to stand out there in the cold.”

Dean picks up Sam’s bag and leads him in, a hand on his arm. He knows he’s probably being clingy but he’s still convinced Sam is going to disappear any second. And touching him is better than punching Anna in the goddamn face. The front hall feels too crowded with four adults and a gangly
“Introductions first, I guess,” Zeke says. “I’m Ezekiel Gardner, but if you’d like to call me Zeke that’s fine. Sam, this is Anna Novak. She was Anna Milton when we met. We’re actually old friends.”

Sam cautiously shakes Anna’s hand then looks to Cas. He looks about as shell-shocked as Dean. “Sammy, this is Cas, Anna’s better half.”

“Hello, Sam. It’s very good to finally meet you.” Cas offers his hand but Sam has other ideas and pulls Cas into a hug. It’s brief but it makes something new crack in Dean’s heart.

“It’s really great to meet you, Cas. Someone Dean likes this much must be pretty great,” Sam says quietly, smiling at Cas. They’re nearly eye level. Cas doesn’t seem to know what to say, and neither does Dean. Sam turns and smiles at Anna too. “You also I guess. I, uh, can’t believe this.” Anna looks nervous and queasy and Dean's fine with that.

“It’ll take some getting used to,” Dean mutters. Sam drifts towards the great room and kitchen, craning his neck to look at the high ceilings.

“Wow, you weren’t kidding about the Martha Stewart vibe,” Sam says with a grin as he looks around.

“Nicer than the Hess place?” Dean asks.

“They had plastic on their living room furniture,” Sam replies with a shudder.

“You can see everything here, except the office behind you, in the front,” Anna says, cheerful and easy like the last thirty minutes didn’t happen. “And Dean’s room over there by the kitchen. Sam you’ll be in the other guest room, upstairs.”

“Unless you wanna swap,” Dean offers.

“I don’t want to make you move,” Sam mutters, looking around then staring back at Dean. “I can’t believe this. I saw the car out front but even then...Holy crap.” Sam grins, wide and innocent and Dean thinks he might cry again, goddamnit. “I was so pissed about moving again, but...wow.”

“So is this permanent?” Dean asks, turning to Zeke, who gives Sam a nervous look.

“Usually this isn’t the sort of thing we discuss with wards present,” Zeke says.

“I’m just gonna hear it from whatever lawyer you stick me with,” Sam sighs. “Come on, Zeke.”

“Fine,” Zeke sighs. “Sam, you’re smart and mature enough to understand this anyway. The answer is: we have to see.”

Dean doesn’t like the sound of that, and it ties his stomach in new knots. Cas looks nervous too. Dean can’t even fucking look at Anna. “You mean he might have to go back?”

“No,” Zeke replies. “The judge in Ohio agrees that Lawrence is a better place for Sam, and we’re transferring the case and jurisdiction here, but we won’t make a decision on custody and long-term placement for about thirty days. We’ll have a hearing in the juvenile court at that time.”

“So, uh...” Dean can’t comprehend this. It’s not possible. Sam’s looking at him like he’s thinking the same thing.
“If you’re in a stable, suitable residence and employed, custody would go to you, Mr. Winchester.”

“Really?!” Sam yelps, turning to Dean with a grin.

“Holy…” Dean bites back the profanity. Holy fucking shit, how is this happening?

“Now, there would need to be interviews and a background check, we want to be thorough. Given your previous situation we’re cautious,” Zeke warns. Dean thinks he might pass out. “You’ll be assigned a juvenile court lawyer too, who can explain things.”

“Great. I love lawyers,” Dean grumbles and Sam elbows him in the stomach.

“But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Anna, can you show me where he’ll be staying?” Zeke asks.

“Of course,” Anna says and leads Zeke upstairs after he grabs Sam’s bags.

“Sam.” The brothers look up to where Cas is standing by the kitchen. “I want you to know that we are very happy that you’re here, no matter how or why, or what happens.”

Sam looks confused but Dean wishes more than anything that he could just hug Cas, after all of this he just wants to touch him and tell him it’s okay. But it’s not okay. And it won’t be.

“Thanks, Cas,” Dean says. “Sam, this is the best guy…person, whatever, that I’ve ever met. No competition. I’m really glad to have you both in the same place.”

“Me too,” Sam smiles. Dean pulls him into another hug, much briefer, but still tight. He looks over Sam’s head at Cas. He’s not trying to hide the pain and worry in his eyes, and Dean can’t stand it.

“So, uh,” Dean stammers pulling back and looking at Sam again. “You’re too skinny and we ain’t had dinner. What do you want to eat? And if you say vegetables, so help me I will send you back right now.”

“I haven’t had pizza in a while,” Sam says with a dopey shrug.

“What do you want on it? I’ll order,” Cas says, pulling out his phone.

“Well, someone I know insists pepperoni and pineapple is the best pizza,” Sam replies and Dean smiles.

“You remembered,” Dean says. “You sure you don’t want your sausage and black olives thing?”

“Also green peppers,” Sam grins.

“I’ll get one of each,” Cas says, indulgent,

“What about Anna?” Sam asks, all innocence and ignorance to what he walked into.

“She’ll be fine,” Cas says stiffly and heads off to make the order in a quiet corner.

Dean opens his mouth to ask Sam something but he can’t even think of a good question. How was the trip and also the last few years of your life that I bailed on to suck cock and nearly get killed?

“Well, it looks good up there,” Zeke says as he descends the stairs with Anna behind. “I’ll be back in the morning around seven to get you to the school and all signed up.”

“I’ll come too,” Dean interjects and everyone looks at him like he’s nuts. “Bobby won’t mind if I’m
late. I just…I wanna be involved and sh-stuff.”

“That sounds great,” Anna smiles and Dean keeps his cringe to himself.

“It is. I’m glad you’re so enthusiastic. I’m sure this is a shock,” Zeke replies.

“It’s fine,” Dean says as Cas hangs up and comes over besides him and Sam in a line facing Anna and Zeke. For some reason it reminds him of two very small, very emotionally damaged armies facing off.

“I should get going,” Zeke says. “Unless you need anything, Sam?”

“I think I’ll be okay. And I’ve got your number.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay for dinner?” Anna asks. She looks justifiably nervous and Dean takes some small amount of satisfaction in her discomfort. “We were going to have—”

“We ordered pizza already,” Cas interjects and Anna’s smile falters. He gives Anna a look of quiet defiance that makes Dean want to pump his fist in the air. “Sam’s request.”

“Zeke’s a vegetarian,” Sam says, maybe noticing the tension.

“And I have to go get checked in to my hotel, for the night,” Zeke says politely. “It was nice to meet you, Dean, Castiel. Great to see you, Anna. See you tomorrow, Sam.”

Anna walks Zeke out and returns awkwardly to the kitchen. Dean decides he can’t look at her and turns to Sam. “Let’s go up and get you unpacked, you can tell me about whatever boring ass podcasts you listened to on your trip.”

“I’ll help,” Cas says, before looking to Dean. “If that’s alright. I…like podcasts.”

“Sure,” Dean says. They can’t talk but at least he can save Cas from being alone with the woman who thinks he can be trained to stop being queer like a dog that keeps peeing on the couch. He doesn’t look back at her as they climb the stairs.

“See, Cas likes them. Not boring,” Sam says as he follows Dean up the stairs. “And this one we listened to was super cool! They had a group of experts breaking down the federal budget but their time on each thing was like, proportionate to the amount spent on it in the budget!”

“When did you turn sixty?” Dean asks. He glares at Anna and Cas’s door as he walks by but pushes his rage down and focuses on Sam and Cas nearby. He can yell more later.

Later takes a long time to get there. They eat dinner and make awkward conversation, with Dean talking over Anna, or Cas ignoring her each time she says something about what he should eat or drink or do. Sam doesn’t seem to notice. He talks a minute about school and his hopes for the new place. He doesn’t mention many friends at his old school, which sucks in some ways and isn’t so bad in others. Dean knows what it’s like moving again and again and, fucking hell, he hope this is the last time Sam has to do this. Maybe that’s why he’s so enthusiastic, who knows.

After dinner they end up in the office on the laptop looking at the school website. It’s nice and they’ve got a track team and it turns out Cas did track in high school too and he and Sam get talking about it and how to train. Dean makes bad jokes about shotput and it’s nice until Anna knocks on the door to remind them it’s getting late. Dean resists telling her to go fuck herself because Sam started
yawning fifteen minutes before. Dean won’t say it, but he’s tired too. He’s pretty sure he won’t sleep but he’s exhausted from a full day of getting his world flipped, like he’s some empty can God is kicking down the street.

“I’ll walk up with you,” Dean says, pointedly avoiding Anna’s eyes as he and Sam walk past her.

“You don’t need to tuck me into bed, Dean,” Sam grumbles but there’s no conviction behind it.

Sam’s new room is crisp and clean and boring, like Dean’s room and the rest of the house, except there’s no painting in here, just a generic picture of a lake that someone probably bought at a big box store. Sam has the same view of the garden as Dean, but a smaller bed.

“Kinda feels like a hotel,” Sam says as he looks around.

“I’d have killed for a hotel this nice,” Dean says and Sam looks instantly cowed.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking.” Sam digs his hands into the pockets of his hoodie. It’s too big, which means it’s probably an adult size, but it’s frayed and faded, so likely second hand.

“We’ve both had a shitty time of it for the last few years,” Dean mutters.

“Yeah, but you…”

“It ain’t a competition, Sam.” Sam stares at him and Dean does the same back, trying to refamiliarize himself with the way Sam’s face has changed and stayed the same. Is he shaving yet? God, probably. And Dean wasn’t there to teach him. He doesn’t even know who was. He doesn’t know if he’s had a first crush or if he still hates licorice or what’d he’d think if he knew his brother was queer or…Sam’s face is blurry all of a sudden. Fuck, he hates crying. He’d gone a good long while without this nonsense before he started caring about shit, like an idiot.

“Dean are you okay?”

“Sammy. I’m so sorry.” Dean says it before he can think better and Sam looks away, like he doesn’t want to hear. “No, really. I am. I shouldn’t have gone with Dad. I shouldn’t have left. I should have been there for you. I fucked up and I failed you and I am so, so sorry.”

“Dean, it’s okay,” Sam says and Dean rolls his eyes as he wipes away his stupid tears. “I mean, it’s not. It was crappy. For everyone. And it’s extra crappy that Dad’s gone but…this is where we are now.”

“Yeah, we’re here because…” Dean stops himself. He sure as hell can’t explain to Sam the fucked up reason why he’s hear – that’s part of some screwed up hostage situation to fix someone that isn’t broken. “It doesn’t matter. All that matters is that I swear I won’t fail you again.”

“I know you won’t,” Sam says. Dean crosses the room to give his brother one more hug, just in case he wakes up and this is all a dream.

“Get some sleep, big day tomorrow.”

“You too.”

Dean closes the door behind him and walks into the hall where Cas is waiting. He nods towards the closed door of their bed room. “She in there?”

“Yes,” Cas replies. “The doors are pretty thick if you feel like yelling.”
“Thanks.” He doesn’t plan on yelling, but it’s a good tip.

Anna jumps from the bed when Dean walks through the door. She’s not in pajamas yet, but she still looks vulnerable and small, her face wrought with worry. He finally made it into Cas’s bedroom and it’s…nothing. Big bed, family pictures by the TV. Anna’s paintings and framed scripture on the walls. “Dean? Cas isn’t…”

“Oh he’s right here,” Dean says as Cas comes in behind him and quietly shuts the door. It feels nice to at least have back up. “But I want to talk to you.”

“I don’t think there’s much to talk about,” Anna stammers. She’s not good at this, not used to being hated and wrong. Too fucking bad.

“Yes there is,” Dean snarls. “You know what? I was mad before, but I could have gotten over it because no matter your reasons, you’ve done good shit for me and God knows I was pretty bad about showing my gratitude. And hell, getting used and thrown away is par for the course for me. But bringing Sam into this? That is low.”

“So, you’re not happy to have him here?” Anna asks back, bracing herself against Dean’s furious voice.

“That is beside the point,” Cas rumbles from behind Dean.

“You dragged a kid into your sick scheme, my brother,” Dean growls, fists tight. “Fucking with us is one level of screwed up, but this? Fuck, maybe you did finally convert me because I want to believe in hell just to think that you’re going there.”

Anna’s mouth is a thin line of anger, her posture stiff and defiant. “I want to help Sam, I want to help both of you. I do care about you. I know you don’t understand it or believe me right now but eventually—”

“I don’t want to hear it. Fuck you,” Dean spits the words and Anna flinches but her expression doesn’t falter.

“Are you done?” Anna asks.

“Unless Cas has something to say,” Dean replies.

“He doesn’t,” Anna says and Dean’s anger starts to rise again. “I want to be clear what happens from now on.”

“That’ll be a nice change,” Dean sneers.

“Don’t start,” Anna scoffs. “You will stay in this house. I am completely sincere about helping you get full custody of Sam when this is over. That has always been what I wanted, but you will have to meet the state’s standards and behave while you are in this house.” Dean opens his mouth to tell Anna to go fuck herself again but she raises a silencing figure. “As you said, he’s a child. You should moderate your behavior appropriately. We don’t want him or Ezekiel getting the wrong idea about you and ruining things.”

Dean’s mouth hangs open in horror. It’s Cas that speaks. “So you don’t have a problem with a bisexual man raising Sam, you’d just use his sexuality and his past to keep him in check?”

“You know the court won’t let Sam be with Dean if they find out about you two, or his past,” Anna replies.
“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Dean demands, just about ready to puke half a pizza on Anna’s pristine white carpets. “You did a fucking abortion. You hate Luke and Zach and their buddies as much as we do. Where do you get off with this Westboro bullshit?”

“Dean, It’s not like that,” Anna protests, her composure faltering.

“Fucking hell it’s not.” Dean has to look away from her or he really is going to start screaming.

“Stop telling yourself this is alright,” Cas adds

“Isn’t that what you two did?” Anna shoots back. “Tell yourselves it was okay? That the things you did in the dark weren’t real or whatever you needed to be alright? You knew it was wrong and you kept going. What I’m doing is trying to save the marriage you were fine with destroying.”

“I wasn’t going to—” Dean stops and looks to Cas. He looks as bad as he did before. Sick and shocked and pale.

“You were just going to leave, right?” Anna asks. “Go be with Sam and never look back? Well, this isn’t very different. Everyone’s eyes are just open now. Getting what we all want can be as easy or hard as you make it.”

Dean can’t take any more. He pushes past Cas and out of the room. He knows Cas isn’t following, because frankly he shouldn’t. If it weren’t for Sam in the room upstairs he would be out of the door with this godforsaken place in his rearview, but he’s trapped.

He shuts his door and sits heavily on the bed, his head falling into his hand. How did this day turn into this? What the hell is he supposed to do? He’s gotta be there for Sa, but he ca’t let this happen to Cas…can he? He doesn’t know what to do or who to talk to and for the first time in his life, he wishes there was a god listening, because he can’t think of anyone else that could help.

__________

Castiel spends an hour cleaning up the spare room. He moved the boxes off his old, sunken couch and uncovers his old desk, although it’s in pieces. It’s mindless work, lots of heavy lifting and moving. His back hurts some but the room is in much better order when a knock finally comes at the door.

He’s more than a little surprised to see Sam Winchester standing in the hall.

“Hi, Cas. I mean Castiel.” Sam is wearing an old Royals tee shirt and sweats, but he doesn’t look like he was asleep.

“Cas, please. I’m sorry, was I keeping you up?”

“No. I mean, I could hear you, but not really. I just wanted to say…” Sam bites his lip and looks up at Cas from under his floppy bangs. Dean may have a point about him needing a haircut. “Thank you. Again. I know this is stressful, having a whole new stranger here.”

“You’re not a stranger, Sam.” Some of the tension eases from Sam’s shoulders.
“And thank you for saving Dean.” Cas starts to object but the utter sincerity in Sam’s face stops him. “I know Anna helped and that he did a lot too but...I don’t think he would have done any of this if it wasn’t for you. For all I know he’d be dead. And I know things were bad but thanks to you we might be a family again and just...thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Cas says, humbled and amazed. He never thought of it that way. He’d always thought of Dean as saving him.

“Um, what were you doing in there?” Sam asks, awkwardly peeking around Cas to the reorganized room.

“Oh. I was trying to find this old desk. I thought you might need it.”

A smile spreads over Sam’s face. He doesn’t look very much like Dean, really, but the warmth in his eyes is the same, and the sheer heartbreaking wonder that someone would show him kindness. He knows one thing for certain: he’ll do anything to make sure this boy and Dean have a better life as a family.

“We should both be in bed,” Castiel says.

“Sure. Uh. See you in the morning. Cas.”

“Goodnight, Sam.”

Castiel walks into his bedroom in the same stupor he’s been in all night. He’s certain the shock will wear off eventually and he’d move on to anger or grief or bargaining, but he’d rather that not be tonight. He’s tired and his stomach is roiling and he needs an antacid. Maybe he’ll taking an Ambien too.

“What are you doing?” Anna asks him from the bed. He had hoped she was asleep.

“Getting some pills and brushing my teeth. I’ll change downstairs.”

“Downstairs?” He doesn’t understand why she’s surprised, but if there’s anything he learned today it’s that he doesn’t understand at all how her mind works.

“You can’t honestly expect me to sleep here.”

“I’m not going to do anything inappropriate, Cas, come on.” Anna rises from the bed and Cas takes an automatic step back.

“Like this morning?” It seems like a week ago already, but now the memory makes his skin crawl even more.

“You said his name,” Anna whispers, picking at her nails. “In your sleep. And you were...you know.”

Cas wants to say something snide. He wants to say something about how if she can’t even talk properly about sex she shouldn’t be telling him how to have it or forcing it on him. But for the first time he notices her eyes are red from crying and unbidden he imagines what it must be like to hear your spouse say another’s name in their dreams. “Have I done that before?”

Anna sniffs and nods. “A few times. Never quite so clear.”

“Before you met him?”
Anna nods again. Before she even knew what he looked like or if he was even real, she had to hear Dean's name. “I thought it was another infatuation. But then when he came in. The way you…” Anna swallows thickly. “You never looked at me like that. Tessa saw it too. She called me while I was home alone freaking out about my husband’s…lover or something and she told me you kissed him.”

“On the forehead,” Castiel corrects numbly.

“I spent the whole night praying and trying to convince myself that it wasn’t like that. I even called you, like an idiot.” Castiel squints at her. He doesn’t remember that…but he does remember her being alone with his phone the morning after. “Do you have any idea how lonely that is? How lonely I've been with you right there beside me? But I calmed down and tried to be reasonable and I…”

“Figured you could pretend to care about Dean, invite him into our house and use him to convert me,” Cas finishes for her.

“I do care about Dean. Bu I just want you to be happy again.” Anna protests. “I saw a way to make you happy and it was working. It is working.”

“Anna…”

“You can’t leave. I won’t let you give up on us,” Anna goes on, her voice thick with tears. “You have to stay now or…or you won’t just ruin things for me or you, you’ll ruin them for Dean and Sam.”

Castiel closes his eyes, all that anger and grief he’s been holding back threatening to burst out in a torrent. He holds it back, but just barely.

“I’m still going to sleep downstairs.”

“You can’t,” Anna grits out.

“I meant on the couch.”

“What if Sam sees that?” Anna asks and it sounds completely rational. Because it is. For Sam to stay here they all have to keep up the charade that this is a normal, functional family.

“Then I’ll be in the spare room.”

“If he…”

“I’ll set an alarm.”

Cas grabs his clothes and toiletries without another word and dumps them in the spare room. He makes it fifteen minutes before he pads quietly down the stairs to lurk at Dean’s door. He shouldn’t knock. He shouldn’t think of sleeping down on the couch despite Anna’s warning. Or in Dean’s room. He thinks it anyway. He knocks.

“Cas?” Dean asks as he opens the door. It’s a strange mirror to how he found Anna. He looks like he’s been crying too, but in this case all Cas wants to do is comfort him, beg forgiveness and try to repair this.

“I’m sorry.” The words tumble out before he can think. “I didn’t know. I didn’t think she’d ever—”
Dean pulls him into his room, shutting the doors behind them and wrapping Cas in his arms. “It’s okay,” Dean whispers against Cas’s hair.

“No, it’s not.” Cas pulls back and looks at Dean. There’s barely any light in the room, just the glow of the clock and the dim streetlights through the open window. He can still see Dean as clearly as if it were midday, his mind filling in the shadows with freckled skin and green eyes. Kissing him right now is stupid, but he does it anyway. He needs this, needs Dean. For the first time in hours he can breathe. Dean kisses him back with the same desperation, cradling his face in his rough hands before pushing him back.

“We can’t,” Dean breathes, even as his thumbs traces Cas’s jaw.

“Why?” Cas asks, despite knowing. “She knows and I am not going back to our room. Ever.” They kiss again and Cas doesn’t know who started, but again it’s Dean that stops it.

“Sam. We can’t because of Sam.” Dean says it with an fervor that makes Cas think he’s convincing himself as much as Cas. “If we step out of line, I could lose him again and, Cas, I can’t. I can’t do that.”

Finally, inevitably, the dam inside him breaks. He grips Dean tighter, as if he can just hold him tight enough and he won’t slip away. He refuses to weep so it all stays inside that searing pit in his chest, tearing him apart. “So that’s it? It’s over? She wins.”

Dean winces and breathes deeps. “Come on, don’t think that way. You were never gonna leave, right? And we were never gonna be anything more.”

Cas wants to argue, wants to say that they could be. A few hours ago he was ready to walk out the door and follow Dean into the unknown. But Dean never wanted that, that’s clear now. Just like it was clear before. And now he can’t walk away without ruining Dean and Sam’s lives.

“You’re right. I guess she was too. This isn’t…real.” Dean doesn’t need to know it was real for Cas. He doesn’t need to hurt anymore.

“I’m sorry, Cas. It was nice while it lasted,” Dean mutters. Cas doesn’t want to hear that, doesn’t want to think about endings or that he’ll spend the night wondering what this all means for his damned soul. So he kisses Dean one more time and tries not to think that it’s the last. Dean kisses him like it’s real, and it hurts more than anything.

He pulls back and doesn’t say anything else. He can’t. He walks through the dark, silent house and up the stairs. He doesn’t hesitate in the hall. He sleeps in the spare room.

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Dean wonders if Bobby has a bottle of something stored in one of the old cars in the yard. He knows the house it cleared out, except for beer, because he’s the one that did the clearing for the old man. He regrets it today because he needs a drink like never before.

He can’t find anything, of course. Which is good. Getting blind drunk is not the way to go when you’ve got a social worker looking over your shoulder. At least being out among the rusted of Thunderbirds and Continentals is comforting. This is the sort of place he belongs, some place as gray as the clouds above, full of jagged edges and forgotten things. He’d felt like a goddamn alien in the
pristine halls of West Lawrence High, like there was practically a neon sign above him flashing “drop out” and “homeless fag.” It reminded him too much of Cas and Anna’s house: bright and clean and colorless. A place he will never, ever belong.

Sam wasn’t bothered by it. He was too distracted with wide-eyed awe at the track and computer lab. Zeke took the lead, talking up how smart Sam is and assuring the vice principal that Sam could keep up in the honors classes and that he had perfect attendance at his old place. It hadn’t taken very long to get him signed up and Dean had felt like he was buying a house or something when they added his name as emergency contact. He made sure Cas was on there too. Eventually an Asian kid was called in to guide Sam to his first class and Dean was done. He’d been glad to be alone at Bobby’s but it had finally left him alone with his thoughts and that was no good.

Dean sniffs the air, catching a familiar skunky aroma right before Ash comes around a corner.

“The boss man wants to see ya,” Ash says before stumbling back when he gets a look at Dean. “Whoa, man, you okay?”

“Do I look that bad?” Dean barely slept, tossing and turning until three am as he went over that last conversation with Cas in his head, and everything that led up to it. He kept telling himself it was better to end it, he had to think of Sam and that it shouldn’t feel like reattaching one arm just to saw off the other. Cas and Anna both looked just as rough, but Sam was nice enough not to say anything.

“You look like shit, and man, your aura. You got some bad mojo going,” Ash wheezes.

“Thanks,” Dean says, scrubbing a hand over his face. He wonders if Ash has any weed on him, but the looming threat of a drug test puts him off. “Bobby say what he wanted?”

“He said ‘tell that fool to stop sulking and get his ass in here and review these orders,’” Ash replies with a grin.

“Great.” Dean waves to Ash and trudges back up to the house. Tori is by the door, resting in a tire lined with an old blanket. She sniffs happily at Dean and he smiles despite himself. Sam would like her. He always wanted a dog.

“So I just got an interesting call,” Bobby says before Dean can even get the door closed. “Some social worker checking in to verify your employment and I assume that has something to do with you being late this morning.”

“Yeah, I was gonna explain—”

“Sam’s back.” Bobby finishes for him. “I got that. You mind explaining to me how? And why?”

Dean collapses into the worn armchair across from Bobby and kneads his temples. “It’s a long, fucked up story.”

“Do I look like a got anywhere else to be? Talk.”

Dean stares at Bobby. Well, he wanted someone to talk to.

“So, a little while before I met Cas I ran into a guy at bar…”

He tells Bobby the whole thing. Ishim. Meeting Cas. The Hell Hounds. Moving in with Cas and Anna. The sex. The other sex. Sam. Everything. It takes nearly thirty minutes to get it all out and Bobby listens to it all without a flinch or frown.
“And so last night I told Cas it was over and today I took Sam to school and...here I am.”

Bobby doesn’t speak, just rolls away to the kitchen, opens the fridge and grabs two beers. He returns to Dean and pries of the cap of one before handing it to him.

“I shouldn’t...”

“Boy, you need it.”

Dean takes the beer without further protest, draining the neck in one swig. It’s sour and not cold enough but it eases his nerves with sheer familiarity. “So. That’s the story. Turns out I’ve been living with a psychotic bitch and now I’m stuck there for another month and I’m not even getting laid anymore.”

“Could be worse,” Bobby says with a shrug and opens his own beer. “At least you got Sam.”

“Yeah, in the worst possible way,” Dean scoffs as Bobby takes a drink. “You know what’s the worst part? I liked Anna. I thought she was nice and I felt like shit going behind her back after all she did for me. I...I don’t get how I missed that she was crazy.”

“Now you know that ain’t true,” Bobby grumbles and Dean raises an eyebrow.

“Did you not hear the part where she wants to screw Cas straight?”

“And that’s backward and stupid, for sure. But this Anna, she ain’t crazy.” Dean takes another long sip of beer and waits for Bobby to explain. “You just wish she was crazy because crazy is easy. Crazy you can write off; it ain’t real. But when normal, rational people do twisted crap, that’s a lot harder to take. ’Specially when they have a reason. And she’s got the worst one in history.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Love, ya idjit. Some of the worst things in the world been done ’cause of love.” Bobby spits out the word like spoiled food and Dean stares at him. He thinks back to his conversations with Anna, how sad she always was talking about Cas; how heartbroken.

“What she’s trying do isn’t something you do to someone you love,” Dean argues. “It’s selfish and cruel and manipulative...”

“You don’t think love can make people do crazy things? Crazier, when they want to make someone love them back who don’t feel the same way. Add in lonely and a little religion and there’s the recipe for disaster right there. It ain’t the good sorta love, but it’s love.” Bobby raises his bottle in a mock toast. “Ain’t it grand.”

“Never knew you were such a romantic,” Dean mutters.

“Love can drive you to the darkest places if you ain’t careful.” Bobby looks out the window towards a tower of wrecked cars. “When Karen...when I lost her - and lost my legs - I thought long and hard about pulling out my .45 and joining her. Only reason I did it was fear that maybe I wouldn’t see her. Figured living with her memory was better than, well, other options.”

“Bobby, I didn’t know.”

“Of course you didn’t, I ain’t ever told anyone.” Bobby shakes off the darkness of the moment and looks back at Dean. “All I’m sayin’ is you can’t pretend you don’t know why she’s doing this. Hell, don’t tell me there’s not a whole mountain of cruel, thoughtless things you’d do if it was for Sam.”
“That’s different,” Dean says, even knowing it’s true. “Sam’s family.”

“What about the mountain of stupid you’ve climbed to just to be with Cas, and not even keep him?”

“But I’m not—” Dean’s voice cuts out the same second Bobby’s eyebrows go so high they disappear behind the brim of his hat. His heart stops too. Then it sort of explodes. Or something like that. Something painful and stupid and pointless like the love he didn’t even know was there. “Oh fuck.”

“Maybe you are dumber than I thought.”

“I just…never been in love before I guess,” Dean just about whispers. It’s all he can manage. Fuck fuck fuck. “Bobby what the fuck do I do?”

“What do you mean do?”

“I told him it was over! I…fuck…” He can’t breathe. He feels like he just threw away a something precious without even knowing what it was.

“Ain’t nothing to do, boy. You buckle down and keep going. Keep working to get Sam back.”

“But…”

“Didn’t you just tell me he’s never leavin’ and you've been halfway out the door for a month? That he said it wasn’t real?” Dean cringes at his own words and the memory of Cas’s. He was stoic and cold like always. Because of course he’d never feel the same because Anna and Bobby and, fuck, Dean himself, they were right. It wasn’t real. And Dean is good for a fuck, but he’s not the kind of person that someone like Cas could love. He’s just the kind of idiot that falls stupidly in love with the one guy he’s never gonna be with and realizes it too fucking late.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-homophobic language

So, I tried to be as accurate as possible with the legal stuff involving Sam. I used to work in child welfare court, and though I’ve taken some liberties for drama and such, it’s mostly accurate. I don't think this needs to be said, but Zeke looks like Tahmoh. His last name is Gardner because Gadreel...watched the garden...

Hoping to have a new chapter up before the season 13 premiere...at which point this fic will contrast as completely cheerful.
“Trick or treat…oh my God, are you okay?”

Castiel raises his head from where it had been cradled in his hands. He wasn’t sleeping. Not really. Just resting his eyes for…a while. He looks at the clock on his computer. It’s nearly noon. Damn. He turns to Meg and sighs. “I’m horrible. But it will pass. Probably. Why is your hair like that? And your nose.”

“I’m a cat, you dork,” Meg replies as if that makes sense. “It’s Halloween.”

“Oh. I lost track.”

Castiel can’t be blamed. No one he knows really celebrates the holiday and he’d always felt pressured to ignore it, despite the amount of children in their neighborhood that have to be turned away from their door disappointed. He thought it sounded entertaining, but his family calls it pagan and Anna had some reasons about juvenile diabetes and thinks it was too morbid. He also can’t be blamed for not know what day it is since yesterday, which he’s reasonably sure was a Monday, lasted an eternity. Dinner at home pretending to be a happy, functional family was awkward and draining, as we his run and the long night on the lumpy couch in the spare room. He’d spent hours contemplating his life and soul and begging God for help or answers to no avail before sleep finally came.

“What have you got there?” Castiel asks, peering at the bowl in Meg’s hands.

“The kids today call it candy. It’s been sitting on my desk all day. Though you could use some.”

Castiel grabs a small Milky Way and tears off the wrapper. The first taste bursts with caramel and chocolate. He’s barely eaten the last few days, thanks to his stomach and the fact his life is a disaster. It makes the candy taste better. And sugar has never irritated his stomach like other things. He takes another candy – a Snickers this time - and set in. After the third he looks up to see Meg staring. “I’m hungry.”

“You want me to leave the bowl?”

“Yes, please.”

“You’re gonna ruin your appetite for your mom’s awesome cooking,” Meg mutters.

“Oh fuck.” The last thing he wants to deal with tonight is family dinner with Anna beside him pretending everything is fine while Dean and Sam sit at home with the porch lights off, wondering why they can’t give candy to children. Cas shoves another candy in his mouth and chews angrily.
“Clarence, what the fuck is going on?” Meg demands,

He glares up, chewing petulantly. “Nothing.”

“Does it have something to do with the hospital lawyer wanting to see you?”

“What?” Castiel spins to look at his email inbox.

“She just called, don’t freak. I think it’s probably about that claim we fucked up. It’ll be fine. Josie is cool.”

“Josie Sands could kill someone with her shoe and smile through it,” Castiel replies. There’s nothing from her in his email inbox, but there is something from Uriel which he doesn’t open because just the sight makes him queasy. He doesn’t want to - no, he can’t deal with this today. As if on cue his phone buzzes with a text alert. He makes the mistake of looking in the hope that it’s from Dean but instead it's Anna.

>>>switching Thursday shift to tonight to cover in case things get crazy. I let your mom know to still expect you. I’ll be home by ten.

He wants to throw his phone across the room, or text back something snide about whether he should ever bother making his own schedule ever again. Instead he looks up at Meg. “Does Miss Sands want to see me today?”

“No, just when you’re free.”

“Good, I’m going home.”

Castiel gets up and grabs his coat before his resolve fails. Hannah and Alfie both give him shocked looks when he exits the office.

“Are you alright?” Hannah ask immediately.

“No, I feel unwell.” It’s not a lie. He’s distracted for a moment by Hannah’s skeleton tie and Alfie’s rabbit ears. He assumes Meg is responsible.

“So you’re leaving?” Alfie asks.

“I have sick days available,” Castiel replies, bristling.

“Normal people take sick days, Clarence,” Meg argues, still looking worried and suspicious.

“Do you want me to stay?”

Both Meg and Hannah blink at him. “No…” Meg says

“Go home, Castiel,” Hannah says. “We’ll call you if we need anything. Have a nice Halloween.”

Castiel grabs one more handful of candy before he leaves the office. It’s not like he can steal any time with Dean before Sam gets home from school, or really do much of anything. But he still feels free, just a little bit, and that’s a relief.

He’s not sure how he ends up at the grocery store with a cart full of over-priced candy and pumpkins. He never tried to buy beer as a young person, or sneak out of the house, but he wonders if it felt the same as this.
“Kinda late for shopping.” Castiel turns to the voice behind him. Somehow it feels appropriate to see Chuck here. God doesn’t let him get away with anything. At least it’s not Zachariah catching him.

“Are you going to lecture me about spreading Satan to children?” Castiel asks flatly.

“What? No! That’s Zach’s stupid thing. I was just saying hi.” Chuck moves his own basket behind his back, but not before Castiel catches sight of wine and macaroni and cheese. It reminds him vividly of the last time he ran into Chuck in the store, when he had been so shocked that Dean was coming to stay with them. This after Anna had spoken to him…and told him something that made him suspect Dean’s sexuality.

“Hi,” Castiel says, acidly. “What did my wife yell you about Dean?”

Chuck goes pale. “Fuck. Uh. Did you guys…” Chuck stammers and sets down his basket with a clank of glass to raise his hands defensively. “Okay. She came to me in, you know, crisis, right? She said she thought her hus-you had feelings for a man that had come into the hospital and that she wanted to make things work.”

“And?”

“And I told her to show compassion and love and understanding and take this test as a blessing or an opportunity for positive change!” Chuck squeals. “I was hung over and regurgitating some reading I’d just done, okay? I did not tell her to move Dean in and…whatever she’s been trying.”

“But you knew that I…and Dean…” Castiel still can’t fucking say it.

“No! I mean, I had my suspicions but I didn’t know and I swear I’m not outing anyone.” Chuck looks nervously around the candy aisle and picks up his basket.

“I know, I’m just…trying to understand how I got into the situation I’m in,” Castiel mutters.

“Well, I’m always around to talk,” Chuck offers sheepishly while shoving five bags of Twix into his basket.

“I don’t think that would be helpful,” Castiel replies. It’s not like it would change anything. He can’t make a move without putting Sam and Dean’s happiness at risk, even if his soul is already damned. “Do you get many trick-or-treaters? I’m not sure how much to buy.”

“Oh. I live in an apartment above a Chinese place. This is just for me.” Castiel raises an eyebrow. “And a friend! That’s visiting. Soon. Maybe. Hopefully.”

“I’ll see you on Sunday,” Castiel says, adding a few more bags to the cart and waving at Chuck.

“Always here if you need me!” Chuck calls after him.

The teenager at the check-out gives Castiel a look before he pays for his purchases, but doesn’t comment other than: “Happy Halloween, cool Constantine costume.” Castiel doesn’t think he looks particularly Roman.

He throws himself into work at home, letting it clear his mind like running might. The sound of the door when the sun is up high makes him jump in confusion. Sam looks just as confused to see Castiel when he walks inside.

“Whoa, I thought you worked all day.” Sam looks around at the cauldron of candy by the door and the pumpkin Castiel is currently disemboweling. “And I didn’t think you guys did Halloween
either.”

“We didn’t. But I want to this year,” Castiel says, wiping his hands.

“Because of me?” Sam chuckles. “I’m kinda old for Halloween.”

“I get the sense you and Dean missed a lot of holidays. And so did I. Call it making up for lost time.”

Sam sets down his backpack with a cautious smile. “Yeah, I get that. Can I help?”

“Yes, please. I’m not very artistic.”

“Guess that’s Anna’s thing.” Castiel tries not to wince at her name. “I mean, all the paintings. They’re really pretty even if they make me sort of sad.”

“What do you mean?” Castiel glances at the painting over the fire. It had always reminded him of looking at colors through water. Another imagined world.

Sam picks up a pumpkin and knife, looking thoughtful. “I don’t know. The shapes and colors look… lonely? Trapped maybe?”

“Maybe. I’d ask her.” Her paintings were one of the first things they ever talked about, years ago before it all went wrong. “How was school?”

“Fine. The teachers have all been pretty great about giving me what I need to catch up, so that’s cool. I might go to the math club meeting later this week.”

“I remember math club,” Castiel smiles.

“Don’t tell Dean that, he’ll call you a nerd.”

“Oh he has lots of other reasons to call me a nerd,” Cas says as he starts sawing into his hollowed pumpkin.

“He’s a nerd too, don’t let him bully you.” Sam looks down, fiddling with the newspaper spread on the table and frowning. “At least, he used to be.”

“Sam, are you okay?”

“It’s just…I talked to him on the phone, but I didn’t see him for years and I hardly knew what was happening in his life. I didn’t even know he was homeless and half the time now I feel like he’s just putting on a brave face for me and…” Sam takes a deep, steadying breath. “I don’t know him.”

“He’s your brother,” Cas says carefully. “Though I guess that doesn’t count for much. Sometimes I feel like my brothers are strangers.”

“It’s not that he’s a stranger,” Sam muses as he starts cutting into his pumpkin. “It’s more like I never see all of him, you know? Like he’s always putting on a brave face or just showing me what he thinks I want to see?”

Castiel smiles ruefully as he as carves a triangular eye into this jack-o-lantern. “You’re a very perceptive young man, Sam.”

“Does he do that with you? I mean, I know you guys are pretty close.”

If only he knew. “Dean doesn’t think much of himself, as far as I can tell. Which is a shame because
he’s truly a remarkable person. I think he feels like he’s failed people – you, your parents – and so he
gives up himself in order to be what people need, protect them and help them.”

“You’re pretty perceptive too,” Sam says. “So how do I get him to trust me and, you know, think
about himself for once?”

Castiel chuckles at that. “If I knew how to do that, I would certainly tell you. As for trust, that takes
time. It’s a precious commodity.”

“He trusts you,” Sam says and Cas looks up, curious. He’s not surprised by the statement, but more
that Sam knows. It’s nice to hear, even if it makes him ache.

“It’s mutual. I trust him more than anyone.”

“Except Anna.” Cas looks up to Sam’s wide, expectant eyes. “She’s your wife. I just figured.”

It used to be true. Even when he couldn’t muster any desire for Anna, he trusted her. They shared
years together; hardship and joy and companionship. He thought she trusted him, and so each
betrayal had stung even more, knowing he was violating that. Now he knows that she rightly didn’t
trust him, but it makes his own trust for her feel like a lie too. “Marriage is different,” Cas mutters.

“Does Anna know you’re home and halloweenifying the house?”

“She’s working late tonight, but I’m sure she’ll get a concerned phone call about our souls form
someone in the home owners association.”

Sam smirks at that, and gets back to carving. It doesn’t take very long to finish, since Cas had already
started before Sam came home, but it’s pleasant. It’s the first time he’s had a long stretch alone with
Sam and it only confirms all the praise Dean’s given him. He’s smart and snarky like his brother, but
in a different way; like the variation on a familiar tune in a different key. Once the jack-o-lanterns are
done, Sam helps Cas set them up outside and decorate the front porch until it’s ‘creepy but cool’ in
Sam’s words. They add a few dead leaves from the yard as a final touch then go inside to make sure
the candy isn’t poisoned. Cas knows at some point they’ll need to eat real food but that’s not a
problem right now. He doesn’t call his mother to let her know he’s not coming to dinner and that’s
fine.

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Dean wonders if he pulled up to the wrong house. There are pumpkins on the front porch, and the
lights are orange and…are those cobwebs? Maybe he slipped into an alternate reality. The idea sticks
with him when he walks into to see Sam and Cas parked on the couch with Sam’s algebra
homework spread on the coffee table.

Coming home to people he loves looking happy and taken care of really shouldn’t do feel like
someone ripping out his heart with their bare hands, but his life is weird, he figures.

“Someone wanna tell me why are we living in Halloweentown?” Dean asks, pushing his feelings
down to be dealt with some other day or decade.

“I thought it would be nice. For Sam,” Cas answer with a gummy smile.
“And you too. I saved you some butterfingers!” Sam says, grinning as well.

“Any licorice?” Dean asks as he doffs his jacket.

“Ew. No.”

Dean looks between Sam and Cas who spoke simultaneously.

“Cas is a normal person who doesn’t like dirt candy,” Sam expounds.

“There are twizzlers in the cauldron. Somewhere,” Cas says.

“You got a…” Dean turns to see the absurdly large plastic cauldron of candy on the table just as the doorbell rings and Sam jumps to answer it. He snatches the candy before Dean can touch it. “Hey!”

“Here.” Cas passes Dean a small Butterfinger as Sam answers the door to chorus of sweet voices crying “Trick or treat!”

“Thanks, Cas,” Dean says as he takes the candy, smiling despite himself. “You two have fun?”

“Yes. It seems I have a weakness for Winchesters,” Cas says as Sam comes back from the door.

“Well, we’re pretty charming.” Dean smirks. It makes Cas and Sam smile.

“I’m charming. You’re just…old,” Sam teases.

“If Dean is old that makes me ancient,” Cas says.

“No, dude you’re like, distinguished. Hey, did Dean, did you know Cas did math club in school too? I told you it was cool!”

“I thought we were going to keep that between us, Sam,” Cas says, deep and serious.

“A distinguished nerd, awesome,” Dean laughs. “Guess that beats a hippie nerd.”

“I am not a hippie!”

“Your hair says otherwise, kid.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Well. I’m going to do math club, so don’t be a jerk about it.”

“Sam.” They both turn to Cas, whose voice is low and conspiratorial. “Don’t tell your brother this but, I also was in the poetry club.”

“Oh man, that is lame,” Sam whispers.

The bell rings again and this time it’s Cas that answers. Dean cranes his head to watch him smile at a small dragon and a Dalmatian in a fireman’s hat. “Where’s Anna?” Dean asks.

“I guess she had to work late or something?” Sam answers with a shrug.

“She’ll be home at ten,” Cas adds as he returns, sounding extremely unhappy about it. “She switched shifts or something. She’ll be here on Thursday night.” Dean hopes Sam doesn’t notice the sullen look that Cas gives him when he says that. Not that they were going to get up to anything with Sam around, or now that Dean had shot himself in the foot telling Cas they were over. It still stings.

“And you ditched family dinner to hand out candy?” Dean asks and Cas’s frown turns in a smirk. He
loves that Cas can be a little shit when he wants to be. As it turns out he loves a lot of things about the asshole. “So, are we going to eat any real food beside candy?” Cas shares a guilty look with Sam and Dean gives a dramatic sigh. “How am I not surprised?”

Dean works on dinner while Sam and Cas take turns answering the door, though he does take a few tries himself as well. It’s fun seeing the kids in their costumes and looking out onto the dark street to hear shrieks and laughter. Sam eventually finishes his math homework before dinner and they eat on the couch like savages once the trick-or-treating mobs have died down.

“Are there any Kit Kats left?” Sam asks once the dinner plates are cleared. Dean throws him one from the cauldron and Sam catches it with a smile.

“I can’t believe you smack talk licorice when you like stupid Kit Kats,” Dean grumbles as he plops on the couch between Sam and Cas, who’s working on a tiny bag of M&Ms.

“Those are in no way comparable,” Cas says and Dean glares between the two of them. "Kit Kats are at least edible."

“I can’t believe you two are already ganging up on me,” Dean mutters.

“Hey, do you remember the Kit Kat cake?” Sam asks.

Cas squints at them as Dean laughs to himself. “What did that taste like?” Cas asks.

“Not cake,” Dean replies, looking over at Sam. “What were you? Six going on seven?” Sam nods and Dean looks back to Cas. “It was Sammy’s birthday and we didn’t have a cake for him. So I improvised. Layers of Kit Kats and some peanut butter and I think Marshmallow fluff? Oh and there was a banana in there too. Had to take a five finger discount for a week to get all the stuff.”

“And pudding for frosting,” Sam adds.

“It was disgusting,” Dean goes on, shaking his head so he doesn’t have to see the fond look in Cas’s face.

“It was awesome,” Sam says, more quietly. “Dean always made my birthdays nice. Even when everything else was crappy.”

“He seems to make a habit of that,” Cas says. “He made steaks for mine. He’s improved some as a cook.”

“I can make you a Kit Kat cake next year,” Dean says and the warmth in Cas’s face fades. Who even knows if they’ll be allowed to speak next year.

“Twix, please,” Cas still says.

“You got it, poetry club,” Dean replies with a wink.

“So what’d you do in poetry club?” Sam asks, oblivious to the moment between Dean and Cas. “Read stuff?”

“Worse than that, we wrote it.” Cas is actually blushing and it’s adorable.

“You wrote poetry,” Dean states, trying to wrap his mind around that.

“Don’t tease,” Cas mumbles.
“No, it’s cool. Do you still have any?” Dean asks.

Cas shakes his head. “Someone got rid of my notebooks. I kept it up for a few years in college, but I wasn’t as productive without people to support it.” Dean stares at Cas, catching the air or regret around him. He imagines a life where things with Balthazar had been different and Cas had never been scared back into the closet. Cas as a poet, happy somewhere else. It’s a bittersweet thought.

“Did you ever write poems for Anna? Like, when you were dating?” Sam asks, knocking Dean’s thoughts off track.

“No. They weren’t those kind of poems.”

“I know a good one about a man from Nantucket,” Dean pipes up and gets the groan from Sam he was hoping for, as well as the smile from Cas. The doorbell saves them all and Dean retreats to hand out candy to a ghost and a monkey. “Sammy have you got much more homework?” Dean asks when he comes back.

“No, they’re going easy on me to let me get the swing of it,” Sam says. “We’re actually in the poetry unit in English, maybe Cas can help me with that?”

“I’d love that, Sam,” Cas says without missing a beat.

“Tonight?” Dean asks.

“Nah. I’m done for now,” Sam says. “Can we watch a movie?”

“What, like, Friday the 13th or something?” Dean asks and Cas looks uneasy. “Or something less gory. And that remake was such crap anyway.”

“How about Nightmare Before Christmas? Get all the holidays in at once,” Sam suggests. Dean gets ready to say something rude but Cas speaks up first.

“I’ve never seen it, that sounds great.”

They talk over half the movie, explaining some jokes to Cas or reminiscing about their holidays as kid. All it does is remind Dean that Sam’s never had a real good Christmas, or Halloween or birthday, Kit Kat cake or no. He has a chance to give him that now, at least a few of them. He already has one under his belt thanks to Cas. The thought of embarking on other holidays, or any part of being fully and totally responsible for Sam – holy shit – without Cas? Fuck, he can’t decide if it’s more painful or terrifying. He doesn’t know how to do this and what if he can’t keep Sam in the right school district or afford shit or…

“Dean?” He looks up to Cas. The credits are rolling and his eyes are dark blue in the dim light.

“Sorry, zoned out,” Dean says. “What?”

“We were asking if you wanted to watch something else,” Cas explains.

“It’s kind of late, you rebels,” Dean replies just as the sound of the garage door. “And the warden is back.”

“Is she gonna be mad?” Sam asks, blessedly ignorant.

“She doesn’t like candy,” Cas shrugs.
Anna looks more confused than angry when she walks in. “Hi…guys?” Her eyes fall on Dean. “Did you and Sam—”

“No, it was me. Sam helped. I came home early and set it up,” Cas says, quietly defiant in a way that makes Dean so fucking proud.

“You came home? What about dinner with you mom?” Anna asks.

“Slipped my mind,” Cas says. Dean knows that’s a lie and so does Anna, but there’s nothing she can say right now without making Sam suspicious.

“Well. Uh. Had a crazy night at work. Lots of fights and this one patient…”

“I don’t know if Sam needs to hear about that,” Dean cuts her off. He certainly doesn’t want to hear it.

“Yeah, I gotta get to bed,” Sam agrees. “Night everyone.” Sam retreats, leaving the adults to quietly stare each other down.

“Dean will you help me put out the pumpkins,” Cas says and starts towards the door without waiting for a yes. Dean gives Anna a shrug and follows. She looks hurt by all the cold shoulders but Dean really can’t be bothered to care. They blow out the candles in silence and are left standing in the quiet October night.

“Do you really think the dead come back tonight?” Cas asks out of nowhere and Dean turns to him. “I hadn’t really thought about it.”

Cas keeps staring out into the night. The sky is surprisingly clear, a few dim stars visible in the black, but there’s a chill in the air. Maybe it is ghosts, who knows. “I’d rather be a ghost. If I had a choice. Between that and hell. Or nothing.”

“I’m not letting you watch creepy movies anymore,” Dean mutters. A light comes on above them, just enough to make it easier to see when Cas smiles at him. Dean can’t stand the idea that someone whose smile can make him feel so good thinks he’s bound for hell.

“Let’s get inside,” Cas says, easy like he didn’t just bring the mood down a hundred notches. Not that Anna hadn’t already accomplished that just coming home. And now Cas has to share a bed with her. He doesn’t rush up the stairs though. He walks Dean to his bedroom door like he’s saying goodbye at the end of a date.

“Guess you better get up to…”

“I’ve been sleeping in the spare room.”

Dean doesn’t know what to say to that. Ask him how long he’s going to keep that up? Invite him into his room? Not like that would fly, but fuck Dean misses Cas so much already, even when he’s standing right in front of him. Is Cas going to sleep there when Dean is gone. Why is all of this so fucked up? How can spending a few hours with Sam and Cas leave him feeling so empty thinking of the future, where he’s stealing peanut butter for Sam and Cas is sleeping alone in a bed that used to be Dean’s.

Cas doesn’t move or resist when Dean closes the distance between them and kisses him, gentle with regret. They don’t touch, other than their lips, that would be too much. But it still makes Dean ache and tremble down to his bones. Cas looks just as sad as before the kiss when Dean pulls away.
“You said it was over.”

“I…it is,” Dean whispers. “I just…tonight was nice and…” He doesn’t even know how to explain it without sounding like an idiot. *I wanted to kiss you at least one time knowing I love you,* is a downer Cas doesn’t need right now. Dean’s fucked things up for him enough already. “I’m sorry.”

“I didn’t mind,” Cas says, like a fucking saint. The martyred kind probably, that end up tied to a tree and killed by arrows for their stupid faith. Stepping back is easier than words. It is over, for good now, and they both know it.

“G’night, Cas.”

“Goodnight, Dean.”

_______

Castiel still showers and dresses in the master bedroom. Keeping the door closed and lurking – in a bit of irony so painful he wants to smash it with a hammer – the walk-in closet. His Sunday church clothes aren’t really different form his work clothes, but he takes longer putting them on because he can hear Anna moving in the bedroom.

The week was easy to manage, because everyone was in chaos getting ready for school and work, so Anna hadn’t tried to talk. Castiel avoiding eye contact was a factor in that as well. It’s not like they didn’t speak at all, he was polite and as warm as he could manage at meals and when they met around the house, he just had nothing to say to her. At least there was no argument or mention of date night, since he had no intention of attempting that ever again.

Saturday was more difficult but Castiel had managed to spend extra time at the mission. Avoiding talking to Chuck and Hannah was easier, and after that he ran errands with Sam and Dean, including a trip to the grocery store that provided the house with several food stuffs that had been forbidden for years. Castiel’s stomach complains no matter what he eats nowadays, so bringing home ground beef and bacon because “Sam likes it” was a win for everyone. In truth Sam feels the same about food as Anna, and watching them discussing factory farming and gardening had been pleasant to watch until Castiel remembered Anna’s role in bringing him. It’s all he can think about right now as he waits for her to leave so he can escape. Then again it’s getting late, he doesn’t have to speak to her.

As he guessed, Anna is waiting for him, sitting demurely on the edge of the bed. Castiel sighs and heads for the door but Anna jumps up to block his exit.

“Anna, I need to let Dean and Sam know we’re ready to go,” Castiel grumbles and Anna’s brows knit.

“They’re coming to church?”

“I assume you’d want them to, we wouldn’t want people to talk after last week.” If they’re keeping up the appearance of a good Christian household, the entire strange household should go to church.

“Oh. I had hoped we would have some time alone to talk,” Anna frowns. And there’s the other reason Castiel is happy to bring Sam and Dean along: a buffer.

“There’s nothing to talk about. Please let me through.”
“Yes, there is.” Anna’s eyes are determined and plaintive with a hand on his chest. “Like when you’re going to stop punishing me?”

“You think this is a punishment?” Castiel asks back, recoiling from the contact.

“You won’t talk to me or look at me. I feel like I’m living alone.”

“This is the only way I know how to survive in this house.” He tries to leave again but Anna steps in front of him.

“Cas, come on,” Anna pleads. “I know this is…not ideal, and believe me, I know how hard it is to forgive someone when they’ve hurt you. But I’m trying to do that and I just want you to try too. I miss you.”

Castiel waivers, staring down into Anna’s face and really looking at her for the first time in a week. She looks tired, just like him; small and faded and lonely. He knows that’s not something he’s imagining, sharing a home with someone you love and want to be with and not being with them is the loneliest thing on earth. Anna isn’t the only reason he knows what that feels like. He made this mess himself and he should suffer the consequences, but maybe he doesn’t have to hurt someone more than he already has...

“We have to go,” Castiel repeats quietly and Anna moves aside with a sigh.

He walks into the hall, shoulders heavy and tense. He knows he can’t go on this way, but he can’t even begin to think of what the future will be in a few weeks when Dean and Sam are gone and he’s left alone with the same life he had before he knew them, only now with nowhere to hide and no moments of escape in sight.

“Hey, Cas!” Sam says, jolting Castiel from his thoughts. “Is this shirt okay?” Sam is in a button up that’s one size too small, but it’s unwrinkled and clean.

“That’s fine, Sam.”

“Are you sure you want to come?” Anna asks as she joins Castiel in the hall.

Sam looks nervously between the two of them. “I thought we had to? Dean said…”

“We’d like you to, yes,” Cas replies.

“Cool.” Sam still looks dubious. “Let’s go get Dean.”

Dean seems even more nervous than Sam as he joins them in the kitchen. Everyone already ate breakfast separately, so there’s nothing to do but pile into the car and go.

“Zeke said he’s staying in town until the hearing thing. I wonder if he’s going to church,” Sam says halfway into the awkwardly silent ride. “He’s a churchy guy. And Anna, didn’t you say you recommended he come?”

“I did,” Anna replies.

“I don’t think he was allowed to invite me to that sort of thing, separation of church and state and all.” Sam fidgets in the back seat. “I’ve never been to church before, actually.”

“Yeah, last week was my first time. It’s…a thing. All sorts of interesting people,” Dean says, making eye contact with Cas in the rearview mirror. They discussed dealing with Ishim, as much as they
could. There’s really not much to do other than avoiding him. Dean hadn’t once suggested not coming, which Cas was infinitely grateful for.

They arrive just on time, taking seats in a rear pew and avoid talking to anyone before the sermon starts. Zachariah is in rare form, launching into a litany of the disasters and tragedies from the last months, Castiel hopes that it’s a prelude to an appeal for Christian charity, that maybe Chuck is organizing some sort of relief effort or something for the holidays. Maybe Zachariah changed his mind about the community Thanksgiving for the poor Chuck had wanted to host and been denied funds for…

“All of these horrors, all of this suffering, inflicted on our nation because we have turned so far from God.” Castiel sighs. It was worth hoping. “Though are leaders are fighting valiantly to return our country to the Christian ideals of our founders, there are still those that seek to pull us all into the quagmire of sin. Fornication. Sodomy. Feminism. Child rape and murder. Socialism. All these forces weigh upon us every day and God sees and weeps.”

“Is he serious?” Sam whispers under his breath to Dean. Dean shrugs and Castiel feels a surge of embarrassment.

He’s spent many years tuning Zachariah out, doubtful but accepting of his version of The Lord. He always seemed generally correct, as far as Castiel could tell, just some of the details were wrong, and the focus on anger and judgment. Then again, he knew God was angry, he knew God was punishing him for his own sins, time and again. He’s just become used to it. Dean had told him so many times, so brashly, that God couldn’t be like that and he liked the idea, just like he smiled at the thought that he could walk away from the prison of this life. It was dream, completely unfamiliar and insane. But trying to listen like Sam would, like Dean would…it makes his skin crawl, not just his own shame and self-hatred for his sin, but for his complicity in such hate and clear perversion of the faith he loved.

“There is work to be done, my friends,” Zachariah goes on. “The word of God must be spread, the poison of sin must be sapped from this great nation. Ready your souls, reach out to those that need it. Do not let them walk so easily into hell.”

“How long is this going to take?” Sam asks and Dean shushes him.

Cas smiles.

Things get better after the sermon. A few people stand up to testify; one about how God gave them strength through illness and last week they were pronounced fully in remission, and another on how they were moved to donate an inheritance to children’s hospital. Castiel has never felt the need to testify. He doesn’t want the attention for his good deeds, however meager and he doesn’t feel like he’s done enough to repent or change. The final witness speaks of overcoming temptation, Castiel isn’t sure what kind, but he notices Anna’s eyes glancing to him as the man testifies of finding strength in God to overcome his vice. It’s a relief when the choir begins their out-of-tune droning. The readings are boring as usual and finally Zachariah turns to community announcements, urging everyone to vote correctly next Tuesday before Chuck asks for more holiday volunteers before his mic is turned off and everyone begins filing out.

Castiel hopes this part will go quickly and painlessly. Like most, it’s not a high hope.

“Castiel.” He turns to the sharp voice. Of course his mother is the first to find them as they leave the pew, with Michael and Luke flanking her. “I’ve been trying to get in touch with you all week and now you won’t sit with your family. Where were you Tuesday?”
“Someone had to give out the candy,” Castiel replies flatly and Luke looks satisfyingly scandalized.

“You ditched dinner for…Halloween?” Michael asks.

“Cas also wanted to spend more time with Sam here,” Anna interjects, Mike and Luke’s eyes go wide as they finally notice that Dean isn’t alone. Naomi remains implacable. “This is Dean’s brother. He’s staying with us.”

“Hm. Fostering will be good for you,” his mother remarks. “Took long enough.”

“Nice to meet you too,” Sam mutters.

“Sorry for…them,” Luke says and steps forward to offer Sam a hand. “Luke Novak. This is my brother Mike, Mom is Naomi. Our wives and rugrats are somewhere around.”

“Glad you joined us, Sam.” Naomi says coolly, watching as Sam shakes Luke’s hand, then Micheal. Dean looks around the milling crowd, as does Castiel. But he doesn’t see Ishim anywhere yet.

“So, uh, Cas says you own a radio station?” Sam asks uneasily.

“Nah, Mike here is the media mogul. I’m just around for the meat,” Luke replies.

“Best steaks in the state,” Zachariah’s voice comes from behind them and Castiel cringes.

“Hello, Mr. Adler, Lovely sermon,” Naomi says with a smile to the pastor as he joins the group and Castiel’s discomfort grows.

Zachariah’s eyes fall on the Winchesters. “New parishoners?”

“We met last week actually,” Dean says. “Or maybe I didn’t make an impression.”

“Of course, you’re the Novak’s…what’s the right word? Adoptee?” Zachariah says.

“Let’s go with friend,” Dean replies, low and fed up.

“And you young, man?” Zachariah asks, turning to Sam.

“I’m his brother,” Sam says, a steel in his eyes and voice that Castiel has never seen. “Do really think that hurricanes are caused by feminists?”

Zachariah blinks and Castiel swears that the crowd around them goes quiet. Luke and his mother look particularly shocked. “Well, it’s a bit more complicated than that, young man,” Zachariah chuckles.

“Yeah, the science of global warm is complicated, kinda,” Sam spits back. “But I’m fourteen and I get it. And it doesn’t have anything to do with God being mad at America because we have gay marriage or something stupid like that.”

"Young man, you shouldn't address your elders like that," Naomi admonishes.

"He's only speaking his mind," Cas says and gets a glare. "Free speech is what makes us great, isn't it?" Sam gives him a crooked smile for that,

“Sam, these are adult topics,” Anna gently warns.

“If they’re so adult then you shouldn’t be talking about them in church, probably scarring poor
confused kids,” Sam says back.

“I think you may be the one confused, Sam,” Zachariah say, beady eyes narrowed to suspicious slits.

“No, I think the fact you’re a bunch of homophobic, sexist, racist idiots is pretty clear.”

“Sam,” Dean snaps and his brother turns to him and Cas with a look of fury. Dean sighs. “It’s not polite to tell jerks they’re jerks to their faces.”

“Well, I—” Naomi huffs and Anna starts to protest too.

“We’re gonna go wait by the car,” Dean says, pulling Sam away. “Great to see everyone, as always.” Cas watches as the brothers hurry out of the church and Dean says something he can’t hear.

“Well, that was…bracing,” Naomi mutters. Castiel can’t tell if she’s embarrassed of furious or both. “Anna, Rachel wanted to talk to us about her shower, come along.”

“I’ll be right back, I guess,” Anna says, rushing after Naomi. Cas wonders what kind of lecture she’ll be getting for not keeping them in check. He doesn’t pity her.

“I have to go – elsewhere. See you next week,” Zachariah says and disappears as well, leaving Castiel alone with his brothers.

“Quite a firecracker you’ve got there in young Sam,” Luke says with warmth that surprises Castiel.

“At least he’s clear about what he thinks,” Michael remarks and gives Cas a dark look. “Rather than pretending to be respectful and not meaning it.”

“Dean was just joking,” Castiel says, fully aware his brothers know that’s a lie.

“You won’t be bringing them along to Thanksgiving, will you?” Michael asks.

“I hadn’t even considered that. We’re going to your house this year?” Castiel says, weary already.

“Well, you, Anna and Mom can’t cook and I had it last year,” Luke replies. “But I don’t see why Sam and Dean shouldn’t be there. It could be great entertainment.” There’s a predatory look in Luke’s eyes that Castiel doesn’t like at all.

“We’ll see,” Castiel says, casting about to see where Anna and his mother have gone. Instead his eyes land on the two people he wants to see least in the world: Ishim, with Uriel right by his side. “Oh no.”

“Uriel, it’s been too long!” Luke crows, embracing Uriel as he joins them. “And Ishim, good to see you again. You both know Mike, and of course Cas.”

“It’s actually Castiel that we want to talk to,” Uriel says with a terrible, smug smile.

“Though of course support from the two of you would be excellent as well,” Ishim adds.

“Support?” Michael asks. “For what?”

“We’re calling on Zachariah to fire Mr. Shurley,” Ishim says plainly. “He’s a pernicious influence on the congregation. Far too liberal and disruptive.”

“I think Chuck is doing a wonderful job,” Castiel says.
“Are you sure?” Uriel asks. “Your position on this could have consequences for you Castiel.”

Castiel’s spine stiffens, as does Luke. “Are you threatening my brother over some beef you have with Zach’s butt monkey?”

“No, of course not,” Uriel smiles.

“But we wouldn’t want anything to jeopardize your friend Dean,” Ishim says and Cas’s blood runs cold. So it won’t be outright exposure, blackmail first.

“We’re putting together a letter, and we’ll be bringing our concerns to Zachariah in the coming weeks, we’d be happy for signatures and testimonials from all of you,” Uriel goes on.

“Castiel here just knows him best,” Ishim says, smug and smiling. “And can verify his radical positions.”

“Are you asking Hannah to join you?” Cas asks back, his jaw clenched and fists tight.

“Hannah hasn’t been returning my calls lately, and I believe it’s because she and Mr. Shurley have…well, I won’t speculate. You know how rumors can hurt people. Especially vulnerable ones.” Castiel stares down Ishim. He’s never hated one person this much, even the men that put Dean in the hospital weren’t this bad and didn’t cloak their hatred in the guise of faith.

“Consider it, Castiel,” Uriel says. “And also consider replying to your emails.”

The two men nod and leave the Novaks, walking with identical dangerous smiles on their faces.

“What the hell was that?” Michael asks, staring at Castiel. “I thought Uriel was a friend of yours. And that Ishim guy is…weird.”

“Obviously they’ve got some axes to grind,” Luke says. “Even if they’re right about that hippie Chuck. You should sign that letter, Cas, even if they were assholes in the way they asked.”

“I don’t think I have a choice in the matter,” Castiel says. As usual.

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
- Homophobia and homophobic language
- Licorice mention

So, you might have noticed that it says 26/31 chapters. The outline is pretty solid right now, so I felt it was safe to put that on there. I am REALLY hoping to have this done before Thanksgiving.

Remember, You can always come say hi over on tumblr, where I’ll be screaming about the show on Thursday.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

okay, just under the wire so y’all can "enjoy" this before the new episode on Thursday. But hey, this fic is super up;ifting compared to the show now, just like I promised!

Warnings at the end and other bits and bobs, as usual. No Licorice this chapter, thank god.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Everything is fading. Dean keeps thinking that as he looks out over the salvage yard. The leaves are almost all gone from the trees, and the few that are left are pale and withered, just barely hanging on before the next storm takes them away to who knows where. It’s the same at home. No. At the Novak place. Not home. He doesn’t know where home is going to be and that’s freaking him out. Sam has been with them over two weeks, and it should be getting easier by now, but it’s just all fading slowly into silence Dean can’t shake.

They all go through the same routines each day, sleeping, eating, not talking. He and Cas look at each other over Sam’s head and don’t talk. Cas and Anna sleep in separate rooms avoid talking at all costs. Dean hears her once in a while trying to get him to talk to her, come back to their bed. Or maybe he imagines it. Cas says no, or at least he does in Dean’s head. But it’s just a matter of time before Cas gives up, before his anger and resolve fades. Maybe he’s waiting until Dean’s gone, but he doesn’t say so. If Sam notices that he’s moved into the middle of a fucked-up soap opera, he doesn’t talk about it. Seeing him each day is the only bright spot in all of this mess, but there’s things unsaid there too. Dean has to go. Sooner rather than later and no one wants to talk about that, not even Anna.

It was weird for a few days after Sam chewed out the asshole pastor. Dean had been proud but also fucking freaked. He had no idea if Zach was petty enough to report him for something. But he was afraid of him and Ishim every day. Luckily, Anna hadn’t made a big deal about it – probably trying to stay in Sam’s or Cas’s good graces as much as possible – and Sam hadn’t really talked about it after they got home. He made sure to tell Dean that he didn’t judge Cas by his church, which was cool of him. But he left Anna out of that, which was accurate but worrying. Dean doesn’t know what that means and he doesn’t want to ask. Things got a bit tense on election night when the asshole from Cas’s church had lost the city counsel seat, but Anna had been please with that too so Dean didn’t know what to think. All that matters is that Sam and Cas still get along like a house on fire. Sam and Dean stayed home from Church last Sunday, but that’s fine too. Dean was relieved to not have to worry about Ishim for a week. They went running together a few nights ago; Dean tried to join but he’d started dying about half a block in and given up. He said it was his hip and no one had to know he was breathing so hard he was worried a lung was gonna fall out. Well, no one but Missouri who had been walking Fergus at the time. He enjoyed a stroll with her before the Barry and Kid Flash made it back, then got to introduce Sam. He’s not sure who had liked Sam more, Missouri or Fergus – who had demanded copious bely rubs from Sam.

He likes those moments, like last Thursday, when it’s just the three of them. He missed having alone time with Cas, but playing monopoly – and losing horribly to the two geniuses he’s stuck with – was better than sex in its way. That’s not to say he can’t stop looking at Cas or wanting him. He does and
sometimes it’s so intense he can barely breathe. But the three of them, together for a few hours as a family…that’s good too.

He keeps thinking things with Sam are too easy or too good. Maybe this is some fucked up game Anna or God or someone else that wants to hurt him is playing. They’ve been assigned lawyers that Sam needs to meet and Dean needs to eventually call back. He’s had a few talks with Zeke as well, nothing too deep, but he keeps mentioning Dean getting his own place and he knows he’s got to do it, but the idea of a few weeks away from Sam when he just got him back and leaving Cas forever is—well, it’s the reason Dean’s staring out Bobby’s window at the dying leaves. He keeps waiting for the one wind to blow him away, but he’s hanging on.

“You done with the Jones order?” Bobby asks and Dean jumps. “Oh, I’m sorry, did I interrupt your quiet meditation time?”

“I was just thinking,” Dean mutters.

“About Sam or about Cas?” Bobby asks, wheeling back to his desk and forcing Dean to move out of the way.

“Both. Don’t really know what to do about…anything.” Dean sinks into the old chair close to the desk.

“Why don’t you start by finally putting this in that fancy new bank account you’ve got.”

Dean startles as the envelope of money that he’d been trying not to think about for a month lands in his lap. “Bobby, come on.”

“Now, I know you think you shouldn’t use that cash because of what you had to do for it, but by my thinking, you did what you could and you came out alive on the other side and there ain’t no shame in that. No point just letting it sit in my desk doing nothing.”

Dean sighs. He doesn’t want to get in an argument he knows he’s gonna lose. “Fine. I need first and last month’s rent for an apartment deposit apparently.”

“You find anything good yet?”

Dean shakes his head. “I gotta stay in the same school district, or close so they’ll give Sam a waiver or something. I’m not making him move again. But everything around there is expensive and wants like, credit checks and references or whatever.”

“That’s rough.” Bobby watches thoughtfully as Dean tucks the money away. “Well, if you need some extra cash, I may have a side job for you. Just a few hours, under the counter.”

“I’m not giving you a pedicure, no matter how much you pay me.”

Bobby rolls his eyes then turns to look at the decrepit staircase that mainly functions as a bookshelf. “I wanna clean up the top floor. I’ve got three rooms up there and a bathroom that I’d like to get habitable. Figure it’s a good job for a hooligan with time on his hands.”

“I’m a hooligan now?”

“You can get up the stairs, that’s all I need.”

Dean squints at Bobby. “Why clean it up now?”
“All your talk, got me thinking I could rent it out, make some extra cash.” Bobby shrugs then finally turns to Dean and fixes him with an earnest look. “I hear this place is in a prime school district.”

“Bobby.” Dean looks down at the money in his hand and then to the stairs up to the place he knows Bobby wouldn’t even make him pay for. It’s all too familiar, but for the life of him he can’t imagine what Bobby wants from him. “Why’re you doing this?”

“Why else, ya idjit? I’m a lonely old cripple and I want to see some life in this house before I burn it to the ground for the insurance money.”

Dean huffs a laugh, shaking his head. “You sure a reformed whore and a kid that’s too smart for his own good will be good company?”

“Better than the other bad memories around here.” There’s a gentleness just below the surface of Bobby’s gruff words. He’s not offering. He’s asking.

“I gotta talk to Sam before I say yes, and…” Dean bites his lip. He doesn’t need Cas’s permission for this but he can’t bear the thought of leaving. “And see what he wants to do. Probably the social worker too.”

“Dean.” He looks up at Bobby, surprised by the tender tone of his voice. “Cas is welcome here too. To visit or…otherwise.”

“He and I don’t have an otherwise. Never did.”

“And never will?”

“Not if I want to keep Sam.” Dean picks at the worn corner of the envelope. “And how would that even work, if he did get away? I can’t date or be someone’s boyfriend or some bullshit. I’m damaged goods and I’ve got other shit to take care of.”

“That’s one way to think about it.”

“And he…he would be crap too. I think. Maybe. I don’t…I don’t know.” Cas has been married for like eight years, what would he know about starting fresh or anything. “Fuck. I don’t even want to think about it. I…I’ll get started upstairs.”

Bobby nods and Dean keeps his word, picking his way through books, an old radio and some pot and pans to make it upstairs. The hall is dusty and quiet, the cold sort of quiet that settles on a place that hasn’t felt human warmth in a few years.

It’s simple, really. A hall just like Cas and Anna’s, but it’s so different. The walls are covered in ancient red wallpaper that’s peeling up from where it meets the wainscoting. The carpets set over the dark hard woods are faded and dusty too. No one ever bothered to shut the curtains on the one window, years of sun have damaged places. Dean turns a nob on the closest door and it gives with a stiff creak. It’s a bed room. Small, tidy. It looks like it was meant to be for a guest, back when Bobby and Karen had them.

The next room is a bathroom that’s in poor shape. There’s water stains and rust around the sink and Dean doesn’t even want to think about trying to get the water running before checking the pipes. The room across from that must have been the master bedroom. It’s untouched from the last time Karen Singer woke up there, Dean knows it. There’s still a few wrinkles on the quilt, a hair brush on the nightstand.

There’s dust and cobwebs on the wedding photo by the window. It’s faded too but Dean can still
make out the faces, smiling in the sun. It reminds him of the picture of Cas and Anna hanging in the front hall. But it’s different too, the way the house is different. Bobby and looks happy, Cas looks lonely. This place, this room, it’s full of reminders of the love that used to fill the place. It’s deep in the walls, settled like the dust. Anna’s house, because that’s what it is, never held love like that. It’s just endless, empty quiet of clean lines and pristine carpets.

Dean doesn’t take of his shoes when he comes in that night. It’s something he’s been doing more lately, just waiting for Anna to say something. But today is Thursday so he doesn’t have to worry about that. He’s home late after stopping by the bank and making a deposit that had the teller giving him a weird look. It was worth it to see such a healthy number on the account balance. Sam has his homework spread out on front on him on the kitchen counter, and there’s no Cas in sight.

“Hey, short stuff,” Dean says, ruffling Sam’s hair.

“I’m like an inch shorter than you and I’m still growing.”

“Well, you’re gonna top out soon.”

“Not before I’m taller than you,” Sam smirks.

“Do you want me to make you dinner?”

“Yeah.”

“Then stop growing.” Sam gives him that big puppy dog smile and Dean rolls his eyes. “What’d Cas pick up?”

“Burger stuff!” Sam says as Dean opens the fridge to check for himself. To his surprise there’s a six pack of beer next to the ground beef that’s already missing a bottle.

“And beer? Where is Cas?”

“On the porch,” Sam says, grimacing as Dean looks at him. “I think he had a bad day.”

Dean grabs two bottles and closes the fridge with a sigh. “How much homework you got left?”

“Uh, gotta finish these math problems then do my history reading.”

“Cool, I do dinner when you’re done, I’m gonna…” He pops the caps from the bottle and shows them to Sam.

“Thanks. I didn’t really know what to say to him.”

Dean’s glad he didn’t bother taking off his jacket yet when he steps out into the chill November air. Cas has his trench on too. He looks like a pale shadow in the dim light from inside the house, faded and small.

“You’re in my spot,” Dean says as he plunks himself next to Cas on the lounger, close enough that their legs and shoulders brush. He’ll tell himself it’s because of the cold. Cas’s empty bottle is between his feet and takes the fresh one from Dean with a half-smile, their fingers brushing. “Why we drinkin’?”

Cas takes a long sip. “I finally had that talk with the hospital lawyer.”
“The giant bitch you were telling me about?”

Cas gives him an annoyed look as Dean takes a swig. “It’s inappropriate to call women bitches. Though Josie Sands does meet the traditional parameters.”

“She have bad news for you?”

“She thinks the claim I lost is part of a larger pattern.”

“Is it?” Dean doesn’t think Cas is part of anything shady, but he’s not sure about the rest of the hospital. Then again, Cas had been cagey all week about the trouble from the higher ups.

“I didn’t think so, but then I started reviewing some files and accounting from outside our department and…I do think there’s a problem.” Cas takes another deep drink.

“Shit. Like embezzlement or what?”

“I’m not sure. I have a meeting with Josie on Tuesday. I have to investigate before then but the person that’s probably behind it…” Another drink.

“Let me guess, Uriel.” Cas had given him some broad strokes of the trouble at work and the assholes he worked with. “Can’t say I’m surprised someone whose name sounds like urinal is a jerk.”

“It might also be Alfie,” Cas says, completely grim.

Now that’s a surprise. Dean only knows Alfie vaguely, but he doesn’t seem like a bad guy. “Fuck. He’s just a kid.”

“He’s two years older than you.”

“Yeah, well, I’m old for my age. Why do you think he’s doing it?”

“I don’t know. And Uriel…I can’t implicate him.” Cas looks so defeated and tired, Dean can barely stand it.

“Are you afraid he’s gonna fire you from the boring job you hate?”

Cas doesn’t reply immediately, just takes another swig of beer. Dean echoes the movement. “He can make life difficult for me. Especially since I…haven’t been cooperative with him lately.”

“What’s that mean?”

“It’s not important.”

“Cas…”

“Maybe I won’t go to church on Sunday,” Cas says wistfully, but very clearly changing the subject. Dean’s pretty sure the guy isn’t drunk off a beer and a half but he does seem a bit looser, if not actually relaxed. “I don’t want to see anyone there anymore. Do you think God will mind?”

“Nah, you see him every day,” Dean smiles and Cas does the thing where he squints and tilts his head and makes Dean really want to kiss him. “Isn’t that the schtick? God is all around you. The stars and the earth or and the trees or some shit?” Dean gestures to the night sky, stained pale orange by the streetlights. It’s hard to imagine God there, but maybe if you squint.

“That’s God’s creation, not God.” Cas sounds genuinely offended.
“What’s the difference?” Dean asks, honestly wondering.

Cas stares at him, gears turning in his head. “That’s a pagan sentiment,” he grumbles.

“Hey, you’re the pagan, Mr. Halloween.”

Cas laughs. A small, bitter sound somewhere between a sigh and a hiccup. But it’s a laugh and a real smile and that’s good enough for Dean. “How was your day?” Cas asks.

“Eh. Boring. Bobby’s got me working on a…a thing.” Dean takes a sip of beer to cover. He’s not ready to have this conversation yet. Cas is already sad enough, and Dean can tell himself he’s not totally sure about taking the room at Bobby’s. He has to talk to Zeke or his stupid lawyer first.

“Speaking of lawyers. I got a message from mine. Or his assistant. I gotta meet him on Monday while Sam has his pow wow with his.”

“Sounds exciting.”

“Oh, it’s gonna be awesome.” Cas leans against Dean with his head on his shoulder, intimate and exhausted. He wishes he could kiss him, but that’s a bad idea for a lot of reasons. So is the cuddling, but this, Dean’s willing to take a risk for.

They stay that way for a while, finish their beers in silence. When Dean takes Cas’s hand, it’s freezing.

“Sorry you had a shitty day,” Dean says.

“Thanks.”

———

Castiel needs more coffee than the single cup coffeemaker, or possibly the world, can provide. He stretches as he watches the coffee drip into his mug, his neck popping as he does.

“That couch can’t be comfortable.” He turns to look at Anna where she leans meekly against the wall. “It’s got to be taking a toll.”

“I actually tried the floor last night, it was fine.” He keeps his eyes on the coffee. It’s Saturday. He just has to get through breakfast and then he can get out of the house again…to avoid Uriel and Ishim some more and the fact he hasn’t added his voice to their damned petition.

“Or you could sleep in your bed. Our bed.” Anna looks tired too. It reminds him of the way she used to look in the first year of medical school, before they were married, when she’d come to his apartment exhausted and he’d just hold her on the couch until she fell asleep. Sometimes she’d do the same for him and it was peaceful and safe. He misses it.

“Anna, I don’t want to talk about this right now.” Dean is out with Sam getting breakfast to bring home, Castiel has no reason to avoid a confrontation other than their imminent return, but he still doesn’t want to do this when he’s feeling this weak and lonely. He can resist the inevitable a little longer.

“Alright, when are we going to talk about it?” Anna demands. “Because you can’t keep this up. And
soon, it’s going to be just us again and we’re going to have to make this work.”

“Are you asking me what I want?” Castiel shoots back. “Because that would be new.”

“That is not fair, Cas, I have always done what you wanted,” Anna replies, voice tense and thick.

“What?”

“I have been trying for years to be whatever it was you needed to be okay. I was patient and turned a blind eye to so much. Because I knew you were struggling. You never asked for a change and you did everything I asked. I thought you wanted to make this work, to make us work.”

Castiel swallows. “I did…You know I did.”

“I do know that. That's why I can't give up now. And you married me, knowing you had these feelings. You didn’t ever leave, you didn’t ever even talk about what you were feeling. You just kept trying and I loved that you didn’t give up on us. Was I really doing something so wrong staying by you this whole time when you stayed by me to?”

“No,” Castiel says without reservation. That whole time he’d prayed and fought and tried and tried to change and it wasn’t until he met Dean – until he fucked Dean – that he knew it was useless. And even then he hadn’t left. And Anna saw that.

“So why would you give up now when everything is out in the open?” Anna asks.

“Because they way you’re trying to help me is wrong,” Castiel replies and he doesn’t know if he’s speaking for himself or Dean when he says it. “You’re using people and lying…”

“Are you saying you weren’t using me? That you weren’t lying the whole time?” Anna’s face has turned from sadness to stone, her eyes clear and penetrating. Castiel can’t hide from her or the fact what she’s saying is true.

“I’m sorry for that, I truly am. I…”

“You never meant to hurt me?” Anna cuts in. “That just means you never wanted me to know. That means you wanted to keep going and stay together.”

Castiel stares at her, trying to see her the way he used to. A best friend. A beacon of hope of the normal life he was supposed to love. “I did want that.”

“And if you could get better? Wouldn’t you want to? Don’t you want to be normal? To try?” Anna is so sincere and he can see his own suffering reflected in her eyes. And he knows she doesn’t want to see him hurting.

He’s tired of hurting too. He’s tired of fighting.

“Hey, guys!” Sam, with Dean behind him explodes into the room and makes Castiel and Anna jump.

“We got bagels! Oh…” Sam looks between them, and Dean looks just as worried when he joins him.

“Is everything okay?” Dean asks carefully.

“It’s fine,” Castiel says and Anna sighs.

“Cool! Then I can ask you my question!” Sam exclaims.
“Sam, I told you, no,” Dean says. This is obviously an ongoing argument.

“But…” Sam starts.

“Go…do something in your room and I’ll ask,” Dean orders. Sam to his credit, doesn’t argue and retreats to his room with a huff.” Dean turns to Castiel and Anna, looking harassed. “He wants to go along with you to the volunteer thing.”

“He what?” Castiel asks.

“For some reason, I was trying to talk him down from thinking everyone at your church was a raging asshole and mentioned the volunteering. He got on some tear about colleges looking for that sort of thing and…I don’t know.” Dean scrubs a hand over his face. “He wants me to come to and I think he’s got some idea about seeing my old stomping grounds or whatever.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Castiel says and Dean brightens.

“Right?”

“Why? It could be educational and it would be good for Sam to get another perspective on the church,” Anna counters.

“I don’t want him getting educated about that sort of thing,” Dean nearly hisses.

“And I don’t want Sam near Ishim or Uriel. I barely want to be around them,” Castiel adds.

“What is going on with you and Uriel?” Anna asks, turning back to Cas. “I saw him at work yesterday and he said he was waiting to hear from you.”

“Are he and Ishim…friends?” Dean asks suspiciously.

“Yes, but it’s not about that it’s…” Castiel sighs. There’s no reason to hide this anymore since everything else is out. “Uriel asked me to make Kelly Kline’s claim disappear and not make it to the insurance, so she would have to pay for it. It was stupid and petty, but he wanted punish…everyone.”

“What?” Anna turns to Castiel, her brows knit. “You never told me this. Did you do it?”

“He threatened to fire you. Or me. Or others,” Castiel says quietly, remembering a time when he wanted to protect Anna; when he had held her and comforted her and cared.

Dean looks at him with the same shocked expression, and Cas can see the puzzle pieces of their conversation a few nights ago falling into place. “And?”

Cas locks eyes with Anna, defiance and spite bubbling inside him. “I did it. When he said he’d write off Dean’s medical bills.”

“Jesus fuck, Cas,” Dean groans as Anna’s face fills with hurt.

“I guess it was too much trouble for him, so he turned to Alfie, or continued to use him. Until now,” Cas goes on. He spent all of yesterday sifting through records, all leading to the inevitable conclusion that someone was diverting claims in such a way that the patients judged immortal paid out of their own pocket even if the insurance paid out…and Cas knew exactly who was reaping the profits.

“What’s different now?” Anna asks.
“As Dean guessed, he’s become good friends with Ishim.” That’s all he has to say for Dean and Anna to understand the impossible position he’s in. And that, once again, it all comes down to Dean and the things Cas will sacrifice to keep him safe, and Sam as well.

“You should stay home, and then it won’t be an issue,” Anna says, to his surprise. “I don’t want Sam around people like that either.”

“Thank you,” Dean says, and Cas can’t tell if it’s meat for him or Anna or both. On cue Sam comes thundering down the stairs as only a teenager can, his face hopeful and bright as he reaches the kitchen.

“So, can I…Oh.” Sam can tell from their faces that the answer is no. “Wow. From no parents to three. That’s great.” Castiel ignores the petulance to enjoy the idea that he’s something like a parent to Sam.

“I’m sorry, Sammy, but some of the people at the volunteer place are actually worse than Zachariah,” Dean says.

“But…”

“Sam,” Anna’s voice it stern but warm. “We all discussed it and we just don’t think it’s a good thing.”

Sam frowns but doesn’t argue, while Dean gives Castiel a thoughtful look. “Are you gonna go?”

Castiel’s phone starts buzzing in his pocket before he can consider his answer. He’s perplexed by the caller ID. “It’s Chuck.”

“Well, speak of the devil,” Dean says. “Or…opposite of the devil.”

Cas rolls his eyes and answers. “Hello?”

“Hey, Cas, it’s Chuck.” His voice is even shakier than usual. “I wanted to call you and, uh alert you that the volunteer meeting and community outreach for today is canceled.”

“What? I was just on my way downtow.” Dean and Anna both give him interested looks. “Why is it canceled? Do you not have enough volunteers?”

“There’s been some push back on the recent changes and, well, Zach says he wants to reevaluate the program. Or something. I-I just wanted you to know. I already called Hannah.”

“Thank you. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow,” Castiel says.

“I hope so,” Chuck replies and he doesn’t sound like he’s joking at all.

“Damnit,” Cas says as he ends the call.

Dean looks equally unsettled. “They’re shutting down the sandwich brigade?”

“It would seem so, unfortunately,” Cas says. “I know it was never much but—”

“It was the only meal some folk got that day,” Dean counters. “It matters and getting rid of it sucks.”

Cas stares silently at Dean. He’d never said anything like that before. It’s good to know it helped, even a bit.
“Why can’t we do it ourselves?” They all turn to Sam, whose eyes are wide and hopeful. “We can go to the store, get some sandwich stuff and give them out. We don’t need your church’s permission to help people.”

“No, we don’t,” Cas smiles.

“I can help you too, if you don’t mind,” Anna says. “You can still hand them out on your own.”

Dean gives him a look and a shrug and Cas nods.

It’s not the worst way to spend a morning. After a grocery run, they get an assembly line going and have a box of forty sandwiches ready to go in an hour.

“Can I come now, since the assholes won’t be there?” Sam asks, once everything is packed and Anna has quietly retreated upstairs to paint.

“Sammy, I don’t need you to see that part of my life,” Dean answers, plaintive. “You’re gonna see those people and think that was me and I don’t want to put that on you. Especially since most of the folks downtown had it worse than I did. It ain’t pretty, it ain’t romantic. It’s a rough, sad place shitty place”

“Dean, I’ve seen bad stuff too. Remember, child of the system?” Sam says it so casually and Castiel hates to think of what the two of them have endured, and what they still face in the future. “And I want to help. Because you were down there.”

“Cas, what’d you think?”

Castiel is surprised to be asked. He’s not sure it’s his place to make that decision but, if Dean wants his opinion, he’s honored. “I think it’s good to see the sad parts of the world. It makes the good ones matter more. And if Sam wants to help people, that’s good too.”

“Okay, fine,” Dean huffs. “But we’re not hanging around too much, okay. I’m gonna hand this shit to Rufus and check on Martin and we’re done, alright?”

“Martin is at the VA,” Cas says, to Dean’s obvious surprise. “We got him in last week, finally. I’m sorry I didn’t let you know. I was distracted.”

“That’s awesome.” Castiel smiles at the warmth from Dean, probably for too long because Sam has to clear his throat to remind them it’s time to go.

It’s strange driving downtown with Dean instead of to him. It occurs to him that this is the first time Dean’s been to the neighborhood since the beating and he wonders what it’s like. The last time Dean saw the park it was summer, not that it makes much of a difference in the grey waste of the city. Even so, the leaves are gone and the sky is as bleak as the dirty streets. Castiel watches both Winchester’s faces as they get out of the car and make their way to the park. He does wonder if Sam is seeing Dean’s face on each person huddled in a doorway to hide from the rain or peeking out from tattered tents under the bridge. They give out sandwiches and water to a few panhandlers and campers, and Cas watches Sam’s expression darken with shock when they hand some to a few kids that can’t be much older than him.

“Well, look what the cat dragged in,” Rufus says when they reach the tent camp. He gives Dean a sly smile and shakes his hand but doesn’t rise from behind the desk.
“Hey, Rufus, thought I’d help on the delivery today,” Dean says. “Check to see you were keeping everyone in line.”

“Oh, we’re doing fine,” Rufus says. “Angel face here probably told you Martin got a bed at the VA. And some bleeding hearts fixed everyone up with blankets and a few fresh tarps and tents last week, which was awful nice.” Castiel looks away, humbled and guilty at the same time. It’s never enough.

“That’s good to hear,” Dean says. Sam nudges Dean and his brother rolls his eyes. “Rufus, this is Sam. My brother.”

“You in a good enough place to get him back?” Rufus asks, eyebrow raised, and Dean avoids his eyes.

“Something like that,” Dean says.

Rufus turns his attention to Castiel, his expression dark. “You better not let me see either of these boys on my side of things, you hear, Mr. Novak.”

“I assure you I won’t ever let that happen,” Cas replies.

“Good. Now, hand those over. We’re an embarrassment of riches today with your twitchy friend bringing an entire bakery,” Rufus says.

“Chuck was here?” Cas asks.

“And his friends,” Rufus answers. Castiel wonder who Rufus means, maybe Hannah and…well, he can’t actually think of many others that would help. Strange. It still inspires him that Chuck also kept up the good work oh his own.

“Well, that’s good to hear. We’ll see you.” Cas nods.

“Bye, Rufus, nice to meet you,” Sam adds as they walk away and Dean waves. “That wasn’t so bad.”

“Well, it wasn’t so good either,” Dean mutters. “Let’s get back to the burbs before…fuck.”

Castiel follows Dean’s gaze to where a figure in a large tattered jacket is running towards him. It’s the man that spoke to Castiel about Dean weeks ago – Aaron. He looks especially worse for wear.

“Dean, oh my God, what are you doing down here?” Aaron pants when he reaches them.

“Leaving,” Dean growls, grabbing Sam and striding quickly around Aaron. Cas rushes after him, flanking Dean as Aaron trails behind.

“Wait, I just want to talk!” Aaron calls.

“You nearly got me killed, Aaron, there ain’t nothing to talk about!” Dean calls back. Cas watches Sam’s face shift from worried to furious and grabs his other arms to prevent him from confronting Aaron.

“And I want to make that right, man! I’ve gotta talk to you.”

“We have nothing to say to each other!” Dean growls.

“Dean, what is he—” Sam begins and Dean shushes him.
“If you won’t talk to me talk to Jody! She’ll fill you in! Those bastards are still out there!” Aaron calls, his voice fading as his stops following. Castiel wonders what he means about Detective Mills, but he can’t imagine it’s good. Dean looks furious and spooked at the same time and Castiel is vividly reminded of the last time he met Aaron, when he warned that Dean was in danger from the men that failed to kill him months ago. And now Sam has seen a hint of that danger.

They’re quiet as they climb back in the car, Sam in the back seat staring at his empty hands. “Who was that guy?” Sam finally asks once they’re a few blocks away.

“The guy I was with when I got hurt,” Dean answers tightly.

“I thought you said you were in a car accident.”

Castiel nearly swerves off the road. He had forgotten that Dean lied to Sam about the circumstances that brought him to the hospital. It’s frankly amazing they hadn’t slipped up before.

“That was sorta true,” Dean replies. “The fu--the bad guys did mess up Baby. But it was…it was not good. And I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Dean,” Sam pleads.

“I said no, Sam,” Dean snaps with a finality that makes both Sam and Castiel wince.

Castiel feels like a fool now for bringing Sam along. Dean was right, Sam didn’t need to know about the constant danger Dean was in or bring more attention them when they had been safe. Or learn how Dean survived. He doesn’t think Sam would hate or pity Dean for it, but Cas still fears what he might do with the knowledge, if he might tell the wrong person and ruin everything.

What would that even mean for them? If Anna or Ishim made good on the threat to expose Dean? Would Dean be left on his own without Sam? Would Sam be sent somewhere else to add some other horror story from the system to his memories? Castiel has no idea and doesn’t know who to ask. The idea stays with him all the way home, where Anna is waiting in the kitchen, washing green and blue paint from her hands.

“Hey, guys. That was fast. How was—” Sam goes straight to the stairs and Dean disappears into his room with twin door slams before Anna can even finish her greeting. She turns to Cas and sighs.

“Are you going to run away from me too?”

“I was considering it.” Anna closes her eyes and Castiel instantly regrets the callousness of the words. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“No, I deserve it,” Anna says. “I’m taking my punishment. I just want to know how long I’m going to have to wait.”

“I was considering it.” Anna closes her eyes and Castiel instantly regrets the callousness of the words. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“No, I deserve it,” Anna says. “I’m taking my punishment. I just want to know how long I’m going to have to wait.”

“I don’t know, A.,” Cas replies, resolve finally crumbling. “I don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow or when Dean and Sam are gone or a month from now. I don’t know what to do. I’ve been given no choice in anything. And at the same time, every choice I make just hurts people more.”

“It doesn’t have to be that way, babe, I swear. It doesn’t have to hurt. I’m serious about working with you to fix this.” Anna looks like she’s about to cry. She reaches a tentative hand to Castiel and he doesn’t flinch when she touches his arm. If he’s trapped here, is it wrong to take comfort? “We can get better and forgive and more forward. Together.”

“You really think that’s possible?” Cas asks. He had her faith once, maybe he still does, that a
merciful God could save him, change him, heal him. The idea she still has the same faith is so tempting.

“I do. Do you?”

He doesn’t know anymore. He hasn’t known where his faith lies for a very long time. What God does he even believe in now? The one he prayed to when Dean was in the hospital or the one that he knows would condemn him for that love? Anna’s and his mother’s God that can change him and wants nothing more than for him to build a family of his own, or Dean’s God among the trees and stars. He doesn’t know and he can’t ask the answer. It would be so much easier just to let someone else decide.

“I…”

Dean’s door opens and Cas pulls his hand back like he was burned.

“Hey,” Dean says, looking between the two of them. “I was gonna ask if you wanted some lunch.”

“No, thank you, I already ate,” Anna says stiffly, leaving the kitchen with a frown.

“You hungry, Cas?” Dean asks, watching Anna go. “I figure Sam is. No better way to apologize to a teen than with food.”

Castiel feels like his stomach is about to eat itself and explode in a ball of fire, but it’s so normal nowadays that he doesn’t even care. If Dean wants to eat, he’ll eat.

“Yes, please. What are you in the mood for?”

Dean is gonna feel twitchy within two blocks of a courthouse his whole life, he thinks. The public defender’s office is right next to the Douglas county circuit court and the police station, so Dean feel extra jumpy. It's also a few blocks away from the child services building where Sam is meeting with Zeke and his lawyer. Or at least Dean thinks so. Anna was the one that got to pick Sam up from school and bring him over because apparently that’s something a foster parent had to do. Dean’s meeting them there after his own meeting, which he’s super excited for. He hates lawyers.

He can’t even remember the names of the lawyers he went through as a kid. They’re just a bunch of bored faces in ill-fitting suits that didn’t care at all about a punk kid getting busted for shoplifting or getting moved to another group home or stint in detention. He had been damn lucky to avoid talking with any more lawyers since he aged out of the system, even Sam’s lazy washout in Ohio hadn’t ever bothered to call Dean. But now he has to talk to his own under-paid Atticus Finch and be told exactly how he’s going to fuck this all up.

The office is rundown, not fancy and the elevator, which takes a full minute to climb two floors, smells like pee. The magazines in the waiting room full of furniture straight out of a garage sale in 1995 are withered and old and Dean has to ask for a second pen to fill out the paperwork after the first dies. The receptionist, a stout woman with short cropped blonde hair, barely looks at him. Fifteen minutes after the scheduled time a man with short brown hair and five o’clock shadow steps into the waiting room. He looks sort of like Cas, and his suit is cheap and rumpled and his shoes are scuffed, just like Dean expected. The one thing he doesn’t expect is an English accent (cockney,
Dean thinks) when he speaks.

“Dean Winchester? Mick Davies, nice to meet you, come on back. Sorry about the mess.”

There are boxes overflowing with manila folders and papers piled three high in the halls between dented file cabinets and a giant printer wheezing away like it’s about to explode. “You guys moving?” Dean asks.

“No,” Mick replies without any further elaboration. He walks through a barren kitchen that smells like stale tuna and opens the door to a cramped office, also stuffed with boxes and shelves of files. They sit and Mick flips open a thin file. “Alright, Dean. Let’s get the rules out of the way. Everything you say to me is privileged and confidential, so you don’t have to worry about lying or anything. I’ve got twenty other juvenile clients and a criminal load too, so I probably won’t even remember.”

“That’s encouraging.”

“Just honest. But I am here to help you get your son back,” Mick replies, trying for sincere.

“Sam is my brother.”

“Oh. Right. Sorry.” Mick leafs through the file, brows knit. “There’s not a lot about you in here. Says you were homeless until recently?”

“Yeah, but I have a job now and—”

“You’re living with the foster family, that’s, well, different.”

“It’s complicated.”

“You need to move out to a place just for you and Sam, you know that, right?”

Dean sighs. “Yes. I found a place. It’s the top floor of my boss’s house, actually. But it would be legit and it’s not too far form Sam’s school and I can drive him and—”

“Good. You need to move now. Your hearing is in a week.” Mick sounds more bored than concerned. “And Mr. Gardner will likely administer a surprise drug test today when you meet with him.”

“That’s fine. I’m clean.”

Mick looks slightly interested in that. “Was there a time when you weren’t? Says here your dad overdosed.”

“I was never an addict,” Dean replies, tense.

Mick shrugs and looks back at the file. “So. Were you a dealer?”

Dean blinks. “What?”

“Police report on your assault, says the Hell Hounds were suspected. If you’re on their bad side, that’ll raise some red flags.”

“They your clients?”

“A few of them. Cops can’t crack the organization. But, my question was: did you work for them?”
Dean stares Mick down, wondering if he’s good or bad at his job to have Dean pegged so right and wrong. “Not as a dealer,” Dean says slowly. “But once in a while I’d suck their dicks for money.”

“Ah, hooker. That makes sense, face like yours,” Mick says, as of Dean just admitted he sold used cars.

Dean rolls his eyes. “Zeke doesn’t know about that and neither does Sam.”

“Good, if that came out getting custody would be nearly impossible,” Mick replies, confirming everything Dean knew. At least Mick doesn’t seem shocked or judgmental. “You out of the business now?”

“Yeah, now I just fix cars.”

“Very good. Stay with that and stay quiet and hopefully judge Henrickson will see a fine upstanding young man on the mend and hand Sam over.” Mick closes the file and smiles.

“Is that it?”

“Is there anything else I need to know?”

Dean chews his lip. He has to ask, find out if there's even the most remote possibility that he and Cas could have anything in the future, even it's over now, there's got to be some hope if Cas ever got out. And what about if they found out what they'd already done. Fuck it. It’s all confidential. “How’d the court feel if I had a thing with Sam’s foster parent?”

“You and Mrs. Novak?” Mick asks, chuckling.

“It’s Doctor. But no. Her husband.”

Mick whistles as he shakes his head. “Nah, mate, you don’t want anyone knowing that. They’d have Sam out of there and away from you so fast it’d make your head spin.”

“Great. Good to know.” Dean doesn’t really feel like that final nail in the coffin makes much of a difference. The hope had been dead for a while.

“Any other questions?” Mick asks.

“Yeah, how did you end up on this side of the pond, Eliza Doolittle?” Mick smiles ruefully. “Let me guess: it’s complicated.”

“Nah. It was a girl. Oldest story in the book.” Mick stands up and stows Dean’s file on the shelf. “The things we do for love, eh?”

“Yeah,” Dean breathes. Or don’t do.

“Now, you’ve got my number. Call me if you have any questions.”

“Sure.”

Mick shakes Dean’s hand but doesn’t move to show him out. Dean walks back through the kitchen, past the files and into the waiting room where the clock tells him he still has half an hour before meeting up with Sam down the street. Dean finds himself walking the block, lost in thought until he’s standing in front of the gray cement walls of the Douglas county police. He turns abruptly after reading the sign. This is the last place he needs to be.
“Dean?”

Fuck. Of course Detective Mills is here now. He can almost hear God laughing.

“Hi. Jody. I mean Detective Mills,” Dean says, turning fully to Jody. There’s a second cop beside her in a blue uniform holding two paper coffee cups. She’s blonde with a bright smile.

“Just don’t call her Jodio, she hates that,” the second officer say sunnily.

“What are you doing here, Dean? You got something you want to talk about?” Jody asks, serious but kind. Dean wants to turn and run.

“I…uh…” Fuck. He feels trapped, and the second cop is doing nothing for his comfort.

“Donna, hon, can you meet me inside?” Jody says, reading Dean’s mind and turning to the officer beside her.

“Sure thing, Jodes,” Donna says and leaves with another smile and a wave.

“I figure you don’t want an audience. Heard Aaron saw you.”

“Huh?”

“He and I are…friends, let’s say,” Jody says with a sly smile.

“He’s a snitch, you mean.” Damn, that makes sense though: Aaron getting out of jail so fast after that probation violation, and staying in the game. He’s their inside man.

“He’s doing what he can. He's turned because he felt bad about what happened to you,” Jody says as if that's supposed to make up for things. “And if you decide to help us bring charges, it could be the key to getting the big bads in jail long enough to make a real dent in their organization.”

“Are you serious?” Dean balks. No fucking pressure.

“We really need your help here, Dean. And I swear we could keep you safe and the stuff about your line of work won’t keep us from putting them away.”

Dean winces at the guy punch of guilt. “I…I can’t, Jody. I have other people that need me to keep quiet.”

“Would it change your mind if you knew I was looking to talk to you about two more assaults we’ve had lately?”

Dean squints at Jody, his skin crawling. “What?”

“Two more young men - working boys if you know what I mean – were seriously assaulted in the last month. One was with a customer, but no one knew the assailant or can help us make an ID.”

“And you think it was the Hell Hounds?” A cold sweat breaks on Dean’s skin and his nerves vibrate beneath it.

“It’s the best lead I have, given what happened to you.”

“These guys were queer or looked it? Did they say it was a middle-aged guy? Goatee?” Maybe it's not him...
“Yeah. Grayish hair. Medium build.”

“Fuck.”

“So it was one of the same guys.”

“No. It wasn’t a Hell Hound…It…Fuck…” Maybe he could save everyone time and spill this to Cas. Let him fucking murder Ishim and save everyone some trouble.

“Dean, if you have information—”

“I have my word against his, and I still can’t talk Jody. I’d lose people.”

“Cas Novak?” Jody asks, pity in her voice. Of course she knows too. It's apparently visible form space that he and Cas have a thing and he's lucky Zeke hasn't caught on. “He’s married, Dean.”

“No. Well, yes, but…My brother. I could get custody if I play things straight and I can’t fuck his life up again. I can’t let him down.”

Jody sighs and shakes her head. “You’re a good man, Dean, you know that?”

“Not really.”

“Good people have to make tough calls. And I understand whatever you chose to do. Just…think about calling me.”

“I’ll think about it,” Dean lies. He’s not going to call or nut up or do anything to jeopardize Sam and that makes him want to punch the world in the face. How does doing the right thing by the people he loves fuck over everyone, including half the people he’s trying to protect? And fuck what he wants…not that he even knows what that is.

He stews in the waiting room of the child protective services building for twenty minutes until Zeke emerges and leads him to a small, windowless conference room where Anna is waiting. With Cas beside her.

“Hey,” Dean says, blinking in case this is a dream. “Didn’t know you’d be here.”

“I called him in,” Zeke says. “I wanted to speak to both Castiel and Anna about Sam, as well as how you’re doing and their plans and availability if Sam can’t transition to your custody after the next hearing.”

“Oh. Great,” Dean says as he sinks into chair. Cas looks absolutely defeated as Anna takes his hand.

“Cas and I had nothing but good things to say, Dean,” Anna says. Dean wonders if he’s imagining the threat in her voice.

“Thanks that’s…great.”

“But Ezekiel has been very clear about his concerns,” Cas adds and Dean’s stomach falls even farther.

“We still need to know what your plans are,” Zeke goes on. “Before Sam finishes his meeting with Miss Bradbury I wanted to know if you’ve secured a residence of your own.”

Dean stares down at the chipped gray surface of the conference table. What is it? Linoleum? Plastic? Who knows. It doesn’t matter. He tears his eyes away and up to meet Cas’s. He should enjoy those
eyes while he still can, even when they’re so fucking sad, before it all fades to nothing.

“I have actually. If I need to, I can be out tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-Mild use of alcohol as a coping mechanism
-mention of anti-gay violence

So, I don't know if this is of interest to anyone, but in Juvenile court proceedings, parents and kids get attorneys, and in this case Dean gets one because he has a legal claim to custody of Sam as his only living next of kin. I'm fudging some stuff just a bit, but I'm trying, as usual to be as accurate as possible with the law. I worked in a child welfare court so...I know my shit.

I'm a big fat liar/indecisive, but I still THINK the final chapter count is going to be 31...We're getting close guys. Shit is about to hit the fan.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Hello! yes, a very early update, but this chapter is comparatively short. Don’t worry, the next three are going to be QUITE long.
Warnings in the end notes like whoa.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Castiel has been at work for thirty minutes and he hasn’t opened a single document. He sent one email. He hasn’t touched his coffee. He hasn’t looked up from the files sitting on his desk, hard copies of what he’s sent to Josie Sands. He just ended Alfie’s career and all that remains is to explain who was behind it. He just has to say Uriel’s name and he doesn’t know if he can even speak. Or if he should. Or if it matters.

Dean is leaving tonight.

Sam was sad when they told him, but they assured him that the separation was temporary and for the best. They lied like adults are supposed to and said it would all be alright. They’re going to have a goodbye dinner and then Dean is leaving. They’ll see him for Thanksgiving, when they bring Sam to Bobby Singer’s house, since Castiel’s mother has made it very clear no Winchesters are welcome at the Novak family holiday. Then Ezekiel will inspect the residence on Friday. If it’s up to the right standards, Sam will go home with Dean after the hearing first thing on Monday.

Then Castiel will be left alone.

Sam won’t ever come back, even if something goes wrong with Dean. He’d be placed in stranger foster care and everything they’ve done would be for nothing. Dean would hate him.

He opens up the voicemail on his phone. Uriel called him after hours last night. Twice. He plays the single message that was left and closes his eyes.

“Castiel, I’m very disappointed in you for not speaking up about Mr. Shurley, but that issue has been resolved. Unfortunately, it has come to my attention that other problems have arisen and that Josie Sands has taken an interest in the irregularities in your department. I would be extremely unhappy to find out that you had taken certain actions and how they may affect your friend Dean.”

And there it is, as clear as can be. If he speaks up, Uriel will destroy Dean, just as mercilessly as he did Chuck.

He stares at his phone, numb, and scrolls down the voicemail menu to deleted messages. There’s one from 3:42 AM on August 24th. He presses play. Anna’s voice is thick with tears when he listens.

“Cas? Shit. I…I know. I want you to know that I know and I’m begging you: please don’t leave. Even if you love…No. You can’t. Please, think about us and all we have and you soul, please. I’m so sorry I haven’t been good enough but I’ll try harder. Baby, I love you so much and I’m so sorry, just please don’t do this. I’ll do anything. Just…please don’t ruin our lives for this stranger.”

He wonders what would have happened if she hadn’t deleted that message. Would he have
confessed? Let Dean go? Left with him? He doesn’t think he could ever be that brave. He’s spent his whole life a coward, afraid of his family and hell and hurting others. And he’s managed to damn himself and hurt everyone even so.

Maybe there’s no point in being afraid.

His door bursts open, jolting him from his thoughts. Meg is there with Hannah behind her.

“Alright, what is going on? We waited long enough,” Meg demands. “Cas, you look like you’re dying.”

“It’s personal,” Cas says weakly.

“Are you and Anna finally splitting the hell up?” Meg asks and Hannah smacks her on the arm.

“Margaret, that is not appropriate,” Hannah says and Cas honestly feels like he’s going to be ill.

“No. Screw appropriate. He’s been doing shitty for months!” Meg snaps back.

“It not anyone’s business. If Castiel wants to share anything, it’s up to him when and how.”

“If he doesn’t talk he’s going to keel over and die of an ulcer!” Meg’s eyes are sharp and dark, and Hannah glares back at her. Castiel sits awestruck, staring at them. It’s surreal to see two people arguing what’s best for you right in front of you as if you’re not there. Then again, he should be used to other people deciding what’s best for him by now. And he’s sick of it.

“I’m gay.”

He lets out a shaky breath in the silence that meets him, unable to meet anyone’s eyes. He said it. He said it aloud to two people and the world is still spinning. And the vice around his heart feels just slightly loser.

“Well, duh,” Meg says and Cas and Hannah give her twin shocked looks. “Oh, come on. I’ve worn shirts so slutty that Alfie nearly had a stroke and you never even noticed.”

Castiel rolls his eyes, and looks to Hannah. She’s as implacable as usual, but curious. “Are you going to tell me you’re worried for me? Or my soul?”

“No, Castiel. I’ve seen you struggling too.” Hannah says softly. “I’m very glad you finally said something.”

“Did anyone not suspect?” Castiel sighs. Coming out isn’t quite as liberating when it turns out everyone knew.

“Most people don’t. Especially considering your marriage. I just…have a similar perspective,” Hannah replies. “I’ve been wanting to tell you that I’m here to talk about…coming to terms with those issues if you want to. It’s actually good that you bring this up now, since I’ve been considering having a similar discussion. But I know it’s selfish to speak about myself right now.”

“What? You’re gay too?” Meg asks, chuckling.

“No. I’m a man.” For once, Meg doesn’t have anything to say. Hannah looks down, cheeks slightly flushed. “Or at least, I know I am not a woman. I’ve been talking with Chuck about this, trying to reconcile my feelings with God and he’s been very supportive.”

Chuck. Cas winces at the reminder. “Do you know that he—”
“That my horrible cousin got him fired? Yes,” Hannah spits. “I was planning on leaving the church anyway. This was just another reason.”

“Should we call you something else?” Cas asks carefully and Hannah’s shoulders untense.

“No. Not yet. I don’t know if I’ll be changing my name, but I am considering changing my apparel and hair as a start.”

“And pronouns?” Meg asks and Hannah turns to her in surprise. “What? I’m not an asshole.”

“Yes. I would…I would like that,” Hannah smiles. “Castiel, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to highjack this. Seeing you finally talk about this made me feel brave. And I wanted to return the favor.”

“Yeah, way to steal his coming out and getting divorced thunder,” Meg says.

“I’m not getting divorced,” Castiel corrects. The shock he was waiting for finally flashes onto Meg and Hannah’s faces.

“Clarence, I know this is like, a process, but if you’re gay that makes being married to a chick kinda wrong,” Meg says.

“I am well aware of the difficulties of my situation, thank you, Meg.” Castiel sighs, fighting the urge to beat his head on the desk. “There are other factors at work beyond what I want.”

“What the hell? How is this fair to Anna? Or you?” Meg demands.

“Or Dean,” Hannah adds quietly. Wonderful, something else that he thought was secret that was evident to anyone willing to look.

“Dean?” Meg Echoes, brows knit. “What does he have to – oh shit.”

“This is not what I wanted to talk about.” Castiel doesn’t want more of a conversation that will just highlight what a damned fool he is.

“Then why did you tell us?” Meg asks. Her concern is uncharacteristic and therefore even more touching.

“Because I needed to tell someone, for once, and not be judged or destroyed.” It feels affirming somehow, that someone will at least know when this is all said and done.

“Cas, if you think I’m going to see you every day and watch you trap yourself in a sham marriage because you’re afraid what mommy the church lady is going to say, you have another thing coming,” Meg says.

“Well you might not have to see me, depending on how the rest of the day goes,” Castiel says. The files sit on his desk like a bomb waiting to explode.

“What are you talking about? Does this have anything to do with why Josie wants to meet with all of us this morning?” Meg demands.

“What?” Cas asks.

“She just emailed everyone that she’s coming down,” Hannah says then glares at Meg. “That’s what we initially wanted to talk to you about.”

Cas stands, bracing himself. “Please call Alfie in.”
Before anyone can move Alfie peeks in the door. “I’m sorry. I tried not to listen and I…Castiel, I’m so sorry for your struggles.”

“You should have let us know you could hear,” Hannah says, his eyes hard and defensive. “This was very personal. For Castiel and me.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” Alfie looks down, shaking his head. “I was shocked. And I don’t understand. Castiel is married and you’re…”

“It is not my job to explain these things to you, Alfie, you have the internet,” Hannah says and Alfie swallows hard.

“God hasn’t abandoned either of you,” Alfie mutters.

Meg rolls her eyes. “Not the point, nugget.”

“I didn’t call you in for a sermon, Alfie. This is more serious.” Castiel says. “Josie has discovered fraud and irregularities in our department.”

“Oh,” Alfie says as Meg and Hannah turn to him in shock. “You noticed that.”

“Allie, why would you do this?” Castiel asks, a different kind of heaviness settling in his chest.

“It was only a few people. They were wicked, the ones God had marked for punishment already. And Uriel said we were doing God’s work and that the money would go to that too,” Alfie protests and Castiel shakes his head. He hadn’t been able to track the funds once they were in the hospital coffers, that would take more work and access he doesn’t have.

“Allie, this is not right,” Hannah says. “That’s not your judgment to make.”

“Fuck judgement. It’s misconduct and it’s also illegal and—” Meg’s mouth snaps closed at the sound of the outer door. The group files out of Castiel’s office to find Josie Sands waiting, arms crossed in her immaculate black suit and not a single red hair out of place. “Hey, Jos, how are you?”

“Underpaid,” Josie says, eyes scanning the group and settling on Alfie. “And annoyed that you people and your ridiculous crusades have put this hospital at risk.”

“Miss Sands, I can explain,” Alfie starts, his voice shaking. The door opens again behind Josie.

“Not right now, Mr. Pike,” Uriel’s deep voice is even more self-satisfied and dangerous than usual as he enters behind Josie, a dark smile on his lips.

“What the hell? Are you pinning this all on Alfie?” Meg demands. “You piece of shit. Jos, you’ve got to know he’s the one behind this. Alfie just—”

“Meg. I’m aware of the allegations against Dr. Wisdom,” Josie snarls and Castiel feels a glimmer of hope. “We are going to launch a full investigation of everyone’s conduct, but for now, Mr. Pike is suspended without pay,” Josie says. Alfie looks to the ground in shame and Castiel winces in sympathy. “The same goes for Mr. Novak.”

“What?” Meg and Hannah both exclaim. Castiel himself can only stare, his panic rising as Uriel smirks.

“Miss Sands, I thought my report to you made clear—” Cas starts.

“That at the urging of Dr. Wisdom you committed malfeasance and failed to notice on-going fraud in
“your own department,” Josie says.

“I’m trying to make up for that,” Castiel counters.

“You’re suspended, Castiel,” Uriel says and Castiel’s rage finally breaks.

“And what about you? This started with you, Uriel,” Castiel declares.

“Mr. Novak, Uriel has a different story,” Josie says, raising a placating hand.

“Which I’m sure he plans to have me verify because he thinks he can blackmail me with the threatening the welfare of innocent people!” Castiel growls. Josie looks interested but Uriel just smiles.

“I have no idea what you’re implying, Castiel, and I would advise you to think before making any allegations,” Uriel purrs and Josie rolls her eyes.

“Both of you, stow it. Uriel, you’re suspended as well, with no access to the hospital records,” Josie sighs.

“Excuse me?” Uriel says and Castiel takes his turn to sneer.

“I want everyone to go home and calm down,” Josie says, stepping between Castiel and Uriel. “I will schedule interviews with all of you after the holiday.”

Perfect, he can lose his job and the Winchesters in the same week. He looks to Hannah and Meg, both wearing different dumbstruck expressions. “You two can manage things while I’m…well, you can manage everything.”

“We’ll have it all waiting for when you come back,” Meg says, brave and firm.

“And call me if you need to talk,” Hannah adds, his face kind and sympathetic.

“Come on, Alfie,” Castiel says, taking the younger man by to walk out past Josie and Uriel’s glares. They stay silent all the way to the elevator to the garage. The wait is interminable and Castiel considers just taking the stairs until Alfie sniffles. Castiel turns to him to see tears in his eyes as the elevator arrives.

“I thought I was doing a good thing,” Alfie says as they step in and the door slides closed. “I…”

“I’m not interested in your excuses, Alfie,” Castiel replies. “I know you thought you were doing good. We all do when we make mistakes.”

“But Uriel assured me he wasn’t lining his pockets, it was going to the church to help them do God’s work.” Alfie goes pale as the words leave his mouth. He knows he’s said too much.

“The church?” Castiel echoes. Suddenly, Uriel’s distaste for Chuck makes more sense. He wouldn’t want someone with morals snooping in the finances if the church was benefitting from his schemes.

The elevator pings and the door opens to the cold, damp employee parking lot. They walk slowly down the row of cars, and Castiel wonder for the first time if he’ll ever come back.

“Are you going to be honest with Josie when she interviews you?” Castiel asks, trying to imagine the story Uriel will ask them to weave. “Or will you blame me as well?”

“Castiel…”
“Uriel will implicate me, if not blame me entirely for his actions, I’m sure of it,” Castiel states. “If you do the same, I understand.”

“Castiel, you may be a sinner, but I would never do that.”

Castiel doesn’t bother hiding his contempt. “This has nothing to do with my sexuality.” From between the rows of cars, a low laugh echoes and Castiel spins to see Uriel emerge. “Are you a cartoon villain? What are you doing here?”

“Going to my car, Castiel, just like you,” Uriel smiles. He presses the key fob in his hand and a shiny black Lexus beeps and unlocks next to him. “But I couldn’t help but hear. You are right, the blame for this will be laid at your feet. You’d be wise not to contest that.”

“And be prosecuted for your crimes?” Castiel snarls back. He can imagine Uriel sending him to jail for this, but not Alfie.

“Of course not, the police won’t be involved, Miss Sands has assured me,” Uriel replies. “Someone will need to be disciplined, and Alfie, I’m afraid that will be you, but you’ll sign a nondisclosure upon your termination and I’ll make sure you find a good position somewhere. In fact, I know Castiel’s brother is looking for someone.” Castiel doesn’t want to know which brother.

“And me?” Castiel asks.

“You’ll be let go as well, quietly. Not officially for this, but we can’t have you around endangering things.” Uriel smiles. “If it makes you feel better, you were bound for the axe anyway. No matter your usefulness, we can’t have your kind working in a hospital.”

“My kind?” Castiel braces his shoulders, his whole body vibrating in offence.

“It’s unclean,” Uriel replies. “Just like we couldn’t have a sodomite like Chuck Shurley in a church.”

“Chuck isn’t—”

“Did you not know? Huh. I thought you two were such friends, but maybe there is hope for you.”

“I – I don’t think we should discuss this anymore,” Alfie stammers.

“Of course not,” Uriel says, still calm and smiling. “We all value discretion.”

“Uriel. May I say, in light of all of this,” Castiel begins, fists tight and jaw tense. “Go fuck yourself.”

Both Uriel and Alfie recoil in shock, looking at Castiel as if he just punched them both, which he wishes he had the bravery to really do.

He gets into the car and slams the door, gripping the wheel tight in unfocused anger, and peels out of the lots, not looking back.

It takes him half the ride home before the angers morphs into a numb sort of terror and disgust that Uriel will most certainly get away with all of this. Maybe Uriel is blessed. Maybe he is righteous and God has given him protection over Castiel as punishment for his sins. Even now when he should be fuming at the loss of his livelihood, what scares him more is the threat to Dean. All of this on top of Dean leaving today and he’s ready to break entirely.

He finds himself at red light, staring past it to the slate sky. “Why?” he asks, as usual, not hoping for or expecting an answer from on high. “Is this all you want from me? To suffer?”
The light turns green.

The anger stays with him until he turns down his street and sees a black car blocking the driveway. Dean shouldn’t be home yet.

Castiel parks crooked in the street and walks inside through the open garage door. The duffle bag he loaned Dean last night is full as set next to the door inside, but Dean isn’t on the ground floor. Castiel’s heart starts racing as he climbs the stairs. Every door is closed except the one to the master bedroom and sure enough, Dean is standing inside, holding a paper bag in his hands as he stares at the bed.

“What are you doing up here?”

Dean’s eyes snap to Cas, wide and guilty. “I was returning the stuff I had that was yours.”

“Oh.” Dean sets the bag on the bed. Inside Cas can make out some sweats, shampoo bottles and books. “I thought it was clear you could keep those.”

“It wasn’t,” Dean replies, face unreadable. “What the hell are you doing home?”

“Are you leaving? Were you going to leave without saying goodbye?” Cas asks back, his mind filling with the thought of coming home to find every trace of Dean gone without warning. He’s sure that would have broken him entirely.

“No. Fuck no. Bobby said I was a useless sad sack today so he sent me home. I was getting this done so I’d have more time with you and Sam, you moron. What are you doing home?”

“You were upset at work?” Cas asks, stepping too close into Dean’s space, close enough to make out the details of his freckles and the way his eyes aren’t as bright green in his light. He smells like rain and sweat mixed with the soap from his morning shower.

“Yeah, I was upset, I’m fucked up about leaving,” Dean snarls. “But—”

“You are?” Cas squints.

“Of course! Why would you –”

“It’s hard sometimes, with you. You don’t always show people what you’re really feeling.” Dean looks so offended it’s almost comical. Cas doesn’t laugh, it wouldn’t be polite. He touches Dean’s face instead, a gentle graze of his fingertips along his cheekbones. The first time he spoke to Dean, when he found him outside that strip club, he hadn’t been sure he was real. Even now, he’s like a dream that Cas knows he has to wake from soon.

“What the fuck is going on with you, Cas? Why are you here?”

“I’m suspended pending an investigation.” There it is, the anger that flares like a distant siren, echoing the horror in Dean’s face and taking Cas back to his cold, hopeless reality. “But I’ll be fired soon.”

“You what?”

“Uriel and Alfie are suspended as well.” His voice sounds distant, even to him, like he’s talking about someone else’s life. “I’m going to be fired no matter what, and I’ll be blamed. Uriel threatened me, again, with exposing you.”
“Cas, what the fuck? I don’t want you going to fucking jail because of me!” Dean is furious. It’s anger bright as the sun and Castiel feels like his own rage is a dim fire in comparison. He’s beautiful and he’s about to leave Cas in the dark.

“I don’t have any other choice, Dean,” he says slowly. “I won’t go to jail. Uriel assured me it wouldn’t come to that. Of course, then I did tell him to fuck himself.”

“Good, so you can stand up for yourself. Nice to know it’s actually possible.”

Cas kisses Dean instead of hitting him. He kisses Dean because he’s angry, because he’s hurt and desperate and Dean is leaving and he’s angry too. He doesn’t push Cas back, instead he reacts like a reflex, hands twining into Cas’s hair and tugging hard. They kiss and it’s two pieces fitting together perfectly, their bodies pressed close. Cas didn’t realize how cold he was until now, pressed against Dean’s heat, arms wrapped around him, grabbing fistfuls of his shirt. It’s been three weeks since they last kissed and it feels like coming home.

“Cas, what are you –” Dean pants as Cas mouths at his jaw and neck.

“I’ll stop if you want.”

“Don’t you fucking dare.”

Dean knows exactly what Cas does: they’re alone for the first time in weeks and this might be the last time they have a chance at this. It doesn’t matter that it’s over and everything is falling apart, they have this. They have each other and Cas can take one more stab at defiance before everything is gone. Cas moans against Dean’s lips and starts tearing at his shirts.

“You want to…here?” Dean asks, pulling back in shock.

“Is that a problem? Nothing good has ever happened in this bed and I would like to take my one chance to change that.”

“Cas this is—” Dean cuts himself off, kissing Cas again rough and seeking. This is a bad idea on every level but for the first time in weeks Cas feels something other than hopeless or trapped or damned and he refuses to let that go. His hands slide down Dean’s back to his ass and then between them to where Dean is already hardening in his jeans. Dean gasps as Cas gropes him through the fabric. “Fuck, never mind.”

Dean yanks off Castiel’s coat and jacket then practically rips off his shirt, sending a button flying. They separate far enough to fumble with belts, first Dean’s then Cas’s. Somewhere in between Dean’s shirts come off and then they tumble to the bed, chest to chest and skin to skin. The bag Dean was holding crunches underneath them and a shampoo bottle stabs Cas in the hip as they move up the mattress in a tangled mess. They struggle out of pants and shoes and then grind together, cocks not quite lined up right but it doesn’t matter. It feels better than anything, just touching Dean, holding him close and tasting his breath. Dean parts from Cas to push the debris away, his mouth kiss-swollen and slick and his eyes heavy. He’s beautiful, so beautiful and Cas is going to lose him. In a second Dean is back, smiling down at Cas from above with a small bottle in his hands. Lube.

“You were returning that too?” Cas asks. He can’t decide if he should laugh or cry.

“It was your birthday present,” Dean replies, as if that makes it better. “Works out though, huh.”

“Fuck me.”

Dean blinks, his breath slowing as if he’s trying to translate what Cas just said. Strange, since Castiel
thought it was quite clear. “You want me to—”

“Fuck me. I want to feel you in me before you’re gone.”

Dean’s mouth hangs slack, and not for the first time Cas wishes he could read his thoughts. “Okay,” Dean breathes, then nods. “Fuck. Okay.”

“Will you…”

“Yeah.” Dean’s voice is small and timid, but he kisses Cas with a desperate urgency that’s a complete contrast. Cas wraps his legs around him, savoring each burst of friction as they move together until Dean sinks down between Cas’s thighs. Dean kisses at Cas’s hips and nuzzles his stomach. Cas sighs in contentment when Dean’s lips encircle his cock, his tongue hot and velvet smooth as it laps at the tip. His mouth is hot and skilled, but his hands shake as they trail down Cas’s length and behind his balls.

Cas breathes deep as Dean stills and his hands disappear. He listens to the snap of a lid, moves readily when Dean nudges his legs further apart, and gasps at the first cold press of Dean’s finger at his hole. Dean continues his mouths attention on Cas’s cock as he circles the furled muscle. It’s different than the other times he’s done this, more focused and intense, but the moment Dean slides inside, just up to the knuckle, Cas keens.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you,” Dean whispers against Cas’s thigh. “It’s okay.”

Cas closes his eyes and lets Dean in. It’s not relaxation, not really. It’s more like floating, letting go of everything and trusting the water to keep you up. Dean licks and sucks at his cock, keeping him hard as he pumps his finger into Cas. When he adds the second he finds Cas’s prostate and Cas moans, arching off the bed into the pleasure. “Dean, there,”

“I got that.” There’s laughter in Dean’s voice, warm and perfect and Cas loves it. He loves this man more with each frantic beat of his heart. Dean adds a third finger with ease, wringing more sighs and moans from Cas. He’s on the edge of coming just like this when Dean pulls off his cock and kisses up his body, fingers spreading Cas wide and ready. “You good?”

“Yes, I’m…please…Dean…” Cas pants. Then he’s empty. He opens his eyes to watch Dean slick his cock then lean close above him and lay a gentle kiss on Cas’s cheek.

“Tell me if I hurt you.”

Cas isn’t sure what that means. Sometimes just looking at Dean hurts, but it hurts in that terrible, beautiful way that reminds him he’s alive, that proves he can still hurt at all. His life before Dean was gray, and with him he can see every color, even the ones that reveal horrors. Dean kisses him, careful and adoring as he pushes into Cas. His cock is impossibly hot and stretches him more than he thinks he can bear but it’s glorious and searing and he’s so full. He’s so full and he loves Dean so much he might explode and it does hurt and it’s perfect.

He stares up into Dean’s eyes and it’s bright and beautiful. This is what he wants, what he was created to adore and love and he doesn’t care that it’s a sin. It’s his. It’s theirs.

Dean is still, eyes locked with Cas’s, asking for permission. Cas nods and, slowly, Dean begins to move. It’s so different, from this side of things. He feels possessed, needed, taken. And ecstatic. He wants to close his eyes, let himself be taken away by the pleasure, but he can’t look away from Dean. He wants to remember everything about this moment: the way Dean breathes, the way his broad shoulders flex and how the flush on his skin makes his freckles disappear. He wants to
remember the last time as clearly as the first.

“You feel like heaven.” He said it then, in that dingy, dark motel room. He says it now in the dim light of day in his own marriage bed. He means it. If this is as close as he gets, perhaps he can be content.

“Cas, I…” Dean bites his lips and clamps his eyes shut. He thrusts fasts, hitting Cas’s prostate on every other stroke and driving him mad. “Fuck I’m…”

“Come in me, Dean, please.”

“I…” Dean shifts and fists Cas’s cock, matching the rhythm of his hips and Cas moans, the crescendo rising in him without warning then climaxing. He comes with a gasp, waves of pleasure pulsing through him just as Dean kisses him. Dean’s hips stutter and Cas feels the warm pulse of him coming inside him and sighs.

They collapse onto the mattress, sweaty and filthy and sated. The glow of it holds Cas for a few beautiful seconds before he remember that this was the last time. Dean is still there, for now, leaning over Cas and touching his cheeks. He wonders how he sweated enough that they’re so wet.

“You’re not allowed to fucking cry, okay. This is already shitty enough.”

Oh.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

“I’m sorry too,” Dean says softly.

“There’s nothing to apologize for.”

“I fucked up your entire life. Your job and your family and now I’m bailing and…I’m sorry.” Cas hates the pain in Dean’s voice. He hates that he can feel guilt radiating off of him like heat.

“My life was fucked up before you, Dean. I wouldn’t take back a single moment with you because you have always made it better.”

Dean’s eyes glisten as he looks at Cas, but not tears fall. “Same.”

It feels like a terrible rehearsal for the good bye they’ll need to say soon and Cas can’t bear it. “What if we just go.”

Dean blinks at him. "What?"

“We get in your car and get Sam and drive until an ocean stops up and start fresh.” It's a beautiful idea, the three of them finally free on the open road, leaving everything behind.

“You’re serious.”

“Yes. Why not?”

Dean smiles, wistful and sad. “Well, we’d be arrested for kidnapping for one. And Sam wouldn’t let us get past the city limit. He’d kill me for moving him again.”

The small ember of hope that was growing in Cas’s heart starts to fade. “We could convince him.”

“And you’re still married.”
Castiel had never thought of that as an obstacle, not really. Maybe that was a sign that he should think that way. He never thought of his marriage as real because if the lack of love and lust. Perhaps he should consider his sins. Because Dean cares about that…or he says he does because he doesn’t want to run away.

“It was a stupid idea anyway,” Cas murmurs.

“Bailing, yeah, but maybe—” A door slams downstairs and they both jump. “What the hell? Sam isn’t done with school for hours,” Dean exclaims, springing up and scrambling for his clothes.

“I don’t know.” Cas winces as he stands. There was some element of spite to having sex with Dean in this bed but he doesn’t actually want to be discovered with come still staining his stomach. He grabs his shirt and starts scrubbing himself with it as the sound of steps approaches up the stairs. Cas pulls on his briefs, shaking in panic.

“Fuck,” Dean says as he yanks on his jeans and the door creaks open.

Of the faces Castiel expected to see, his mother’s was not among them. Nor is he expecting the utter annoyance on her face.

“Really, Castiel? I thought you were done with this.”

Chapter End Notes

Warnings:
- Unprotected anal sex
- Bottom!Cas
- Homophobia
- Transphobia

So, those of you that guessed Hannah was queer - congrats! I'm trying to be as sensitive as I can with this sort of story while keeping the focus on Cas and Dean. And yes, everyone else is horrible and I am horrible and mean for ending it there but I can't resist a good cliff hanger.
Chapter Notes

Okay, I'm posting this while I'm quite tired and late at night after a Halloween party.

You're in the final stretch, and in the darkness before dark, we're going into the...darkest darkness. Warnings in the endnotes, but nothing that hasn't been an issue before.

Happy Halloween and I love you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dean’s not a hateful person. Stubborn, maybe, and a smartass; and sure he can hold a grudge, but he’s not hateful. He tries to be polite when he can be and not spit in the faces of the people he needs to like him. And despite the shit sandwich of bigots and zealots and just plain dicks life keeps throwing at him, he doesn’t hate most people. But right now, he fucking hates Naomi Novak.

“What the fuck?” Dean exclaims and Naomi turns to him with the kind of bored disdain usually reserved for dogs peeing on the carpet. “What are you—”

“Please finish dressing before you berate me, Dean, I can’t take you seriously otherwise,” Naomi sighs. “You too, Castiel. I’ll be downstairs. Be quick about it. I didn’t drive across town in the middle of the day to be kept waiting.”

Naomi turns on her heel and leaves Cas and Dean staring at each other. “What the fuck?” Dean repeats. Cas shakes his head and gets back to dressing. He’s pale and shaking and Dean wishes he could just fucking do something to help him for once. Punching his mom in the face probably wouldn’t count. “Cas, I’m sorry,” Dean says for what feels like the thousandth time after he pulls on his shirt.

“It’s fine.” Cas’s hands are shaking as he buttons up his shirt.

“No, it’s not. This isn’t how people want to come out to their parents.”

“I said it’s fine, Dean,” Cas snaps and Dean flinches. “Apparently I don’t need to come out to anyone since the entirety of creation already guessed my secrets.”

“What?” Cas doesn’t reply, just throws a sock at Dean over the bed. They finish getting decent quickly and quietly, which only ups Dean’s anger and apprehension. “Do we have a…game plan or something?” Dean dares to ask before they leave the room.

“What would be the point of that?” Cas replies, sour and cold.

He’s not wrong.

They file down the stairs to find Naomi in the kitchen, staring into the open refrigerator. “You have a child in the house and your stomach must be acting up with all this stress, why don’t you have any milk, Castiel?”

“Sam finished it this morning,” Dean answers, offended on everyone’s behalf. Naomi levels him
with a new glare.

“I asked my son, Dean, not you.”

“Mother,” Cas hisses.

“In fact, don’t you have a job you should be at right now?” Naomi goes on and from the corner of his eye Dean sees Cas’s fist contract.

“I’m taking the day off,” Dean growls.

“To continue your corruption of my son, I see. Well, you’re no longer needed here, so you can go.”

“Dean is not going anywhere,” Cas counters and slams the fridge door out of his mother’s hands.

“What are you doing here, Mother?”

“I received and extremely concerning call from Alfie Pike,” Naomi replies, stepping a safe distance away from her son and Dean.

“Alfie told you about Dean and I?” Cas asks. Dean turns to him, because when did Alfie learn that?

“I came out to Hannah and Meg,” Cas mutters to Dean.

“No, he would never discuss something so scandalous over the phone. And I honestly can’t believe you brought your colleagues into this.” Dean’s reaching the breaking point and the only thing holding him back is Cas.

“You—” Cas starts and Naomi raises a hand for silence.

“I am here because Alfie called me in crisis. He thinks you might be fired? Is this true?”

“You’re here about his job?” Dean asks, aghast.

“Of course, I am. And, again, we don’t need color commentary on this, Dean. This is a family matter.”

“Like fuck it is,” Dean huffs. Naomi braces a hand on her hips and scowls.

“Castiel, I’ve already been on the phone with Uriel Wisdom and I have other friends on the board, he’s extremely disappointed you’d implicate him like this but he’s open to discussing this with you with Zachariah as a mediator.”

“I don’t want to discuss anything with Uriel,” Cas replies.

“He indicated you’d be amenable,” Naomi replies.

“Because he’s blackmailing him!” Dean yells and Naomi turns to him with a look of pure fury.

“He is using the one thing any of us seem to be able to do to get through to Castiel, because my son thinks it’s important to allow a deviant to get custody of a child. And as appalling as that is, I support it since it will mean getting you and your filth out of his life forever.”

Dean grits his teeth so hard it hurts. He truly, completely, hates this woman. “Getting rid of me won’t change Cas.”

“Of course it will. It removes the temptation and will allow him to recover and heal from your unsettling influence.”
“His what?” Cas asks.

“I’m sure he’s spent months filling your head with nonsense: telling you that you were born like this, that it’s not a sin, that God cannot help you. These are the teaching of the devil, Castiel.”

“And yours are the teachings of a bunch of crazy, bigoted assholes!” Dean bellows back.

“Please, mind your language, Dean, this is still a Christian household, despite your efforts.”

Dean throws his hands up with a groan. “Cas, are you—”

“So you knew?” Cas asks, his eyes still on his mother, a look of heartbreak on his face. “That I’m—”

“That you think you’re a so-called homosexual, yes, of course.” Naomi sounds completely frustrated by this. “I’m your mother, I’ve seen the signs since you were young, but until recently I thought you were doing a good job at controlling and correcting your urges.” She gives Dean a sneer on that word for good measure.

“Why did you never talk to me about it?” Cas demands and Naomi rolls her eyes.

“I did. I told you time and again that this was the way of sin. And that was all I needed to say. You seemed handle it fine, and when you deviated, you had Anna there to help you. And look, in the past few months, with this one’s - well, help isn't the word - you were able to be a complete husband again. Now it's time to continue that without him.”

“I have been dying keeping this inside me for years and you knew? You both knew and you did nothing?” Fuck, Dean hates this, he hates seeing how Cas is breaking bit by bit before his eyes.

“Nothing?” Naomi scoffs. “I am the one that helped Anna understand you. She may be rebellious and flawed, but she loves you and she came around to the correct way of thinking.”

“So this whole fucked up conversion thing was your idea? Awesome,” Dean snorts and Naomi steps towards him with cold fire in her eyes.

“It’s not conversion, Dean, it’s salvation.” Naomi’s eyes narrow, boring into Dean like little hate lasers. “You people, you’re so quick to judge those of us that are willing to stand up for what is right, for God’s commandments. Do you really care about Castiel? About his soul or his life? You’ve already cost him his job, and almost destroyed a marriage.”

“Of course I—” Dean starts, even though he’s shrinking.

“How many lives do you need to destroy to feel better about the mess you’ve made of yours? Was your father’s not enough? I have to say, I worry for that poor brother of yours, but I can’t intervene there. I have to protect my own children. And yes, that is what I’m doing, Dean, protecting my family because I know that down the road you want him to walk is only disease and stigma and loneliness and disappointment all leading to hell. You may not believe in his soul but I do, and someone has to protect it.”

Dean wants to say something smartass. He wants to fight and chew this bitch out but he can’t because she’s fucking right. No matter what Cas says about making it better or Dean being good, Naomi sees right through him. She’s not like Ishim that thinks he should be punished or Anna that thinks he’s good enough to be used, she just sees him for what he is. Poison.

“Cas is a good person,” Dean says finally, his voice thick.
“He’s trying to be, no thanks to you.” Naomi turns her focus to Cas, who looks as meek as a prisoner.

“Mother…” Cas and Dean jump as the door from the garage slams and Anna rushes in. “Anna. What are you—”

“Naomi called me,” Anna says, breathless and obviously confused to find Dean and Naomi there. “She said you were fired? And you didn’t call me?”

“I’m suspended,” Cas mutters. “I didn’t think to call you.”

“Of course not, you never do,” Anna says, shaking her head before looking at Dean. “Did he call you?”

“No,” Dean replies instantly. Seeing Cas walk in was as unexpected as the news he was suspended, or the fact Cas didn’t even seem to care. And then they’d fucked and it had felt so good even when it was so wrong. He's been idiotically on the edge of telling Cas he loved him and throwing his whole damn life away, but at least there was one bullet dodged. “I was just here to pack.”

“Is that the story you’re telling?” Naomi asks, arch and offended.

“It’s the truth,” Dean counters. “I wanted to—”

“And then you just happened to take advantage of my son’s emotional distress and force him into more depravity in the bed he should share with his wife.”

Naomi could have slapped them and Dean would have taken it better. Anna looks just as sickened as Cas does and Dean’s never felt so ashamed.

“In our bed?” Anna asks, her voice small and her eyes filling with tears.

“I’m sorry.” Cas whispers. “I just…I’m sorry.” The person Dean’s looking at is so different from the man he just was with. He’s even more lost and broken than when Dean first met him. And it’s Dean’s fault.

“Don’t you see it now, Castiel? This is a sickness and all it does it hurt people. Including yourself,” Naomi says, then turns back to Dean. “And you. You do nothing but make it worse.”

“In fact, I think it’s time that you leave,” Anna says. “For good.”

“What?” Dean asks. Cas looks up, but he doesn’t protest. “I was gonna say goodbye to Sam.”

“Perhaps you should have thought about that before you decided to defile yourself,” Naomi snaps.

“You’ll see Sam on Thursday,” Anna adds. “Please go, Dean.”

“Anna, come on,” Dean doesn’t know why he wants to apologize to her, after everything she’s done. Maybe it’s knowing that Naomi is using her a puppet as well. But he does. Anna looks up at him, her cheeks wet with tears.

“I should never have invited you into this house,” Anna says and Dean turns away. She’s not wrong. He’s lucky she doesn’t call Zeke and ruin the last good thing in his life right now. He’s still mad enough at Naomi to make one last desperate try. He grabs Cas’s hands and Naomi winces.

“Cas. Come on. I’ll go if you want me to, but please tell me you won’t listen to these bitches?” Cas meet his eyes and Dean begs him silently for some hope. Maybe that he’s willing to fight. “But to do
you really want me to go?

“Castiel,” Naomi growls.

Cas yanks his hand away and shakes his head. “Goodbye, Dean.”

He grabs his bag, since everything else is in the car and walks out. If Cas doesn’t want him there, he has no reason to stay. If Cas won’t fucking fight for himself that’s not Dean’s job. He stays steady, one foot in front of the other, unbothered by the creak of the Impala’s door and unsoothed by the roar of her engine.

He drives. He’s not even sure where he’s going until he pulls into the parking lot of East Lawrence High.

He doesn’t know if he’ll get in trouble for being here. Social workers are pretty picky about family seeing a kid in their care outside what’s allowed, but Dean doesn’t fucking care. Sam isn’t allowed a phone so he at least can’t break a rule and text him.

He stares at his dash for a long time.

How did this happen? How did he fuck this up so badly? How did he let Cas do this to himself? Maybe Cas and Naomi are right. Maybe this is a punishment from God. He has one good thing left, and that’s Sam. He’s the only reason he didn’t bodily haul Cas out of that house. That, and the fact Dean’s a coward and Cas wouldn’t let him…

“Dean?”

Dean startles at Sam’s voice, accompanied by a knock on the window. Dean unlocks the door and Sam slides into the shotgun seat. “Hey, kid.”

“What the hell are you doing at my school? Some kids saw your car and think you’re a murderer lurking out here. Did you get fired or something?”

“What? No! I…” Dean sighs. He wonders if this is how Cas feels with his family sometimes, just ready to be ashamed of something. “I’m moving over to Bobby’s this afternoon. I won’t be around tonight like we planned but I’ll see you on Thursday. We’re gonna give Bobby a real Thanksgiving.”

“Why aren’t you staying?”

“It’s complicated.” Sam gives Dean his bitchiest glare. “It’s complicated grown up stuff, okay, Sam? But it’s fine. It’s gonna be fine.”

“Did Anna find out about you and Cas?”

“Did she – what? Jesus fucking Christ, how did you know?” Dean sputters and Sam heaves a sigh.

“Dean, come on. You and Cas act more like a couple than he and Anna ever do. He doesn’t sleep in their room. And the other night on the porch you were sorta…cuddling.”

“We were not cuddling!”

“Dean. I don’t think you’re less of a man for going gay for Cas, I’m not gonna judge for cuddling.”

Dean rolls his eyes. At least in this trying time it’s nice to know is brother will always be a little shit. “Okay, for one, I didn’t go gay for Cas. And two…” Sam raises an eyebrow as Dean flounders. “I’m
bi, okay! Always have been.”

“Okay.” Sam looks sincere and Dean’s not sure what to do with it.

“Okay?”

“Okay. You’re my brother and I love you and I want you to be happy. And I guess that’s gonna be with Cas? I mean, was I right? Did Anna find out?”

“Sorta. She…” Dean shakes his head. He really doesn’t want to lie to Sam but he also doesn’t want him to know everything, especially the part where he was Cas’s whore. Fuck. “Cas and I are over. Not that we ever even started. It doesn’t matter. It was just sex.”

“Of course it matters.” Sam tilts his head, considering. “Wait. Did you and Cas…did you sleep with him?”

Dean blinks. “Uh. Yeah. I thought you guessed.”

“That you guys, like, fell in love! Not that you banged! Dean, he’s still married even if he’s gay.” Sam looks so offended and his naiveté would be cute if it didn’t make Dean feel like garbage.

“Sam, like I said, it’s complicated and…wait did you say in love?”

“Yeah. Duh.”

“You mean me, right? Because Cas he…he doesn’t.” Dean can’t think that. He can’t comprehend that, especially after everything. If Cas loved him, he’d fight for him and he's never done that.

“Wow. You are dumb.”

“No. I mean, yeah, I am but…”

“But it’s complicated. You keep saying that but you won’t tell me how or what even happened today.” Sam looks so worried, so caring Dean can’t stand it. He doesn’t deserve this kid.

“Cas is having issues at work, okay? I was home early to pack up and he came home cause he got suspended and shit happened and his mom came home and—”

“His mom? Wait, while you two were—”

“No! Jesus. This is not what I’m here to talk about! It was a giant mess and Cas made it pretty clear that he’s got no plans to change things. Not that he can.”

Sam blinks. “Okay.”

“I just need you to go back to the Novaks tonight and be cool. I wanted to tell you myself because I didn’t want you to think this was about you or that I was ditching you.” Dean sighs. Again. He’s suddenly so fucking tired. “I need you to be okay.”

“I am. Dean, what are you not telling me? Is something else wrong?”

“I’ll see you day after tomorrow,” Dean says. Sam can tell he’s deflecting, he knows, but he just has to get them through this week and they’ll be okay.

“Alright. Just, promise to tell me when I’m older, okay?” Sam gives him a weak smile and Dean tries to return it. It’s more of a grimace but it’s good enough for Sam. He gets out of the car and gives
Dean rushes to join the students streaming out of the school. He revs Baby and drives.

He thinks about driving forever. Just a passing thought. He should have said yes to Cas, caught him when he was still brave before Naomi crushed it out of him. He should have been faster to say ‘Maybe we can try to do this for real.’

But they can’t. Cas never asked for that. Cas never really wanted it. He ran away to Dean and asked to run away with him. There’s no fighting this monster together. Cas has a nice house and a nice job and a nice wife and a family he won’t leave, and he’s only ever wanted Dean as a rebellion, or an escape. Now he’s being punished for that and he’s just…taking it, like a good little soldier in some holy army.

The liquor store is pretty busy for a Tuesday afternoon. Must be people getting ready for the holiday. Dean shows the ID Anna helped him get and pays with money Cas helped him earn and he wonders if he’ll ever get away from them or the shadow of what he’s done.

Bobby yells at him when he comes inside, something gruff and folksy and Dean yells back that he’s fine. Not like he’s gonna share the booze with Bobby. Not that Bobby would mind, but Dean wants to do this alone.

He turns off his phone. He sits himself on the floor by the new bed and turns on the radio. He drinks listening to Zepp until he stops imagining what might have been. What is and what shall never be.

It hurts. It’s hurt of three days now and Castiel just wants it to stop.

“Take your medicine.”

For once, Castiel doesn’t argue. At this point, he’s just glad to be home and not still in a hospital bed. He hadn’t wanted to go, which was stupid of him, but he’d been past caring and if his mother hadn’t seen the blood when he threw up who knows what would have happened. She had been the one to take him, his mother, and he felt like a child when she bundled him into her car and scowled the entire drive. At least she took him to Lawrence General, not Saint Mary’s. He didn’t want to see anyone he knew and she understood that. Anna had stayed to take care of Sam. He still doesn’t know what she told him about where he was, or why Dean was gone.

He wonders if Sam knew if he would have tried to tell Dean. Not that Dean would have been allowed anywhere near him. He didn’t have any calls or messages from Dean when he got his phone back after the thirty-six-hour stay. He would be lying if he said he wasn’t disappointed. He’s been weak and sent on himself. Just ‘I miss you.’ There was no reply.

“Castiel. Your pills.”

He blinks at his mother and complies, swallowing his pills down with the glass of milk provided.

They prodded him and filled him with drugs and he slept through most of the ordeal, his making thoughts filled with worry about Dean, and Anna. About Chuck and Alfie and Hannah and Sam. His doctor had cautioned him to avoid stress. He also berated Castiel for not being on a full
prescription before. He had some choice words about Anna’s attempts to control things just via diet and Castiel’s constant undermining of that. The medication should help. He should have been on it years ago.

“Are you sure you should be driving? Anna can take Sam to the mechanic’s or wherever it is he’s spending the holiday.” Castiel looks up at his mother. He feels like he’s in college again, with her asking if he’s sure he’s up for living in the dorms. She has a point though. She always has a point.

“I’m fine.” He wanders from the kitchen to find his trench coat and keys. “I know how to get there. Anna doesn’t.”

“She should go with you then.”

Castiel wants to glare at her, but he’s too tired. He’s barely made it out of her sight in days and he’s so worn down. “Just say what you mean, Mother.”

“Fine. You being alone with that man is not in your best interest right now.” Once again. She’s not wrong. Seeing Dean is just going to make him feel worse. He doesn’t need the reminder of his cowardice or his sin and what he’s lost.

“Well, I don’t care.”

“What do you care about, Castiel? I’d truly like to know. For this man you’ve nearly destroyed you career—”

“That wasn’t Dean’s fault—”

“And your marriage. Not to mention, risked you soul. You’ve broken my heart and Anna’s over and over and for what? Unnatural lusts?”

“I care about finding my coat,” Cas snaps back. He’s wearing khakis and a sweater but he still feels cold and exposed going out without his coat.

“I got rid of that hideous old thing,” Naomi replies, impatient. “Castiel, you cannot keep avoiding this. We are going to have this conversation.”

A quiet cough comes from the stairs. Sam looks embarrassed to have walked in on the argument, as does Anna where she hovers behind him.

“Um. I brought some clothes,” Sam says, holding up a backpack. “Zeke said it was okay for me to stay the night. He wants to talk to me tomorrow when he comes to inspect stuff or whatever.”

“Did he really?” Naomi asks and Sam gives her a scowl that would get him grounded if Naomi was a blood relative.

“Yes,” Sam replies. “Anna was listening while I was on the phone. I asked her to help me call because I miss my brother. Who is a way better person than you, by the way.”

“Sam, that’s very rude;” Anna says quietly. Castiel hasn’t said more than three words to her since Tuesday. When he came home this morning he noticed her things on the couch.

“Are we still pretending everything is okay here? Really?” Sam scoffs. “Can we just go, Cas, please?”

Castiel nods and sends one last weary look to Anna and Naomi before leading Sam to the car.
They’re quiet for a few minutes of the journey, Sam fiddling with the fraying holes in his jeans, just like Dean does.

“I know about you guys,” Sam says when they hit a red light and Cas’s shoulders slump. “You and Dean, I mean. And I’m okay with him and you, being, uh, that way. I really am.”

“But?” There’s always a ‘but.’

“But I think Dean’s really hurting and…I don’t know if this is good for him?” Sam mutters. “I don’t know how things happened with you guys or whatever, but he’s been doing really good and I hope this doesn’t mess him up.”

“What do you mean?” The medicine Castiel is on is strong enough to dull the acid that was tearing at his insides, so he knows the tightness in his chest has nothing to do with that. It’s fear and hurt, pure and simple.

“Just don’t lead him on if you can’t follow through, okay? I know ‘it’s complicated.’ Dean keeps saying that.” Sam shakes his head, long bangs flopping into his eyes. “He really cares about you, and I know you care about him. But people that care like that shouldn’t keep hurting each other. And you cheated on Anna, so how is he supposed to trust you?”

Castiel keeps his eyes on the road, blinking them clear. Sam is right. Everyone around him is right. Everything is broken and he’s the one that broke it.

“You’re a very wise young man, Sam.”

The rest of the ride is silent, and the crush of gravel under his wheels as he pulls up to Bobby’s house is deafening. He knows he shouldn’t, but he gets out with Sam and walks him to the door. It’s cold outside, the threat of snow in the air. The dog on her chain on the porch growls at them until Sam kneels to pet her. She has no tail, so she wags her entire body as Sam scratches under her chin. Sam’s bright smile makes Castiel’s heart ache as much as anything. The door opens before either of them can knock to reveal Bobby Singer looking even more disgruntled than usual.

“Next you’ll be asking me to bring her inside,” Bobby says as Sam stands.

“What’s her name? Oh, I’m Sam by the way.” Sam holds out his hand. “Nice to meet you Mister Singer.” Bobby scowls at Sam’s hand until he drops it.

“Dog’s name is Tori, and if you call me Mister Singer again I’ll roll right over your toes. Come on in, Dean’s in the kitchen.” Bobby moves to let Sam through the door, then rolls to block Cas when he tries to follow. “No. I don’t know what you and your shithead family did or said to that boy, but this morning it the first time he’s crawled out of the bottle in two days and unless you’re ready to make this right, don’t bother.”

“He’s been drinking? Is he alright?” Cas doesn’t want to think about Dean hurting himself in anyway because of his own cowardice and inaction.

“He’s fine and I’ll keep him in line. You ready to do something to help?”

“I…I can’t,” Castiel whispers. “Dean knows why I can’t and why we can’t…”

“I thought as much. Dean will bring Sam back after the inspection. “Go be with your family.” Bobby closes the door before Castiel can say anything else and he slumps.

The drive home is even worse than Tuesday. He doesn’t even bother asking God for a sign or help.
now, God has already given him enough. Dean doesn’t want to see him, quite rightly. He must be
disgusted with Castiel. There is no one he hasn’t failed. And now he gets to enjoy the torture of
Thanksgiving with his family.

Maybe it won’t be so bad. With everyone there, believing he’s normal maybe he can pretend that he
is. He can laugh with the children and eat too many mashed potatoes and joke with his brothers
about his mother’s cooking. For a few hours he can go back to pretending. It doesn’t sound so
terrible, compared to hurting more.

Dean’s head hurts. So does the rest of him, but the head’s the worst of it. It’s been a long time since
he had a hangover that lasted two days. It’s probably not just the hangover. The sleeping like shit and
generally hating the entire fucked up world right now doesn’t help.

He didn’t drink anything other than beer last night. Bobby had given him a hard time about it, but he
had paid for it, damnit, and Dean’s a damn grown up. He’d been at the store to get some damn
thanksgiving food and the beer was there too. Now he’s stuck with a bad headache that Bobby’s
shitty coffee can’t cure and Sam is here. And he hasn’t heard a single word from Cas and he didn’t
fight Bobby to come in. Perfect.

“Wow. You look bad,” Sam says when he gets back down stairs from dumping his stuff. “Are you
sick?”

Sam knows he’s not sick, but it’s nice of him to say that. “I’ll be fine. Just need some pie to take of
the edge.”

“You’re making a pie?” Sam ask, laughing.

“Regular Barefoot Contessa you got with this one,” Bobby says from his chair by the desk. “Don’t
see why we can’t go to Denny’s like normal idjits.”

“The fact that you know who the Barefoot Contessa is tells me you’re more into this than you let
on,” Dean shoots back, then turns back to Sam. He won’t even dignify the Denny’s crack. “And
yeah. I’m just doing apple. It’s easy. I just got a Turkey breast and stovetop stuffing, sorry. Real
potatoes though.”

“That’s great, Dean,” Sam says with a weak smile.

“Something wrong?” Dean asks.

“No, just…this is really nice. I’m sad Cas isn’t here.”

“Cas is with his family,” Dean grumbles and starts peeling an apple. “That’s where he should be.”

“Yeah, I know. But he’s…” Sam sighs and shakes his head. “You’re right. I just feel bad for him.”

“Yeah me too.”

Sam drifts closer to Dean and picks up an apple. “Can I help?”

He’s not sure if Sam means the pie or something more. “Looks like you’re already helping to me.”
Sam smiles broadly and starts peeling. “So, you got real vegetable too, right?”

“Potatoes are a vegetable.”

“Something green, Dean.”

“Yeah. The apples.”

——

Castiel actually likes Luke’s house. It’s rustic and full of character, as you’d expect from a farm house that’s over a hundred years old out in the middle of nowhere. It’s usually cold, but with the entire family there, it’s not bad. Dinner was uneventful, which was the best Castiel could ask for. Useless conversation about weather and sports and how everyone’s businesses were thriving. Castiel had kept his eyes on his plate for that exchange. In fact he hadn’t said much at all and let Anna do the talking for both of them. The worst had been the politics talk, but he’d excused himself to check on the children’s table for that.

Now he’s assigned to dish duty with Rachel while Lilith watches the children. It’s quiet work and Rachel doesn’t say much, so that’s good. Castiel doesn’t feel good, not at all, but the constant pain has subsided to a manageable level.

“Castiel?”

He turns to see his mother at the door of the kitchen, her face more solemn than during dinner. “Please join us in the parlor.”

“What?” Castiel blink as Rachel takes the plate he was washing from his hands and gives him a towel.

"I told you earlier," Naomi says. "We're having the conversation."

“I don’t understand,” Castiel says, terror rising. Even so he dries his hands and follows his mother into Luke’s front parlor. The room looks smaller than it is with so many people in it. Luke and Michael are sharing a couch, while Anna sits in a wingback chair in the corner. On the other couch...sits Zachariah Adler. His mother gestures for Castiel to sit in the remaining chair and takes the empty place next to Adler. Castiel refuses to sit. “What’s going on?”

“Castiel, we want to speak with you. As a family,” Naomi begins.

“I don’t recall how we’re related to Mr. Adler,” Castiel says.

“He’s here to offer his counsel and help,” Michael replies. “He’s just as concerned for you as we are.”

“Concerned?” Castiel repeats. He has a suspicion of where this is going, but he hopes he’s wrong.

“I’ve explained to your brothers what your situation is at work,” Naomi says. Castiel exhales in relief and finally sits.

“Uriel is a good friend,” Zachariah adds. “And a pillar of our church and community, he’s very disturbed that you want to makes Alfie Pike’s clerical mistakes into some conspiracy and pin it on
him because he's aware of your...connections."

“But he…” Castiel starts.

“But I’ve talked with him, and my friends on the board and he is willing to help you retain your position,” Zachariah goes on. “However, there are conditions. And your family is here to help you understand them.”

“Conditions?” Castiel feels nauseous. His brother’s faces are concerned and sincere, his mother’s dark and Anna won’t even look at him.

“You need to renounce your sins, Castiel,” Naomi says.

“My what?” Castiel whispers.

“Do you really need a reminder of what you and that vagrant have done, brother?” Luke says, shaking his head in disgust.

“An affair is terrible enough, Cas,” Michael says and Castiel feels the blood leave his face. “But with a man? A *prostitute*?”

“You – you told them?” He looks to Anna and she shakes her head vehemently.

“No. I didn’t want anyone to know, but your Mother she…” Anna stammers. God, she looks so ashamed.

“You needed our full support to make a positive change, and everyone needed all the information to make that happen,” Naomi explains.

“That’s why your family wanted me here as well, to assure you that this is part of God’s plan for you,” Zachariah says with a smile that make Castiel’s fists clench.

“So this is an intervention,” Castiel says. “But instead of drugs or crime, you want to save me…from being gay.”


“People keep telling me that,” Castiel murmurs.

“Cas, we were all there at your wedding day,” Michael says. “We saw how happy you and Anna were. We see you two every week, and we know that you love each other. You two have been through so much. School. Loss. And you can make it through this.”

“Through God’s grace Anna has forgiven your transgressions and wants to help you,” Zachariah says.

“It’s true,” Anna says, finally speaking up. “Babe, I know this isn’t how you’d want this to go. And I’m so sorry for how I’ve hurt and failed you. But this means a fresh start, for both of us.”

“And we forgive you too, Castiel,” Naomi says, her tone gentler than Castiel has heard in years. “We love you. We worry for your soul.”

“And us,” Luke adds and gets a glare from Anna. “What? Someone has to say it. I run a Christian business, Cassie, I can’t have customers knowing my brother chose to be a deviant. So does Mike. And we can’t have that sort of thing around our children.”
Castiel feels naked, flayed and exposed. He’s dredged a moment like this his whole life. Every sin revealed and condemned by the people he loves with nowhere left for him to hide. The disgust in their eyes isn't his imagination.

“If I am such a monster, why are you even still speaking to me?” Castiel asks, his eyes trained on a worn section of the green carpet. Suddenly, his mother is kneeling before him, taking his hand in hers and stroking his hair as tenderly as she did when he'd fall as a child.

“Because you are not your sins,” Naomi says. “We love and care for you.”

“We still believe you have it in you to make the right choice,” Anna adds. “With prayer and the strength of God, I know you can do it. I know you want to make this right. Or else you wouldn’t be here.”

“So what do you want me to do? And what does this have to do with Uriel?” Castiel asks, tired and resigned. Naomi squeezes his hands, smiling as if this is a victory.

“Like we said, renounce your sins,” Zachariah replies. “On Sunday, before all the congregation, we want you to witness. Confess your crimes before God and be absolved and reborn.”

“Is that all?” Castiel mutters. “And if I don’t.”

“Then we will have no choice but to contact the proper authorities about Dean Winchester’s past and your crimes as well,” Luke says, his voice cold and terrifying. “Uriel is a friend. As is Ishim Sunder. They’re good Christian men that I won’t let you drag through the mud to hide your sins.”

“I see,” Castiel says. He feels like he’s watching himself from a great distance.

“This is a chance for a new beginning in the Lord,” Naomi says, clutching his hand tight. Castiel can see the force of her prayer and call to God in her face. “He is waiting for you Castiel. He always has been, and when you do this, when you let this darkness go and let his light into your heart, you’ll be healed.”

He just nods.

He had asked God days ago, what he wanted from him. It seems he has an answer at least, clear and cruel as day.

Ezekiel Gardner takes much less time to look over things than Dean expected. He talks earnestly with Sam out of earshot, and then Bobby as well, and Sam and Zeke come outside to retrieve Dean from where he’s leaning on an old Camaro, everyone is smiling.

It gives Dean some hope, which is pretty new for him, honestly. He still hasn’t heard a word from Cas, not that he’s expecting it, but the absence of follows Dean like a shadow. It was the first Thursday they’d missed in a long time. But it’s something he’s got to get used to, isn’t it?

“Things look very good, Mister Winchester,” Zeke says. “Unless something unexpected comes up, I have very high hopes for Judge Henrickson’s decision on Monday.”
"That’s…wow," Dean says.

“And I told my lawyer I really want to be with you, too,” Sam adds.

“Thanks, Sammy,” is all Dean can say. He looks back at Zeke. “And you’ve got good reports from Cas and Anna?”

“I was going to meet with them on Wednesday, actually, but they weren’t available due to Mr. Novak’s medical issues,” Zeke says and Dean’s brain does a record scratch.

“Medical issues?” He turns to Sam. The look of absolute guilt on his face is all Dean needs to know. “Cas was sick and you didn’t tell me?”

“You were mad at him!” Sam protests.

“No, I—” Dean snaps his mouth closed, horribly conscious of Zeke’s eyes on him. “Sam, that doesn’t mean I don’t care if he’s sick.”

“Okay.” Sam looks guilty as all get out and Zeke just looks awkward.

“Well, it sounds like you two have a bit to talk about on the way back to the Novaks,” Zeke says. “I’ll be touching base with them on Sunday and I’ll see you on Monday, Dean.”

“Can’t wait,” Dean says.

Sam walks Zeke to his car and gets a hug for his troubles before sulking back to Dean.

“What happened with Cas?” Dean asks before Zeke’s even down the driveway.

“I don’t know, okay! I got home from school on Tuesday and he was already gone and it turns out he was at the hospital. I guess his mom took him? I heard Anna talking on the phone about him throwing up blood?”

“What?”

Tori raises her head in concern.

“He’s fine! He came back after two nights in the hospital and he was fine.” Sam’s voice cracks on the last word.

“You don’t throw up blood if you’re fine!” Dean snaps. Fuck this is his fault too. Cas is sick and it’s his fault. “Come on, get in the car. I’ll ask him what happened myself.”

Sam obeys and keeps quiet on the drive until they pull up to the Novak house. Of course Naomi’s ugly-ass Buick is parked in Dean’s spot.

“Dean,” Sam says before they get out. “I really had a good Thanksgiving with you. I like Bobby and…I really want to stay there with you. I mean it. I’m really glad you’re, well, that you’re okay. I know it’s a day late, but I’m thankful, for you.”

Dean looks down, focus on the inseam of his jeans. It had been nice, after he’d chilled out. They’d watched the dog show and then football and eaten until their sides ached. Somehow Bobby and Dean had started explaining to Sam how a car engine worked and his little nerd brain had been fascinated, especially once Bobby brought out the books. It was good, and warm and the fact Cas hadn’t texted back when Dean sent him a “happy thanksgiving” message should have hurt less because of it. But it only stung more because Dean spent the whole time wishing Cas was there.
“Same, Sammy,” Dean mutters, forcing himself to look at Sam and remind himself why this is all worth it. “But don’t get all weepy on me, okay?”

“Not now. No promises for Monday. We’re almost there, Dean.” Sam smiles and Dean tries to echo it. They get out of the car and to Dean’s surprise, Anna is already walking out of the house to meet them.

“Uh. Hey,” Dean says. There’s really no conversation they can have to make up for the fucking her husband on her bed thing. She looks almost as tired as Dean feels.

“Hi, Dean. Sam.”

“Is - Is Cas around? Sam told me he was sick?” Dean’s heart is racing and Anna looks like she’s about ready to scream at just him asking.

“I’ll see if he’s feeling up to it,” Anna replies. “You can wait out here. Sam, come on inside. We’ve got some leftovers if you’re hungry.”

“Awesome!” Sam cheers. He gives Dean one more hug before rushing inside with Anna at his heels.

“He ate like an hour ago!” Dean calls after them, and Sam waves him off. “Teenagers.”

He waits in front of the house, kicking at the dirt by the roses. They’re dormant right now. No leaves or flowers left, just sticks covered in thorns. The door opens and Dean looks up, heart leaping. It’s Naomi.

“Oh. No offense but I was hoping to talk to a different Novak.”

“Yes, so I gathered. But Castiel doesn’t want to see you.”

Dean takes a step back, steadying himself. “What?”

“I think it should be clear. He realizes what a dangerous influence you are.” Naomi isn’t smiling, but there’s something coolly triumphant in her face.

“I don’t buy that,” Dean says slowly. Cas would never just send him away. Except for the last time he did.

“You don’t need to. But you’re no longer welcome in this house. And that’s for the good of Sam and you, as well as Castiel.”

“So you’re on the ‘tattle about me to the social workers and fuck over Sam’ bandwagon too, great. Did Anna give you the memo?”

“It was the other way around.”

Well that’s news. News that makes perfect fucking sense. “This whole thing, the conversion and using me. Using Sam. It was your idea.”

“I care about my son, Dean,” Naomi replies.

“Some loving mother you are.” Dean wants to throttle her, or at least slash her tires, but she holds every fucking card and she knows it.

“In fact I am,” Naomi replies, advancing. “I know you aren’t familiar with how real parents treat their children, since you have none, but good mothers fights for their sons. You have attempted to
destroy Castiel in every possible way and I am just trying to protect him. I’m his mother. I don’t want to see him hurt or abandoned or destroyed by disease or poverty. Can you and your kind really offer anything beyond that. You’re a prostitute, Dean, a liar and a criminal, how do you expect him to ever trust anything you do or say?”

“I’m wouldn’t—”

“I’m not interested in your excuses or lies, Dean. Castiel does not want to see you. Now or ever again.”

He wants to spit in her face, tell her she’s the fucking liar. But he’s not sure. Nothing she’s saying about him is wrong, so why would she lie about Cas?

“You’re a piece of fucking work, you know that?”

Naomi sighs and reaches into her pocket. She pulls out a neatly folded stack of money. “Here. Dean, for your services,” she says, holding it out to him.

He want to scream. Slap it out of her hands and spit in her face. But he doesn’t. He’s not the beast she thinks he is, not entirely. He doesn’t take the money. “Fuck you, Naomi.”

He turns and leaves, knowing full well he’ll never look at the Novak house again.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-Major homophobia. Just lots and lots.
-Alcohol as a coping mechanism
-Medical issues (off screen), Cas
-Cas doesn't experience direct suicidal ideation but it's in the background, and he's just...depressed.

I know. Guys. I know. I know it's real bad, but just, trust me. Trust the tags.
Cas wakes up cold. And confused. He’s not sure when he fell asleep after coming home from Luke’s. He’d been too distracted to check the time on his phone and there’s no clock in Dean’s room now. Because it’s not Dean’s room anymore. The sheets have been washed but Cas can still smell a trace of Dean in the linens, in the air. That’s the last thing he remembers thinking before falling asleep in the small hours of the morning. Alone.

He knows sleeping here was cruel, but he wanted a few more hours of freedom. He can’t give up entirely yet. Anna hadn’t questioned it. They hadn’t spoken in the car after she’s made an abortive attempt at an apology. He knows she didn’t have anything to do with planning the confrontation, but it doesn’t matter.

He pushes himself out of the sheets and stretches. He’s wanted to wake up in Dean’s bed for a long time but this wasn’t how he imagined it happening. He’d always thought it would happen, somehow. He thought a lot of things would happen, eventually. He was a fool, but that’s not a thought worth pursuing so early in the morning. If it is early.

The muffled sounds of screeching tires and gunfire break him out of his stupor. He shuffles out of the room to find Sam curled on the couch while an action movie plays on the TV.

“Oh, hey, sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you. Anna said you’re still feeling bad?” Sam looks worried and guilty, but what’s more concerning to Cas is that he missed seeing Dean again when he dropped Sam off.

“I’m fine. The pills are working. What time is it?”

“Like ten-thirty.”

“Fuck.”

Sam’s eyes widen in shock. “Sorry. Your mom said not to wake you.”

“She’s was here again?” Beyond the intervention, his mother obviously feels the need to monitor him like an addict who might sneak off for a new fix.

“I guess. I think she and Anna went out to the black Friday sales or something after I got in.” Sam looks sheepish and fiddles with the remote. “She said something about buying a new mattress.”

“Wonderful.” Castiel feels terrible; mentally, emotionally, and even physically, but he suddenly has to get out of the house. “I think I’m going to go for a run.”
“It’s kind of cold.”

Cas shrugs and heads upstairs. He ignores the bed when he walks by it into the bathroom to get ready. He wonders if Anna actually slept there after learning what he’d done. It’s not like there was any other place in the house she could go that he and Dean haven’t defiled. Not that she knows that. Maybe she’ll make them but a new house to go with the new start everyone insists they will have.

He stretches in the front hall, eyes tracking over the wedding pictures and scriptures and art on the walls. There’s nothing about this house that he chose or that he cares about, except the books and records that are all kept discreetly out of sight. He’d be happy to leave, but any new place would be just the same.

He steps into the frigid air and runs. He can see his breath in front of him, and his lungs sting with the cold, but it feels good. Each stride further from his house, from his family, from Lawrence and the past and everything…it gives him the illusion of freedom. He doesn’t want to turn back and he doesn’t care where he’s going. He follows the main road past house after house, past a family setting up a plastic nativity scene in the front yard already and another writing “Christ is Come!” on their roof in lights. He runs and runs and runs, sweat pouring down his back and face and chest, until he feels like he’s back in his body again for the first time in days. For the first time since he and Dean made love.

That’s a strange term for it, he guesses, one that Dean would roll his eyes at. But it had felt like more than just fucking. It had felt important and beautiful, not base. Not filthy, the way everyone thought of it. He hates that they see it that way. He hates that part of him sees it that way too.

He runs harder, pushing every thought out of his mind until he there’s nothing but the pounding of his feet on the pavement and the cold air on his face. He runs until he turns a corner and suddenly he’s right back on his own street, heading home.

“Fuck,” he whispers, coming to a halt within sight of his house.

“You watch your mouth in front of my boy, Castiel Novak.”

He looks up to see Missouri, Fergus on his leash as usual, looking up at him with a tongue lolling out of his mouth.

“Apologies,” Cas mutters. “I’m having a rough morning.”

“It’s nearly noon, honey, that sounds pretty rough.” Missouri looks Cas up and down. “I was actually heading your way to see if your strapping young man would be up to help me get my Christmas decorations out of the garage.”

Cas fights very hard not to just turn and run away again. “Dean’s not-”

“I mean the little one,” Missouri replies, giving Cas a discerning look. “I assume Dean’s working. Is everything alright?”

“No. Nothing is alright,” Cas sighs. “But I’m sure Sam would be happy to help you. I would be as well.”

“Perfect. I can heat up some cocoa for you. Ease your weary heart. Come on, Fergus, time for your lunch.”

Anna’s car is still gone when Castiel gets home. He showers in the downstairs bathroom and gets
dressed there, just trying to breath and hang on. There are no messages on his phone despite a text sent to Dean in the early hours of the morning. *I need to talk to you.*

He heads upstairs to find Sam, at least at Missouri’s they can be of some use while they wait for everything to end.

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Benny’s bar hasn’t changed much since the last time Dean was here. Not that he remembers it very well, he was so fucked up then. Dean’s pretty sure the video poker rig in the back is new, but otherwise it’s the same. Same dirty walls and sticky bar and cheap whiskey. Same spot at the end of the bar reserved for a dumb kid with a pretty face and wandering eyes, hoping to get on his knees and score some cash. This time it’s not Dean, but the guy Dean’s looking at over the lip of his glass might as well be, down to the sandy hair and fading bruise under his eye.

The kid catches Dean staring and sends him a wink. Shit.

Dean sighs as the kid sidles over and Benny conveniently goes to serve someone else, chuckling quietly.

“You look lonely,” Dean’s new friend says with a smile and Dean can’t help rolling his eyes.

“Come on, man, you gotta be more subtle than that,” Dean says and the kid blinks. “Most johns, they’re deep in the closet or just like getting their dick sucked, doesn’t matter by who. You don’t wanna make ’em feel too gay.”

“I wasn’t--”

“Yeah, you were. You think I don’t know my own kind?” The kid scowls, but instead of walking away, he takes the seat next to Dean and waves to Benny for refills. “Are you even old enough to drink?”

“Benny ain’t checking IDs,” the kid says. “So, are you gonna tell me to get off your turf or something? You look a little white bread for this scene I gotta say.”

“Nah, I’m out,” Dean replies and damn if it doesn’t feel sorta good to say it.

“Good because Azazel gave me this territory and I don’t want to have to fight for it.” The kid holds out a hand. “I’m Brice, by the way.”

“Hope that’s not your real name,” Dean replies, shaking Brice’s hand. “Never tell folks your real name. Wait, did you say Azazel?”

“You know him?” Brice asks, looking interested as he takes a drink.

“Yeah, thought he kept business to the edge of town. And didn’t care about what a few hustlers do.” Dean’s suddenly feeling very stupid for coming here. He’d worked himself ragged all day until he’d ended up taking a crowbar to an old Dodge and Bobby had told him to get it together or get some air. He didn’t want to drink at home anymore so he’d returned to the scene of the crime. Or several crimes, as it were.
“I dunno, man, I’ve only been in town for a month or so,” Brice says. “He’s got a hate boner for hookers according to some of the guys. Looking for one pretty face that screwed over his sicko second in command.”

“The pretty face got a name?” Dean asks, already sure of the answer.

“Dan or something? Maybe Dean?” Brice finishes off his drink. “Sounds like the guy’s lucky to be alive.”

“Yeah, I bet he is,” Dean mutters. “Azazel do that?” He points to the fading bruise on Brice’s cheek.

“Nah. That was some fucking nut. Jumped me and tried to break my skull a few weeks ago.” Brice says it with the weary resignation of the streets, and Dean recognizes that too. “Kept yelling about the lord or some shit.”

Dean closes his eyes and shakes his head. Of course. “You tell the cops?”

Brice laughs, dry and hollow. “You think they’d believe me? Or care? Even if I could ID the asshole, there’s no point.”

“I guess not.” Dean knocks back the last of his whiskey. He took the fucking bus downtown because he had a mind to drink and he’s not stupid enough to risk hurting Baby or himself with getting Sam back so close. But here he is, face to face with a reminder of why he’ll never be safe. The booze burns in his gut but it loosens his muscles and makes reality recede just a bit. Brice does the same and looks Dean up and down.

“So, you sure you’re not interested in blowing off some steam? Show me a few moves?” Brice gives Dean a suggestive smile. “No charge.”

“Nah, man,” Dean says, shaking his head. It might be nice for a little while, but it feels wrong. “Like I said I’m out. Of all of it.”

Brice shrugs. “Fair enough. Can I ask you one more question?”

“Sure, why not.”

“How’d you do it? Get out?” The bravado is gone from Brice’s face, replaced by a genuine look of hope, and perhaps wonder.

“I got lucky. Met someone that wanted to save me, even when I didn’t wanna be saved,” Dean answers. He’s not even sure now how it happened. If he’d never been in all those wrong places at the right times, he might never have met Cas or fallen into the mess that still somehow saved his pathetic life. “I certainly didn’t deserve it. Still don’t.”

“Sounds like a damn miracle,” Brice says. He sighs and looks around the bar. It’s a slim crowd for a Friday night, but it’s still early. “Glad someone could make it out.”

“Hey.” Brice turns around and Dean pulls out his wallet. Out of habit he keeps more cash than he strictly should in there, just in case he has to run. He hands a hundred dollar bill to Brice. “Get a few decent meals, okay?”

Brice looks at the money in his hands then back to Dean. “You sure you don’t want—”

“I’m sure, buddy, just take the night off.”
Brice nods and tucks the money away. “Thanks.”

Dean doesn’t say anything else. He watches Brice leave and hopes that the money ends up in a diner’s till and not the pocket of a dealer. He turns back to the bar and waves Benny over for another refill.

“Did I just see you strike out with another hooker?” Benny asks, amusement in his voice.

“Other way around. And I’m retired.”

Benny laughs warmly as he refills Dean’s glass. “Glad to hear that. Wondered where you got off to. Figure you either blew town or got yourself killed.”

“Neither. Well, I came close on the second one.”

Benny smiles. “Sounds like someone took care of you.” Dean nods. “Same someone you were so broken up about last time you came here to drink away your sorrows?” No point in lying, so Dean nods again. “Then why are you back here?”

“Because, it’s over.” Dean drains his glass at the reminder of his stupid broken heart.

“Sorry to hear that. Hope that don’t mean you getting your ass beat in my john again.”

Dean shakes his head, running a thumb over the cloudy glass. “You know the asshole that did that’s still out there? Thinks he’s doing the Lord’s works bashing on queers.” Dean’s cowardice churns together with the whiskey in his stomach. How the fuck does he deserve to get what he wants; go legit and live safe and pretend to be happy with Sam? How can he do this when Ishim is still hurting people and Azazael is getting away with more and more and Cas is stuck in the prison of his marriage.

“He ain’t welcome here. Saw him a few weeks back and I told him I’d go to the cops with some interesting pictures if he tried any shit. Got him runnin’ pretty fast.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Didn’t think snitching was your thing.”

“I do what I can. Hate shit stains like that using God as an excuse for their hate. They’re gonna get a nasty surprise when they pack it in for good and don’t find no pearly gates on the other side. Just wish I could do more.”

“Same,” Dean sighs. “But there ain’t no changing them. Any of them. Get rid of him and there’s gonna be some other asshole waiting to take his place.”

“Don’t mean it ain’t worth fighting,” Benny replies. He meets Dean’s eyes with a sincere look. “All it takes is one person, brother.”

Dean wants to laugh in his face at the idea of heroes and saviors. There’s no such thing. Cas tried to be that, even when his God told him he was a monster, and look what it cost him. Dean's not that guy. “That one person could lose a lot. And there’d be no one thanking him.

“You don’t stand up and fight for someone else, or even for God or because you’re afraid. You do it because it’s right,” Benny says, so easy and warm Dean almost believes it. “You do it so you can look at yourself in the mirror and be proud.”

“Well, that ain’t gonna happen for me, that’s for sure.” Dean can’t even imagine that. He’s got a two-day beard going now because he can’t bear to look himself in the eye, knowing how much he’s failed.
“Sad news. It’s not a bad face. When it ain’t beaten to hell or passed out on my floor.”

Dean quirks an eyebrow at Benny. It’s been a while since he’s had a come on, and now he’s been the target of two in one night. He’s gotta admit, Benny’s solid, burly frame, soft beard and muscles straining the sleeves of his white Henley have their appeal. He’s a lot of man, but he’s lacking one important thing: he’s not Cas.

Then again that doesn’t matter anymore. Would it really hurt that much more to have one more reason not to look in the mirror? His phone sits heavy in his pocket, a string of messages unanswered. And a missed call from Jody Mills too.

“I can’t figure out if you wanna get me to be good or bad, Benny,” Dean says at last. He knows what people think he is. He knows what Naomi thinks he’d do right now.

“I think that’s up to you.”

A fresh pain twists in Dean’s heart. Truer words never spoken.

Today, he plans his run better. Anna and Sam are both in quiet when he wakes up, so Castiel doesn’t even need to bother with excuses like yesterday when he and Sam came home from the afternoon with Missouri, or after dinner when Anna had asked him what he thought of the new bed. He gets dressed and he’s out of the house into the quiet morning without a word said to anyone.

It’s colder than yesterday. Cold enough that he had to wear track pants and a jacket, but he doesn’t mind that. He doesn’t mind the looks he gets from the few people he passes. He focuses on the route, as much as he can. Part of the plan is getting as far away from home as he possible and that will never happen if he just stays on autopilot.

Maybe that’s what he’s been doing his whole damn life. He thinks about that as he runs. He’s done as he was told, as was expected; as God and his family and the church commanded, because they were all really the same thing. He questioned their wisdom and authority in the back of his mind or the deepest parts of his heart. But he never stood up and disobeyed, not outright. He thought he could get away with a few secret acts of defiance and indulgence. Then a few more. Until he was certain he had escaped…but he was just right back where he started, begging God for a sign. At least today he plans on doing that part right.

He has to walk the final mile and a half to the church. It’s strange, really, that a building so suburban and plain could hold so much power over him or a community. Even in his mind when he hears the world “church” he thinks of steeples and grand cathedrals far away. Not a beige building in need of new siding on the east side with a sign out front that currently reads, “Rejoice and give thanks th lord!” He wonders where the last E went.

He doesn’t expect any doors to be open, but the side entrance is unlocked. The chapel is silent and cold, in a way the magnifies the emptiness and makes Castiel steps and breath seem twice as loud. He takes a seat in the usual pew and for the first time in a long while, sets his eyes on the cross above the altar and prepares to pray.

It feels like getting ready to jump off a cliff. Will it feel this way on Sunday, if he does what they want? He kneels, knees smarting on the padded rest. He grasps his hands and begins...
“God, please help me. I don’t know what to do—”

A crash from behind the closed door to the rectory cuts Castiel off. It’s followed by raised voices – both male – arguing.

“Is someone there?” Castiel calls, standing

“You said no one would be here!” one voice yelps, getting closer.

“Shit! I told you this was stupid!” The second voice is extremely familiar.

“Chuck?”

The rear door bursts open and Chuck stumbles out, a second man behind him. He’s taller than Chuck by an inch or two, with caramel blonde hair and a pronounced chin. “Cas? Wha-what are you doing here?”

Castiel stares at the two flustered men. “Praying.”

“Oh.” Chuck gulps and looks askance at the man behind him.

“What are you doing here?” Castiel asks, rising, and Chuck turns pale. “I thought you were fired.”

“I was,” Chuck replies too quickly. “But, I, uh—”

“We’re breaking into good ol’ Zach’s files,” the other man interrupts, grinning. Chuck hangs his head.

“We’re just looking for my final paycheck records,” Chuck mutters, unconvincing.

“We’re trying to find where he’s been getting and hiding all that money he doesn’t want Chuck knowing about.”

“Gabe!” Chuck snaps. Gabe just smiles, smug and calm.

“Oh, that makes sense,” Castiel says.

Gabe jabs Chuck in the arm and wags his eyebrows. “See. Told you everyone probably hates that blowhard. You aren’t gonna call the cops or report us, are you? I’d hate to have to kill you.”

“No. I just came here to get some quiet. Or help.” Castiel is beginning to think that’s impossible.

“Hon, why don’t you do your walk on water thing with your friend here and I’ll work some magic on figuring out Zach’s password.”

“No, don’t—” Before Chuck can finish, Gabe dashes back through the door towards, Cas assumes, Zachariah’s office. “Great.” Chuck sighs and joins Cas in the pew, his shoulders slumping as he sits.

“Who is that, if you don’t mind me asking?” Cas begins, sitting next to Chuck.

“My ex. Well, ex-ex, now. We’re—I don’t know. He came to visit a week ago and hasn’t left yet, even after I ran out of candy.” Cas stares at Chuck’s profile, trying to process that information and matching it up with the rumors and insinuations he’s heard about Chuck until now.

“You’re gay?”
“Bi,” Chuck replies like he’s just admitting what his favorite color is. “Not that it mattered to Zach. He said that made it even more likely I was a predator and pervert that shouldn’t be allowed near Christian children. Fucker.”

“How did he find out?”

“Caught me and Gabe holding hands coming out of the movies. That’s it. Just holding hands.”

“And the blackmail that, I’m assuming, Gabe had on him?” Cas recalls the story of someone having information about Zach and it seems to fit what he knows of Gabe.

“I was never gonna use that. Because I’m a nice person,” Chuck grumbles. “But Gabe was pissed and he started hacking and digging. He thought it was fishy I’d get fired the day after I asked Zach where most of the money he keeps talking about comes from.”

“Fired for digging into financial misdealings and being told it’s because of sexuality. Common story, it seems.”

“You came out?” Chuck asks with a proud smile and Cas nods.

“Sort of. It turns out most people already knew.” He gives Chuck a meaningful look. “It wasn’t pleasant.”

“I get that. And you got canned too? Rough.” It’s nice to talk to someone who sounds genuinely sorry for him for once

“Suspended, for now. There’s been…financial malfeasance. It’s under investigation.” Cas slumps against the hard back of the pew.

“They think you did it?”

“They know Uriel Wisdom did it, with Alfie Pike’s help. But they – being Zachariah and Uriel and Ishim and my entire family would like me to admit to it. Then they’ll make it go away.”

“What the fuck?”

“They want me to witness tomorrow. Say that I did it because I was under the influence of an evil man tempting me to sin.” Castiel shakes his head. “I also have to tell the congregation that I’m gay. Or was. They say the Lord will help me to heal and I’ll be reborn free of sin once I do this.” He says the words, trying to find some grain of hope left that they’re right or true and this really will be a new beginning.

“Um, You know that’s bullshit, right?”

Cas squints at Chuck. “It’s the teaching of Christ. I thought you of all people would be aware of that. Though you do seem remarkably at peace with your damnation.”

“Cas, I don’t think I’m going to hell for being queer,” Chuck says, earnest and calm. “There’s nothing like that in the Bible. Hell, don’t even think there is a hell.”

“What?” Chuck could be speaking in tongues for all the sense it makes to Cas.

“Let me guess: you’ve been carrying this inside you for a long time – the gay thing. You spent your whole life praying for God to fix you or cleanse you or whatever.”

“But he never did.”
“You ever think that’s because you didn’t need to be fixed?”

Cas closes his eyes, remembering the first time Dean told him he wasn’t broken. The idea seems so foolish, even now. “After a while, I just started praying for help or a sign or something to show me the way. And it never came.” Cas swallows. “I must be so terrible in God’s eyes, so sinful, to not even merit that.”

“You ever hear that joke about the drowning man?”

Cas looks back up at Chuck. “I don’t see where this is going.”

“So, this guy is drowning. And he prays ‘Oh God, please save me! I have faith in you!’ And a lifeboat comes by and offers him help but he says ‘No. God will save me. I have faith.’ So the lifeboat goes off and the guy drowns and dies.”

“This isn’t very hopeful.”

“So he’s up in heaven and he meets God and he says ‘God! I prayed to you! Why didn’t you save me?’ And God says: ‘What do you think the lifeboat was for?!’”

Cas stares at Chuck, his mind working both too fast and not fast enough. “Are you telling me that God works in mysterious ways?”

“I’m saying the same thing I’ve been trying to tell Gabe for years. He thinks because good people suffer, that God is either not there or must be a total asshole, but God gave us free will, and through that suffering happens, but also so much good. Ephesians 4:2: ‘Whoever lives in love, lives in God, and God in them.’ God is found in the love between us. When we help each other, when we love each other, no matter how: that’s God.”

In a lifetime of sermons and gospel, he’s never heard anything so clear or simple. The closest he can remember is Dean talking about seeing God in the stars and trees. There had been no trees to look at that night, no leaves to enjoy. It had made him think of Dean’s eyes.

“You think God sent me a lifeboat and I didn’t see it?” Cas asks carefully.

“I’m kinda certain of it.”

Cas tries to look at it how Chuck might. Try to see where God is trying to help him. On one side is the offer of a new life, new birth and salvation. On the other side is…uncertainty, hurt and loneliness. But freedom might be worth that.

“Oh, honey!” They look up to see Gabe returning to the chapel. “Merry Christmas, I got us in.”

“We don’t even know what to look for,” Chuck groans. “Or that he’s even doing anything.”

“He is,” Cas says, finally certain of something. “The extra money would come in as donations from Saint Mary’s hospital,” Cas says. Chuck stares at him in shock and Gabe’s smile becomes a grin. “And as for outbound, I would look for any causes that have to do with Bartholomew Boyle.”

“Ooo. I like this one,” Gabe smirks. “You wanna get to work?”

“As long as you’re okay?” Chuck says, looking to Cas.

“I’m not, but….you have given me some things to think about.”

“Are you gonna go through with it? Tomorrow?” Chuck asks.
“Do you think God wants me to?”

Chuck shakes his head. “I can’t speak for him, you gotta figure out what you want. The rest will work itself out.”

“Nice to meet ya,” Gabe says with a wave.

The two retreat and leave Castiel alone in the empty sanctuary. He doesn’t feel like praying anymore. Or maybe he doesn’t feel like God is there to listen. He walks back out of the church and onto the road, trying to remember a time when he did feel that way or if churches and holy places had always been marked more by the absence of something than what they held.

He gets colder as he walks, even when he switches to a jog. It’s not a short journey, and with a mile to go before he reaches home, it begins to snow. It’s light; icy, dry flakes that dust the world like powdered sugar. It’s beautiful.

He remembers watching out the window as a child any time there was a chance of snow. He could always smell it in the air. He’s say up late, hoping and praying and waiting for the first flakes to be visible in the beams of the street light. You can’t just see snow at night, you have to look for it. Even now, with a light dusting, he loves how it makes the world quiet and clean. Everyone even seems to move slower, just to watch the flakes fall. And even now, it fills his soul with wonder that something so simple can be so beautiful.

He doesn’t want to go inside when he reaches home, but he can’t feel his hands or face, so it seems like a wise decision to do so. Anna is waiting in the kitchen.

“Oh my God, Cas, you were running?” She jumps up instantly, moving to hug him on instinct then winces back. “I’ll make you some tea.”

“Thank you.” Anna sets the kettle to boil and grabs a sweater from the closet to hand to Cas. As she does he catches a glimpse of tan. “Is that my coat?”

Anna turns to him with a wary smile. “I saved it. Your mom had a whole good will box ready to go. I didn’t let any of your stuff in.”

“Thank you,” Cas repeats, quieter and more sincere this time. “I didn’t expect you to want to do anything for me.”

“Cas, I’m still your wife.” Anna keeps saying that like it means everything. Should it?

“Why though?” Cas asks, the thought striking him suddenly. “Why keep up this marriage when I hurt you? Why marry me at all or remain with me knowing my sins?”

“Because I love you. I always have and I want to be with you for the rest of my life. No matter what you’ve done, or chose to do tomorrow…I still love you.”

“And if I do this, if I stand up in front of everyone and shame myself and you and beg God’s forgiveness for what I did with Dean; you really think that can be a new beginning for us?” He shudders to think of how the congregation will look at them. Maybe in the same horrible way they look at friends recovering from illness – so brave and pitiable, so lucky for God to have tested them and found them adequate.

“Yes. Yes I do. I know you don’t have a choice tomorrow, if you want to protect Sam, and I’m sorry it’s come to that. Cas, I’m sorry I’ve spent so long trying to change you, or control you, the way you mom does,” Anna goes on, approaching him slowly. “But I can change too. I can try and be what
you need. We don’t need to be alone, and if it takes you a while to trust me or touch me again. I understand that too.”

“And if I can’t do that? Touch you?” He read the articles that Michael forwarded, about how God loves all his children but hates their sin. As long as he’s celibate, it’s almost good enough…

“We’ll find ways. And if you want to—” Anna gulps, and bites her lips. “If you wanted to see Dean—”

Castiel’s stomach twists at the thought, not just the guilt of it but at how much he wants it. How easy it could be. The sound of a door closing upstairs jolts him from the thought. “No. I won’t do that. I’m doing this to protect Dean and Sam and I won’t undo that.”

“I won’t put Sam at risk, I swear. I do care about him. And Dean.” He knows Anna isn’t lying, which makes all of it worse.

“It doesn’t matter. My mother would. She’d find out and…” Cas shakes his head. It doesn’t even matter. “And Dean doesn’t want anything to do with me now anyway. He won’t answer my calls or texts.”

“Then what have you got to lose tomorrow? Certainly not him.” Anna lays a hand over Cas’s and he doesn’t pull away. “And you have everything to gain. Peace. Forgiveness. Family.”

Is this the lifeboat? If it is, shouldn’t it feel more like a rescue and less like drowning?

Dean takes a final look at the room. It’s not much and not half as nice as Sam’s room at the Novak place, or even half the size. But Sam’s got a desk and a twin bed with new sheets and a window with a view of the front gate to the salvage yard. The window in Dean’s room looks over the few trees Bobby has growing on the edge of his land. He figured out this morning that is faces East when the light of dawn woke him to pound on his head and hangover. At least booze was the only bad decision he made last night.

He switches off the light. The room is good enough and should make Dean feel hopeful and happy, not like he’s drowning in guilt. It does anyway.

He’s not expecting the doorbell to ring. Mainly because he didn’t know Bobby had a doorbell. Tori starts barking from inside. It took Sam all of five minutes on Thanksgiving for Sam to convince Bobby to let her in and she’s been parked in front of the space heater under Bobby’s desk since. Except now she’s growling at the door as the visitor keeps ringing and knocking.

“Get back,” Dean hisses at the dog as he opens the door. “Sorry, Bobby’s out right now but – Sam?”

Sam shoves inside, brushing snow of his windbreaker. “Took you long enough to get the door. It’s freezing.”

“Sammy, what the hell?” Dean demands, rushing after Sam to the living room. Sam scratches behind Tori’s ears as he seats himself by the heater. “How did you get here?”

“I took the bus and then I walked,” Sam answers.
“Jesus Christ, why?” Dean pulls out his phone and starts scrolling for his contacts. “I’m calling Zeke right now.”

“No!” Sam yelps, jumps and grabs the phone from Dean’s hands.

“Hey! You’re not supposed to be here, Sam. I know Anna is a pain sometimes but—”

“I’m here because Anna and Cas’s mom are gonna make him do something really bad, and I can’t call you so I had to tell you in person!” Sam says, jumping back into distress.

“What are you talking about? What are they gonna make him do?” Dean feels sick at the thought of what Naomi and Anna could be up to now.

“They want him to testify or something? The weird thing they do at his church where they stand up and talk about their sins. They’re making Cas do that and say God’s gonna make him not be gay or something.”

Dean has to sit down. He can’t believe Anna would do that. No, this has Naomi’s stink all over it. “What the fuck? Why would Cas ever…”

“I don’t know. I heard him and Anna talking and it sounds like his mom is making him because…of me?” Fuck, Dean’s going to be sick. “Dean, what does this have to do with me?”

“Sammy, I…”

“Are they gonna take me away from you? Is that it?” Sam pushes on. “Because I’ll tell Zeke they’re lying. I will. Do they know something I don’t? Is it the bi thing? Because that does not matter.”

“No, it’s not that, not really. I—” Dean’s skin feels too tight and he can’t breathe and he doesn’t want Sam to know this or see that side of him.

“Dean, please, just tell me. Unless you like, murdered someone, I promise it’s okay.” Dean looks into his brothers eyes. There’s nothing but love and faith there. He doesn’t deserve it, but fuck, he’s got to believe in it.

“I didn’t kill anyone, okay? But I did do bad things. I needed money and I had nothing else and…” Dean swallows as Sam’s brows furrow.

“Did you sell drugs or something?”

“No. I sold myself.” He watches Sam blink slowly, watches the understanding dawn and waits for the hate and pity and disgust to eclipse the confusion. It doesn’t happen. “Do I need to be clearer? I was a hooker.”

“I got that. Dean, I’m…” Dean braces himself. “I’m sorry. I bet that was…really hard.”

Dean blinks. “You’re not angry? Or grossed out?”

“It’s not great, okay. But you did what you had to do, right?”

“Yeah…”

Sam shrugs. “Then I can be okay. I still think you’re a good person.”

“I’m not though,” Dean mutters. He closes his eyes and sees Benny’s face. And Aaron’s and Jody’s and Brice’s and they all dissolved into Azazel and Ishim laughing.
“Why do you think that?”

“Because I’m fucking selfish. I’m letting bad people get away with bad shit because I don’t want the world to know what I did. And I’m not just talkin’ about Cas and his stupid family.”

Dean dares to look at Sam. He looks flummoxed, like he’s trying to reconcile the idea of his hero big brother with the lying, failure of a whore he’s looking at now. “So Cas knows? About what you did?”

“That’s how I met Cas, Sammy.”

“Oh.” Now Sam looks like he’s revising everything he ever thought about Cas too.

“He wasn’t ever like other, uh, clients though, okay?” Dean says quickly. “Never. He was always special. Always…good.”

Sam’s face melts into a warm smile. “You guys fell in love while he was paying you for sex? I’ve seen that movie.”

Dean groans. “I told you Sam, Cas doesn’t—”

“Yes, he does.” Sam sounds absolutely sure of it and Dean has to close his eyes to block out the conviction in Sam’s face. “If Naomi is making him do this by threatening to - what? tell the authorities about you and get me taken away? - that means he’s doing it because he loves you.”

“Sam…”

“And if you love him, you won’t let him do that.”

“Sam, I can’t stop him,” Dean counters. “I can’t do fuckall because I love you. I won’t let them take you away. And Cas doesn’t want me interfering. If he did, he’d answer my damn calls and texts and tell me himself.”

“What? He said you weren’t calling him back. He’s totally depressed and Anna’s telling him all this stuff about new beginnings and…”

“Were you eavesdropping on them?”

“Yeah, of course. But the point is: Cas might want to do this because he thinks you’re okay with it!”

“That’s Cas’s choice,” Dean sighs. “I can’t make it for him.”

Sam scowls at him. “Okay, then, what do you want?”

“What?” Dean doesn’t understand. What he’s wanted has never mattered.

“Do you want to make the bad guys pay?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Do you want to be with Cas, if you could be?”

Dean looks down. He doesn’t know why the answer fills him with shame. “More than anything, I think. But that’s not on the table.”

“Dean, I love you too. But helping people is more important than me,” Sam says with total
earnestness. “I don’t want to be the reason that people get hurt, whether it’s strangers or you or Cas. If Zeke knowing what you did gets me taken away? We’ll deal with it. But I don’t want to be a hostage and I sure as hell don’t want to be the thing that keeps you from being happy.”

Dean swallows, not even fighting the tears filling his eyes. “Sammy…”

He’s not prepared for the hug and it knocks the wind out of him. “Dean, I believe in you. And that if we do the right thing, it will work out.”

“Thanks, Sammy,” Dean whispers into his brother’s hair. For the first time in a long time he feels lighter and free. And pretty damn sure of what he’s gonna do. “Now, give me my damn phone.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m still calling Zeke to take you home,” Dean replies. “And then I’ve got a lot of other calls to make.”

_________

Castiel’s alarm goes off at the same time as usual. He’s always hated that anemic beeping and the last few weeks of using his phone had been a welcome relief. Today it’s his alarm clock. Sitting comfortably on the nightstand. Black plastic. Red numbers. Set on top of pale maple. The windows are closed and he can’t see the bare tree branches gilded with snow. He can’t stand to turn around and see Anna beside him.

He turns his eyes to the painting on the wall. It’s new. Splashes of red and blue at war, violent and jarring. They don’t blend, but the green around them… it does. It makes the blue deeper but turns the red a rusty brown. He never tired to find meaning in Anna’s art. He accepted the beauty, but he needed poetry to tell a story. Perhaps that was a mistake. She’s been showing him her heart for years – seeing them as two colors that will never blend together.

“Good morning,” Anna says softly from beside him. “Did you sleep okay?”

“No.”

The evening was quiet and fraught, after Zeke brought Sam home. Anna had been furious and sent him to his room, over Castiel’s protests. His mother had been there when he arrived, ostensibly for dinner, but in reality to remind Castiel of his obligations for Sunday. With her hovering and Anna punishing, Sam hadn’t even been allowed to explain and that made Castiel even more suspicious and angry.

He escaped and tried to call Dean again. He tried to call Bobby Singer. He tried to call Chuck and no one had answered. His mother found him and scowled at him and he’d given up. When Naomi was gone and Sam’s door was shut against him, Anna asked him, humble and gentle, to sleep in their bed. And he gave up again. He spent hours staring at the ceiling and thinking of God and lifeboats and love and obligation and then he gave up again and took a pill to sleep. Because he thought he was tired of the fight and the search.

He was wrong. Somehow, waking up next to Anna makes that clear. He wasn’t tired of the fight. He was tired of giving up. He’s tired of drowning.
He doesn’t say another word to Anna. He showers and shaves and combs him hair and dresses in his best suit. He ties his tie with extra care and goes downstairs to make coffee while Anna takes her turn getting ready.

He heads outside while his cup fills. Dean’s seat at the corner is vacant and covered with snow. There are no leaves left and the world is silent and empty. Dean saw God here, in his way. The memory of Dean’s faith, Dean’s defiance, Dean’s light: It makes Castiel consider praying, one more time.

He’s tired of prayers of surrender and desperation. To this day there was only one time he prayed unselfishly, begged God to save the man he loved. He thought that was the only prayer God ever answered, and he never considered why.

He doesn’t pray for a sign or for a miracle. Just forgiveness for what he’s about to do.

Sam is waiting by the coffee when Cas comes inside.

“Cas, you don’t have to do this. Whatever they’re gonna make you do, you don’t have to,” Sam says without prelude.

“Is that why you were at Dean’s? You heard us talking and wanted him to stop this?” Cas asks. He expected, but he wasn’t sure until now.

“Yeah. And he thinks it’s crap too and——” Sam gulps.

“He didn’t say that, did he?”

“He implied it,” Sam huffs.

“He still isn’t answering my calls,” Cas says. He’s not angry about it. Just sad he has to do this alone.

Sam furrows his brow. “What? He said you weren’t answering his.”

“What?”

“We’re going to be late. Your mother is waiting outside,” Anna says, her voice tight and tense as she enters the kitchen. “Sam, please stay put while we’re out.”

“And if I don’t?” Sam snaps back. “Are you going to make me write how bad I was on a chalk board until God likes me again or something?”

“Sam,” Anna gasps. “Don’t talk about things you don’t understand.”

“I understand that you’re screwing with my life because——”

The sound of a key in the front door stops Sam. Cas doesn’t even have to look to know it’s his mother walking in. “What is all this yelling about? Castiel, Anna, I don’t like to be kept waiting.”

“It’s nothing, Naomi,” Anna replies. “Sam, you have homework.”

Sam glares at Anna and turns away, muttering.

“Sam,” Castiel calls. Sam turns to him with hope in his face that breaks his heart. “Thank you.” Sam looks like Castiel just punched him, but he nods and goes up stairs. “Let’s go,” Cas says.

He makes sure his mother sees him open the closet and take out his old coat. “Where did you get
“It doesn’t matter. We’ll be late,” Castiel replies.

Castiel has never been sent to execution, obviously, so he doesn’t know if that’s what this feels like. But he’s been to tests and interviews. Once he was called to the principal’s office when he was suspected of cheating. He hadn’t cheated, of course. His perfect score was legitimate, but the teacher hadn’t trusted that and had looked at him with suspicion all year. He feels that now. The creeping dread, the world crumbling under his feet if he doesn’t take the right steps. There’s a chasm waiting to swallow him if he falls.

He rides in the back seat, like an errant child, and watches the snow. It’s already half melted, leaving puddles of gray mush on the side of the road. He wonders if the people downtown are warm. He thinks of Dean sleeping in the Impala, covered in snow.

Everyone is there at the church. Michael and Rachel stand next to Luke and Lilith. The children are already downstairs for Sunday school. Their parents certainly don’t want them exposed to the filthy things Castiel is going to confess. They file in together, Naomi leading the clan to the front pew. Castiel sees so many people he knows in the crowd. Daniel and Adina, Hester and Inias. Tessa is there, glaring from the back and he knows she’s never attended before. Anna must have called her. Alfie is seated in the middle rows, next to his parents. He looks ashamed and he won’t meet Castiel’s gaze. Uriel is closer to the front, looking calm and satisfied. Ishim is beside him and he stares Castiel down like he can send him straight to the fires with the sheer force of his hate. Hannah isn’t beside him, but she is there in crowd, at the back…with Chuck and Gabe sitting next to her.

Castiel knows he won’t be allowed to speak to them. He certainly doesn’t want Zachariah to know they’re there. His eyes drift to the rest of the crowd. Friends and acquaintances too numerous to name. People he’s grown up with, went to school with, works with. And entire life in one room.

Zachariah appears to greet them before they sit, embracing Naomi before turning to Castiel. “So, will you be testifying today?” he asks.

Castiel feels his family holding their breath, waiting, the eyes of the congregation and his friends on him already. “Yes,” he answers, surprised by his own calm. Out of the corner of his eye he sees Anna sigh and smile in absolute relief and on the other side, his mother's look of triumph.

“I’m glad to hear that, Castiel,” Zachariah says with a grin and heads back to the pulpit to begin the service.

“So am I,” Naomi adds.

Castiel sits, listens to the quiet fall over the congregation and waits.

“Good morning, all,” Zachariah begins. “I hope you all had a blessed holiday. I myself had a very interesting time, and it got me thinking. The human soul is like a turkey.”

Castiel sighs. He’s going to have to wait through this entire sermon, isn’t he?

“The soul is raw, and unclean at first,” Zachariah goes on. “Because it is full of sin. All of us are born sinning and unclean, we are born flawed and it is only through following God’s laws that we can be saved. It is only through accepting that Christ died for your sins that our turkeys can be cooked in the fire of God’s love and we are finally ready to be one with the Lord. Yes, I see some of you smiling. It’s a silly metaphor, but it’s not wrong. We must all face that fiery forge of salvation, we must all place our trust in God's light or be cast into the eternal fires of hell."
“Amen,” Naomi says on one side of Castiel, her eyes alight with hope and devotion.

“In light of that, I’d like to open the floor up to you, my friends.” Zachariah looks directly at him and Castiel’s blood runs cold. “As we return from giving thanks, it is time for you to open your hearts, let the light if God in, and cleanse yourself of sin. It is time to be reborn.”

He closes his eyes and listens to the quiet one more time. Someone coughs. A door opens as someone enters late. Another person whispers. There’s no more waiting.

“I would like to testify,” Castiel says, opening his eyes. His voice feels small, muffled by the fear and the attention focused on him. He feels himself tremble as he stands and a murmur goes up.

“Brother Castiel, please come forward,” Zachariah says with a grin. Castiel keeps his steps steady, keeps his eyes down as he walks forward. “What would you like to say, here in the sight of God? Remember, my friends, these confessions are sacred and are not to be judged or shared. These words are between Castiel and his God.”

“Your God,” Cas corrects, finally raising his eyes to Zachariah and the empty altar behind him.

“Excuse me?” Zachariah stammers.

“This is your God, not mine. He was never mine,” Cas goes on as the whispers of the congregation break into a murmur.

“Castiel,” his mother hisses from behind him. “We have been over this. Think of that boy before you do something stupid.”

He does think of Sam, and Dean, and he falters. Maybe he should...

“Hey, excuse me!”

Cas spins, blinking because he’s not sure what he’s seeing if not a dream. Or a miracle. “Dean.”

“Sorry, we’re kinda late,” Dean says, bright and defiant as he walks down the aisle with Sam right beside him. At the back of the chapel by the door is Jody Mills, of all people, with another uniformed officer with blonde hair beside her. “Glad I made it, I heard it was show and tell time. Oh, heya, Cas.”

“What are you doing here?” Naomi demands, standing up with such aggression Cas is worried for Dean’s safety.

“I thought everyone was welcome in the house of the Lord?” Dean replies, smirking and another wave of chatter ripples around him. “And I got shit to say.”

“You’ll need to wait your turn,” Zachariah sneers.

“Never been one for waiting, actually,” Dean says. He stops halfway down the aisle. “You mind me horning in on your time, Cas?”

“No,” Cas replies, voice soft with wonder.

“Cool. I figure I need some practice testifying, since I’m gonna be doing it in court someday soon. See, folks, I’m a big ol’ queer. Always have been, no matter what my dad wanted. And I'm a whore. Or I was. And you know what? I’m not ashamed of that.” The congregation is too shocked to even whisper, but Cas finds himself beginning to smile. Link by link, Dean is breaking the chain holding
both of them. "I did what I had to to survive. And I refuse to be ashamed of it because I did survive. I survived even with assholes all around who though it was okay to beat the shit out of a guy because he’s queer. I’m talking about this fucker by the way."

Dean points and every set of eyes in the congregation falls on the target: Ishim.

“This is absurd!” Ishim blusters, rising and moving to rush at Dean.

Sam steps in front of him, face full of fire. "You try and hurt my brother again and I will break your face."

"And I will help you." Hannah rises from the back of the church and advances, fixing his cousin with a look of wrath. "Please sit down, Ishim. You'll have time to confess later. Maybe after Uriel explains how he used the fact you knew Dean's past to blackmail him into confessing to his many financial crimes."

"How dare you?" Uriel growls.

"Luckily, I've made sure ample evidence of those crimes is in the hands of the proper authorities," Hannah adds. "And I'll be happy to testify against my dear cousin with you, Dean."

"You still have no evidence!" Ishim say on top as the crowd begins to murmur in earnest.

"Actually I do." Dean looks back at Cas and gives him a wink. “Turns out I have a friend with some real interesting pictures and he can testify about finding me bleeding on his floor. My friend Jody’s here to take you in, but if you want to stay for the rest of the show, you’re welcome to. Granted, she's got a busy day ahead because she's gonna arrest some of the other assholes that thought they could leave me bloody and get away with it."

“This is an outrage!” Ishim huffs, looking between Dean, Zachariah and Jody for some chance of escape.

“Yeah, it really is, because you and Urinal here give all these people a bad name,” Dean says and turns back towards the front of the church. “You too, Zach. You talk about God’s love and grace but it’s all a bunch of BS. You believe in hate. Hating people for who they screw or how they vote or what they believe. That ain’t God. It’s fear and I’m not going to let you use it to hurt…” Dean swallows, locking eyes with Cas. “To hurt someone I love.”

Cas takes a shuddering breath. Maybe the sun came out, maybe reality just shifted, but the colors of the world suddenly seem brighter, especially the green of Dean’s eyes.

“Sorry to say this so public, but I think someone blocked my number on your phone,” Dean goes on with a crooked smile. He takes a step closer to Cas, then another, his voice growing softer. “Cas, I don’t know if I believe in God, or heaven, or any of it. But I believe in you. You’re the best person I know, and I’m not going to let these assholes tell you otherwise. I’m not going to let what I did or who I am get used against you anymore. I’m not gonna let you take the fall or pretend to be something you don’t want to be because of fear. Now everyone knows. Sam knows. And Zeke knows too. So, you can make your big confession however you want, but don’t do it for me. Don’t do it for them. Do what you want for you. And I’ll love you either way.”

It’s strange. Castiel had heard such similar words from Anna yesterday, but this means so much more.

“Do you hear that, Castiel? you still have a chance,” Naomi hisses, stepping closer and grabbing his arm. "Forget about Uriel and all of this other nonsense. Think about your future. Think about your
soul."

Cas doesn’t look at her. Or Anna or any of the people that are staring at him, waiting. He can’t look away from Dean or he’ll fall. And right now is his chance to fly.

“T—I love you,” Cas says, plain and easy. The most important words he’ll ever say.

Dean smiles.

"I have never loved anyone more than I love you. And I didn’t know for long time what that meant. I have been searching my whole life for something, asking God for a sign or to save me. And I thought he didn’t hear me but I was wrong. He sent me you. Every time I have needed faith, you were there. Every time I was lost you, found me. And I have never felt holier than when I am with you. Someone told me recently that God is the love between us.” Behind Dean, he sees Chuck smile. “And with all my heart and soul, I love you, Dean, and that is not a sin.”

Everything happens quickly. Someone starts clapping, someone else starts yelling but Cas still doesn’t look away from Dean. He crosses the distance between them and kisses the man he loves in the sight of God all the world. The congregation explodes around them, voices crying out, hollers of approval. It doesn’t matter.

Dean kisses him back, wraps him in his arms, and finally, Cas is reborn. Finally, he is free.

Chapter End Notes

warnings:
-None!

Haha, got ya.

I told you I would make it happy.

Brice is the cute deputy from "Hibbing 911" btw.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Um, holy crap, guys, I can't believe this is done. And like, several days ahead of schedule. Everything just sort of poured out of me the last few days and so here it is. The final chapter. It's not short either. No warnings on this one. Just love. And a little surprise at the end.

Readers, cementers, friends that have stuck with me through this giant thing, especially Nicky and Alison: Thank you. Thank you so much. This story means so much to me and it fills my heart with joy that it's meant something to you too. Your words and encouragement and support means the world to me. To know that in some small way, this has helped you or touched you...guys, it's amazing and I'm sort of crying right now.

There are no warnings on this chapter beyond anything from before. And I'll have a few notes at the end. For now: enjoy.

Dean should be used to doing things in public by now, he thinks. It’s not like he’s ever had the luxury of doing this stuff in the privacy of home. It’s always been back alleys and borrowed spaces. Never quite like this though. It’s one thing to tell a guy you love him, but it’s another thing to say it in front of a hundred people in his goddamn church. And yet kissing Cas has never felt so intimate or so right. He pulls back, just to see those blue eyes again and smile. It’s just them, with the world crashing all around, and it’s perfect.

“Did we just get married?” Dean asks, quiet, just for Cas.

“I should get divorced first,” he murmurs back, arms around Dean’s waist.

“And maybe date some.”

“Excuse me!” someone yells at them but neither of them look away.

“Hope you don’t mind me crashing your party,” Dean says. “I almost didn’t make it. Sam made me promise to take him. Donna and Jody got here before us.”

Dean spent most of last night at the police station, explaining everything to Jody in minute detail, along with Benny, whose pictures and corroboration cemented everything. Shit with the Hell Hounds is gonna be harder to figure out, but there are other people on it. Jody at least got a message to Aaron to get out of Dodge.

“It was quite dramatic,” Cas replies. “I did have a speech prepared, you know, and you ruined it. It was very moving. I was going to tell everyone that their God could go fuck himself. And that I would rather live alone than live a lie.”

“Sorry,” Dean mutters. “But you don’t have to do the alone thing. Not anymore.”

Cas kisses him again, and the chatter around them gets louder and angrier. It still doesn’t matter because Dean loves this idiot, and by some miracle, Cas loves him back.
“Uh, guys, I think someone is getting arrested,” Sam interrupts, pulling at Dean’s sleeve. They part reluctantly and turn to see Ishim and Uriel arguing loudly with Jody and Donna. Somewhere in the chaos Chuck, Hannah and some other dude Dean doesn’t know crowded around him and Sam. Cas turns back to the spectacle, but he keeps ahold of Dean’s hand.

“Now, Sirs,” Donna says, calmly cutting through the yelling. “We can do this hard or easy. We’re just here for Mr. Sunder.”

“How can you arrest this man when there are trespassers right there!” Zachariah yells, jabbing the air in the direction of Dean and Cas as Jody steps around him and grabs Ishim. “They are not welcome here and engaging in public indecency!”

Jody gives them a look over Ishim’s head as she secures his cuffs. “I don’t see anything indecent there, Mr. Adler, just two people in love.” Ishim winces as Jody finishes the cuffs with an extra hard yank.

“You’re all going to hell,” Ishim growls.

“I don’t think you get to decide that, Mr. Sunder,” Jody says. “And if anyone is interested, All Souls over on Burnaby street welcomes everyone, if you’d like a different place next Sunday.” Jody sends Dean and Cas a wink. Dean squeezes Cas’s hand, it’s good to know he has somewhere to go, if he wants to.

“Well these degenerates are certainly not welcome here!” Uriel thunders advancing from the pew towards Dean and Cas.

Donna steps in front of him, placing a hand on his chest. “Like I said, sir, this doesn’t have to be hard.”

“Get your hands off me, you filthy cunt,” Uriel growls and swats Donna’s hand away. In one smooth movement Donna grabs his arm and twists it behind him, and pulls out her cuffs.

“Don’t ya know that threatening an officer is a bad idea?” Donna says with a smile as Uriel grunts in frustration. “But at least your friend here will have company in custody.”

“Does anyone else want to be arrested? Because I only have one more pair of cuffs,” Jody asks the uneasy crowd.

“I would like these sinners to leave my church!” Zachariah bellows, glaring at their group blocking the aisle. Dean squeezes Cas’s hand, even though he seems unbothered.

“Don’t worry, we’re going,” Cas says, firm and calm.

“But, before we do!” The blonde guy next to Chuck pipes up, raising a finger. “I wanted to remind everyone on the Church email list to check their inbox when they get home for some fascinating video subscription and financial information about your beloved Mr. Adler.”

Chuck groans and shakes his head. “Gabe. You didn’t.”

“Hells yeah I did,” Gabe grins. “No one fires my boo and gets off scot free.”

Chuck closes his eyes and Dean’s pretty sure he’s praying for the strength not to commit murder in a church. “Thanks, and please never call me your boo again.”

“You have no sense of romance,” Gabe shrugs.
“This is outrageous! I want everyone who is not here for the true message of God to get OUT!”
Zachariah yells, face red and mouth frothing.

“Oh, but we’re having fun!” Gabe laughs, elbowing Chuck. “Before we go, can we do the making out thing too? I think Pants Suit over there might actually burst into flames if she sees more man-on-man action.”

Dean follows Gabe’s gaze to Naomi. She’s standing at the front with Cas’s brothers and Anna clustered behind her like dour-faced gang. Behind them there’s continued commotion as Ishim and Uriel are escorted out. Zachariah breathes heavily as some of the congregation retakes their seats, other still seem confused.

“You’ve been asked to leave,” Naomi says calmly, eyes fixed on Dean. “Please do so.”

“No one wants to stay here in your stupid church anyway,” Sam sneers back. Anna finally looks up, meeting Dean’s eyes with a look of deep pain before turning to Sam.

“Actually, Sam, you need to stay here,” Anna says quietly. “You’re still placed at our house until the court makes a decision tomorrow.”

It’s Cas’s turn to clench Dean’s hand in comfort. He breathes through the anger. They knew this was coming. Still, Sam turns to him with worry in his face. “Dean…”

“It’s okay, Sammy,” Dean says. “Go with her. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Sam nods and pulls Dean into a hug. “I’m really proud of you,” he says, smiling up at him. He turns to Cas and locks him in a hug as well. Dean loves the way Cas’s face softens from surprise to affection. “You too, Cas.”

“Thank you, Sam,” Cas whispers.

Sam walks to the Novaks with heavy steps as Naomi stares them down. “Tomorrow certainly will be interesting,” she says.

“Mother, it’s over. No more threats,” Cas says and Dean’s heart swells with pride.

Naomi shakes her head. She doesn’t look angry anymore, not really. Just sad and resigned and so, so disappointed. “You’re right. It is over. Or it will be if you insist on living like this.”

“I’m not insisting on anything,” Cas replies. Dean retakes the hand he’d let go of to hug Sam. Whatever Cas is going to say or do, Dean wants him to know he’s not doing it alone. “I’m gay. It’s who I am. The only choice here is for you to accept it or not.”

“I don’t,” Naomi says without a second of hesitation. “If you walk out of here, with him, you have no place in this family or this church or in my life.”

“Then I’m sorry. For hurting you, all of you, I truly am,” Cas says and looks at Anna when he says it. “But I won’t be sorry for living my life and being who I am. Exactly as God intended me to be. Come on, Dean. Goodbye.”

Dean doesn’t let go of Cas’s hand as they walk back down the aisle. He holds tight and watches Cas, who doesn’t look back. Dean does though, because there’s noise behind them, the sound of movement and murmurs too loud for just Chuck, Gabe and Hannah to be following. Sure enough, at least a third of the congregation is walking out behind them. Cas doesn’t see until they get out into the parking lot, but his face fills with awe as he does.
“Guess you inspired some folks,” Dean says. His notices a pair of teen girls standing by a car, one crying and the other saying something fervently before hugging her. Then they kiss. “Like, really inspired.”

Cas doesn’t say anything, but his eyes look moist.

“That was amazing, Cas,” Chuck says, joining them and following Dean’s eyeline to the young couple. “Looks like Siobhan and Kristen liked it.”

“It was. We’re all quite impressed,” Hannah adds, more cheerful than Dean has ever seen him. “What are you going to do now?”

“I don’t know,” Cas says with a wry smile. “I should probably figure out where I’m going to be sleeping tonight.”

“Dude,” Dean sighs. “You’re coming to Bobby’s.”

“Am I?” Cas asks back, and Dean has no idea if he’s fucking with him or serious.

“Well, he doesn’t have a guest room, but I think we can find a spot for ya.”

“I think I could be agreeable to that.” Cas smiles, that real, warm, perfect smile that Dean can’t get enough of and it makes perfect sense to kiss him. He could get used to this out in public thing.

“Aw, see how cute they are, honey,” Gabe says, breaking the moment. When Dean looks over, Gabe has his eyes on Chuck. “That could be us but you playin’.”

“That is–” Chuck sputters. “What does that even mean? I am not playing!”

“Who is this guy again?” Dean asks.

“My sorta boyfriend,” Chuck mutters.

“Don’t undersell it, I’m the love of his life,” Gabe replies with a smirk.

“Fuck you,” Chuck grumbles.

“Later,” Gabe shoots.

Hannah has obviously had enough. “Let’s go find lunch or anything else to get out of Dean and Castiel’s hair. I’m sure they have a lot to talk about.”

“Ooo, Waffles?” Gabe asks with a grin.

“Sure, fine.” Chuck doesn’t leave though. “As long as you’re both okay?”

“We’re fine, or we will be,” Cas says. “Thank you, Chuck. For everything.”

“Call me anytime,” Chuck replies.

They wave and the trio heads towards a beat-up Nissan as Cas and Dean walk hand in hand to the Impala. The let go just long enough to get inside.

“Before you go calling Chuck, we should probably un-fuck your phone,” Dean says.

“And then I need to get a few clothes,” Cas replies. “If you don’t mind driving me to the store.”
“Anywhere you want to go,” Dean replies and Cas looks at him with such adoration it makes him blush. “As long as we’re finally getting you some goddamn jeans.”

Dean barely stops touching Cas for the rest of the day, not just because he wants to but because they can and fuck anyone that says otherwise. They huddle in the car and unblock Dean and Chuck and Bobby and a slew of others from Castiel’s phone, and correct his phonebook as well. It makes Dean furious to know Naomi was working so hard to keep them apart and doubly so to see how much it hurts Cas. He kisses Cas to comfort him and spite her as well.

He stays close to Cas in the store, even when he sees an old woman with white hair and a pink jacket give them a look. He stares her down while Cas looks for his size of jeans and she huffs away. She won’t be the last to look at them that way and Dean hates it, but it’s better than hiding. He holds Cas’s hands going into the market and through the drive through and all the way up Bobby’s front steps.

“Are you sure I’m welcome here?” Cas asks, hesitating at the threshold.

“Bobby said so,” Dean says. “Come on, get inside before you catch cold.”

“Viruses don’t work that way, Dean.” Dean pulls Cas inside before he can argue more.

“So, you got him?” Bobby asks, wheeling from the kitchen as soon as they’re inside. Cas raises an eyebrow.

“Yeah, I got him,” Dean says.

“And Sam?”

Dean’s anxiety spikes like an icicle to the gut. “We’ll find out tomorrow.”

“Well, one’s not bad,” Bobby says, looking Cas over. “Take off that coat and settle in. I’m glad to have you, son.”

Seeing Cas smile at Bobby makes Dean’s heart hurt in the best way. “Come on, Cas, I’ll give you the tour.”

Dean shows Cas around the downstairs then lead him up to his room. The door creaks as they enter. Cas makes a careful circuit, it doesn’t take too long, since there’s not a lot to see. Even so Cas trails his fingers over the spines of books, traces the fading filigree on the wallpaper. He tests the quilt between his finger tips and it makes Dean catch his breath. He turns back to Dean and his eyes are bright in the afternoon light.

“You like it? I know it’s not perfect.”

“That’s what I like about it.”

Dean closes the distance between them, leaving just a breath of space between their bodies. Cas lifts his hand to Dean’s face and caresses him with the same reverence and care he gave the rest of the room. It makes Dean tremble.

“Are you okay?” Cas asks.

“I should be the one asking you that, you’ve had a big fucking day.”

“I’m not. There’s a lot to adjust to. But I’m here, and that means everything. And I asked you first.”
Dean finally dares to touch Cas back, tracing the solid line of his jaw. “I’m scared.”

“Me too. What are you scare of?”

“I’m scared that we’re not gonna get Sam back, and I’m scared that when I’m not some forbidden thing that you’re not going to want me. I’m scared that you’re gonna decide God doesn’t want you —”

He’s so relieved when Cas kisses him. It’s soft and loving and everything he needs. Everything they need. He holds Cas carefully, part of him still afraid he’ll disappear like a dream.

“Can you say it again?” Dean asks, barely above a whisper.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

He kisses Cas again, putting every ounce of longing and love he can into it. He’s pretty sure he’s not ready to get naked right now, but just touching Cas without fear is enough. He pulls him onto the bed and keeps kissing him.

They are not perfect, and things are not okay, but they are here together and it’s good enough for now.

Cas wakes in sheets that smell of Dean. They’re soft with age, and warm, but the space beside him is cold and empty. Cas sits up, worried. It’s still dark out, just a few hints of light on the horizon visible through the window. Castiel can’t find a sweater or robe, so he throws his trench on over his boxers and sleep shirt and pads through the quiet house.

Dean isn’t in the living room or kitchen, and Bobby is still snoring in his room, but the coffee maker is gurgling away and Tori is sulking by the front door. Cas steps outside into the cold to see Dean leaning on the Impala, looking at the sky.

“Dean?”

“Hey,” Dean replies, smiling at Cas. “I was gonna bring you some coffee.”

“I don’t know if I should, my new pills are still at…the other house.” He can’t call it home any more, can he?

“Like that ever stopped you.” Dean smirks as Cas joins him by the car. The ground is freezing, even through his socks, and the metal of the Impala even more so when he leans on it. But Dean is warm.

“I’m slightly more motivated to take care of myself now,” Cas mutters. “I will say that this is an interesting method you have for making coffee. Does the hypothermia bring out the flavor?”

“Anyone ever tell you you’re kind of an dick?”

“I was under the impression you liked that about me. Or did you mean my actual dick?” Dean laughs quietly and shakes his head and his smile is still the most beautiful thing Cas has ever seen, even in
the pale November twilight. “Why are you out here, Dean? Did I do something wrong?”

“What? No! You’re fucking awesome.”

Cas smiles at that. They were quiet last night, mostly, talking with Bobby and just enjoying the company. Dean had explained the situation with Jody and the upcoming raid and arrests for the Hell Hounds. The prosecution and processing on that case will take a while, but at least most of them will be off the streets, thanks to Aaron and Dean. There had been a few texts and calls with Hannah, Meg, and Chuck but nothing of great import. He had also sent one to Anna, asking for her to bring some of his things with her to Sam’s hearing. He didn’t receive a reply.

And then it was just him and Dean, alone in a bedroom that neither of them had to leave when things were done. And neither of them had really known what to do with that. It was unspoken, that they could take things slow now, and they did, just kissing and touching and embracing until they fell asleep, tangled together in shared warmth. It was wonderful, but Cas worried anyway.

“Good,” Cas says and waits for Dean to explain himself. “So why are you out in the cold instead of in bed with me?”

“You’re gonna laugh at me,” Dean sighs.

“I promise I won’t.”

“I was…praying.”

Cas stares at Dean in confusion and wonder. “To who?”

“What do you mean to who?” Dean scoffs and gestures at the brightening sky. “Fuckin’ God or the universe or whatever.”

Cas looks up at the sky, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “I didn’t think you believed.”

“I don’t know what I believe or how much, but, hell, I figure we can use all the help we can get today.” Cas treasures this: that Dean lets him see when he’s afraid.

“Then I’ll pray for it too,” Cas says easily.

“Really?” Dean asks with the same touched expression he has whenever Cas offers him something he doesn’t think he deserves.

“You know, I prayed for you, when you were unconscious in the hospital,” Cas tells him. “And it was the first time praying ever felt right, because it wasn’t about me, not really.”

“Guess it worked then.” Dean smiles.

“I hope it works now too.” Cas leans close to them as they both look up at the sky. The sun is behind clouds but Cas can still pinpoint the moment it peeks above the horizon. He watches deep blue become gray and prays that when it's dark again, Sam will be home with them.

“Let’s get inside,” Dean says after a while. “Coffee’s probably done.”

Cas lets Dean fiddle in the kitchen while he showers. The pipes bang and it’s awkward in the old clawfoot tub, but it’s not too bad. The water is warm and brings the feeling back into his skin. Cas feels exposed crossing the hall to the bedroom in just a towel, but Dean looking him up and down and wolf whistling is worth it.
“I gather you’re in a better mood,” Cas smiles.

“I’m in a room with my naked boyfriend, it’s hard not to be.”

Cas tilts his head, pushing a few stray drops of water from his eyes. “Your boyfriend?”

“Fuck, is that not okay? Were we supposed to have a talk before I said that?”

“No, it’s fine.” Cas approaches Dean carefully, smiling. “I like it.”

Dean heaves a shaky breath. “Good. Okay.”

“You seem nervous.”

“Of course I’m fucking nervous, I’ve got this damn hearing in a few hours and I don’t want to fuck things up with you before they’ve even started!” Dean’s voice is tight and his breathing is too fast for Cas’s comfort.

“You don’t have to worry about that second one,” Cas says, laying a hand on Dean’s shoulder.

“Really? Because I don’t know what the hell I’m doing. Making a big show in front of the church is one thing but the actual being a human person in a-a relationship? I’m lost. I’ve had sex with a lot of people, but I’ve never dated anyone.”

“And I’ve dated one person, and we saw how that worked out,” Cas says, stepping too close and forcing Dean to look at him. “Nothing about our relationship is typical. And I’m nervous about this too. But we’ll figure it out together, okay?”

“Okay,” Dean mutters. “And the hearing?”

“All we can do is hope and pray and we already did that,” Cas says with a shrug.

“That’s comforting.”

“I try.”

“Try harder.”

Cas crowds into Dean’s space, gently pushing him until the back of Dean’s legs hit the bed and he’s forced to sit. Cas follows him, straddling his lap and dropping his towel. “Is this alright?”

“This your way of trying to relax me?”

“Is it working?”

“Mmm. Maybe.” Dean kisses him, pulling him flush against his chest. He tastes of chicory coffee and cinnamon and his hair is soft and silken between Cas’s fingers. The kiss deepens easily, only breaking so that they can remove Dean’s shirt.

“You’ll need to change for the hearing anyway,” Cas mutters as he fumbles with Dean’s belt and buttons. The fact that he’s getting hard makes that particularly challenging in this position.

“What?” Dean asks against Cas’s neck.

“You can’t wear jeans to court.”
Dean huffs as he flips them, trapping Cas under him as his shimmies out of said jeans. “Fucking watch me.”

“Do you even own a suit?”

“You helped me buy everything I own, you know I don’t.”

Cas reaches between them to stroke Dean into full hardness before they start to grind together cocks caught between them.

“Maybe you can—” Talking while kissing is very difficult, especially when Dean is doing things with his hips and mouth that are making Cas’s brain overheat. “—borrow one of Bobby’s.”

“God no.” Cas grabs the globes of Dean’s ass and bucks his hips, earning a grunt of pleasure. Dean responds in kind, building the friction between them.

“You have – oh fuck – khakis,” Cas gasps.

“I would rather die and just for suggesting that, I get to come first,” Dean says.

Cas laughs and Dean echoes it as he flips them again and kisses his way down Dean’s body. “Fine,” he mutters before taking Dean’s cock in his mouth. “But you still can’t wear jeans.”

The juvenile court isn’t even in the main court house. It’s nextdoor in a two-story white building that looks like it could be any old office from the outside. The only thing that really gives it away are the metal detectors they have to walk through to get inside. It makes Dean nervous and he hates taking off his shoes to go through, but Cas is right there with him and that’s good at least. Bobby raising hell about getting his chair through is pretty damn entertaining as well.

The lobby is small, only about twenty gray chairs on the bluish gray carpet and two big wooden doors with “Courtroom” signs above them and Dean doesn’t know which he’s supposed to go into. He doesn’t know fucking anything that’s going to happen and he doesn’t see Sam and he’s going to throw up.

“Mr. Winchester!”

Dean spins at the sound of an accented voice. Mick is just coming through the security. He looks marginally better put together than the last time Dean saw him, or at least like he shaved, but his suit is still wrinkled and it looks like he hand-sewed a patch onto the shoulder. “Hey, Mick.”

“What, you didn’t trust me so you hired someone fancy?” Mick says, looking Cas up and down. He’s wearing his church suit from yesterday and he’s got a bit of sex hair going (thanks for once to some actual sex), but he looks pretty respectable. Dean’s wearing a pair of dark slacks that Bobby found somewhere and his best shirt.

“I told you that you looked like a lawyer.” Dean smirks at Cas. “Mick, this is Bobby Singer, my boss and landlord, and this…is Castiel Novak.”

“The foster dad?” Mick asks, eyes widening. “The one you had a fling with?”
“We have a relationship. Present tense,” Dean says. “And, uh, better to just tell you. Everyone knows and I also let the cat out of the bag about me turning tricks.”

“You what?” Mick balks.

“He went to the police with some information about assaults,” Cas explains.

“He’s helping to put some bad characters in jail,” Bobby says. “He’s being a hero.”

“And there were other factors at work,” Cas adds, looking uncomfortable.

“I don’t care about other factors. Dean, this isn’t good,” Mick says, his expression dire. “Henrickson isn’t one of those super-conservative types, but ‘ex-hooker who’s shagging the foster dad’ doesn’t look good to anyone! Are you telling me you two are together?”

“Yeah,” Dean replies. “Cas came out. It was a big thing. He’s staying with me at Bobby’s for now.”

“Okay. Well. I guess I can try and spin that as, uh, continuity for Sam and an extra income,” Mick mutters.

“I’m unemployed right now, actually. Or I will be once I officially quit,” Cas says.

“Wait, what?” Dean asks, turning to Cas. This is news. “You’re quitting? For real?” Cas nods.

“Bloody hell,” Mick groans.

“I told them not to tell you that,” Bobby says.

“That’s just…You know you’re buggered here, right?” Mick asks,

Dean’s stomach twists just as Cas takes his hand. “I know. But maybe we can explain.”

“We’ll try,” Mick replies.

One of the courtroom doors opens and Dean sees a flash of red hair that he thinks is Anna, but the girl is much taller and has glasses. She’s wearing an ID badge around her neck so she must be a court employee. “In the matter of Sam Winchester?” she calls into the lobby.

“Here!” Mick says. “We’re still waiting on the agency, kid and Miss Bradbury.”

“They’re in already,” the clerk says. “The judge is about to take the bench.”

“Shit,” Mick mutters. “I wanted to talk to the worker and Charlie.”

“You didn’t yet?” Dean demands, his panic rising.

“Until now this seemed pretty open and shut case!” Mick snaps back.

“Guys,” the clerk says. “We have six more hearings after you and we’re already running late so we need you to get in here.”

“Dean.” Cas’s voice is calm as he squeezes Dean’s hand. “Just breathe. Let’s go.”

“Okay,” Dean whispers and lets Mick lead the way inside.

The courtroom is small and reminds Dean to an uncomfortable degree of a church. There are rows of
scuffed benches on either side of a central aisle, with tables at the front. It’s more crowded than Dean anticipated. Zeke is seated at the right table next to two women, one with longer blonde hair and another with short red hair in a mismatched suit. Beside the redhead is Sam, so she must be his lawyer. Dean has no idea who the blonde is. Sam turns at the sound of the door and waves wearily to Dean. Mick leads Dean to the empty table on the left and Cas takes a spot on the bench directly behind them.

“I’ll get the judge,” the clerk says and disappears.

Dean turns to look at Cas and finally notices the rest of the crowd in the courtroom. Holy shit. They’re not strangers waiting for a hearing. Chuck is there with Gabe and Hannah and another dark-haired woman Dean doesn’t recognize. One row behind them, next to where Bobby parked, is Jody. On the other side of the courtroom, alone in a middle row is Michael. That can’t be a good thing, but at least Naomi and Luke aren’t here to tell the court what kind of trash Dean and Cas are. Anna is seated in the back next to Tessa, the nurse Dean’s pretty sure ratted Cas out to Anna all that time ago.

“All rise,” the clerk calls and Dean jumps to his feet to watch Judge Henrickson, a stern-looking back man, enter and take his seat on the bench.

“Please be seated,” Judge Henrickson says and everyone but Zeke sits. “Looks like we have a guest worker today.”

“Yes,” Zeke says. “The Douglass County Child Protection Unit has been very welcoming. However, if this case is not dismissed today, I will be transferring this fully to Miss Bevell.”

“Do you anticipate that, Mr. Gardner?” the Judge asks, eyes narrowing. “Your report was optimistic.”

The blonde, Miss Bevell, rises. “That report was filed prior to certain information about the elder Mr. Winchester’s past and his inappropriate relationship with the foster family coming to light.” Dean decides right there and then that he does not like Miss Bevell at all. She uses the same tone to talk about people that Naomi did, implying everything is beneath her. “In addition, we’ve received some calls of concern from members of the community. Including Mr. Novak's own mother.”

“Well don’t keep me in suspense, Miss Bevell, what information is this,” Judge Henrickson asks. Zeke sends Dean an apologetic look while Miss Bevell sneers. “And just so we’re clear, this whole court room is sworn in and if anyone lies, it’s perjury.”

Miss Bevell puffs up, a smug look on her face. “Dean Winchester is a prostitute. He has ties to dangerous gangs and drugs, and his association with the Novaks began when Mr. Novak paid him for extramarital sex.”

The Judge turns his eyes to Dean and he feels like a something smaller and dirtier than a worm. He’s absolutely fucked. “Okay, then,” the judge says. “Does this change the agency’s recommendation on placement and dismissal?”

“Yes,” Miss Bevell says.

“No,” Zeke says at the exact same moment.

Dean blinks. “What?” he asks aloud and gets glares for it.

Zeke clears his throat. “Dean was a sex worker, yes, and I’m disappointed he didn’t share this information earlier, but the facts in my report remain the same: he is fully employed with a stable residence, free of drugs and is in a good position to take care of Sam.”
“And the foster father?” the judge asks, still looking in Dean’s direction. “I assume this is Mr. Novak we have with Mr. Winchester?”

Dean glances to Mick. Is he supposed to talk? Mick stands, hands spread on the table. “Yes, Your Honor, Mr. Novak and Mr. Winchester informed me this morning that they are in a committed relationship and that, apparently, Mr. Novak will be living with Mr. Winchester for the foreseeable future.” Dean keeps his eyes on the judge, trying to read any sign of what he’s thinking but there’s nothing. “I think this is a good thing. It’s another adult Sam knows and trusts in his life to help care for him.”

“Or,” Miss Bevell cuts in. “Placing Sam with another person with a history of criminal activity and moral—”

“Hey, I’m going to stop you there.” The court’s attention turns to Sam’s lawyer, who also stands. All these lawyers standing up and talking about him makes Dean feel pretty damn small. “If Miss Bevell is taking Mr. Winchester’s sexuality or his relationship with Mr. Novak into consideration, that is blatantly unconstitutional.”

The judge fixes Miss Bevell with a hard look. “Miss Bradbury is correct. Miss Bevell, do you have any concerns about Mr. Winchester that are not related to his history as a sex worker or his relationship?”

“I’ve shared everything I have,” Miss Bevell grumbles and sits down. “Miss Bradbury,” The judge asks. “Do you have anything more to add?”

“Yes,” Miss Bradbury says, smiling over at Sam. “My client wants to be with his brother and Mr. Novak. He has been very, very clear on this and, in my opinion, it is in his best interest to be placed with Dean and that jurisdiction be dismissed.”

Dean lets out a breath and smiles at Sam.

“Alright, Mr. Davies. Anything more from you or your client?” the judge asks.

Dean’s mouth goes dry as he stands up. He’s shaking and he wants to look to Mick or Cas for help but that’s not going to do anything. Instead he thinks about walking into that church yesterday. He knew he was doing the right thing, he knows he can do it now.

“No one doubts that you’re ready, Mr. Winchester,” the judge replies. “The question is: are you fit? Is Mr. Novak fit, for that matter?”

“Your Honor,” Jody says from the back. Dean and the lawyers turn around to look at her. “Detective Mills, nice to see you. Do you have something to say?” Judge Henrickson asks.

“Yes, Your Honor,” Jody replies. “Mr. Winchester was nearly killed in the incident that led him to move in with the Novaks to recover. Before that, he was beaten by a religious fanatic, because of his sexuality and profession. He won’t tell you that, because he doesn’t think it’s important. But, even knowing that putting the people that hurt him in jail would put Sam’s placement with him in jeopardy, he came to me and made his reports. Because he did the right thing, bad people are getting punished. Dean is not one of those bad people. He’s one of the very good ones. He has no arrests as
an adult, I can verify that, but he has the gratitude of the Lawrence PD and he has my faith that he will be exactly the person his brother needs to have the best chance at happiness.”

Jody meets Dean’s eyes and he has to blink a few times to keep his stupid fucking tears at bay. “Thank you,” he mouths. Jody smiles and nods then sits back down.

“It looks like we have some other community members here,” the judge says. “Sir?”

It’s Chuck that stands and speaks. “Hi. Uh. Your Honor. My name is Chuck Shurley and until recently I was assistant pastor at First Christian where I got to know both Dean and Mr. Novak. I can tell you, without any reservation, as both a person of faith and a person in general, that these are good people. They made mistakes but they are making up for them and I know that Sam belong with them.”

“And you two?” Judge Henrickson nods to Hannah.

“We’re here to speak for Castiel,” Hannah says. “My name is Hannah, this is Meg, we are former co-workers.”

“I don’t know Dean,” Meg says. “But I know Cas and I can tell you he’s not just a good guy, he’s hard working and believes in people. He’d be a good person for anyone to have in their life.”

"Castiel is an inspiration," Hannah adds.

“I was gonna say the same things about Dean,” Bobby interjects. “Hope you’re not offended if I don’t stand.”

“It’s fine, I’m getting the idea. What about you, sir?” the judge asks Michael.

Dean swallows and glances to Cas as Michael rises. His heart is pounding, even though he knows what’s coming. He could probably recite the speech about Cas’s sins and Dean's filthiness and how they’ve disappointed God.

“Your Honor, my name is Michael Novak, Castiel is my brother,” Michael begins. His eyes linger on Cas apologetically. “I don’t know Dean well. And I won’t lie to you and say I’m not disappointed in how Dean and Cas met. It’s not right and it shows some disregard for law and others that’s troubling.” Michael looks over at Anna for emphasis but she won’t meet his eyes. He turns back to the judge. “But Cas is a good man. He was cornered into doing a bad thing. And as far as I can tell, so was Dean here. They did what they had to because no one ever told them there was another way or, heaven forbid, let them walk it. I may not really know Dean, but I know brothers. I love my brother and I’d do anything to take care of him if I had to and I think that’s what Dean will do for Sam here, so I urge you to make that happen.”

Dean can’t believe it, but when he looks to Cas and sees the tears on his face he knows this is real. "Holy shit," he whispers to Cas.

“This is all very moving,” Judge Henrickson says, looking entirely unmoved. “Would the foster parent not dating Mr. Winchester like to have a say as well?”

Dean’s heart drops as Michael sits and Anna rises. She doesn’t look as tired or sad as she did yesterday, but that doesn’t mean anything. She’s good at hiding things. She takes a deep breath, holding onto Tessa’s hand.

“Dean came to our house because of me,” Anna starts. “I was the one that invited him. I was the one that brought in Sam as well. I did this because I knew, in my heart, that my husband loved Dean and
I didn’t want to lose my husband. I was afraid…” Anna’s voice hitches and Dean feels like he's swallowed an entire cave of bats. “I used them, when I should have been helping them and I trapped someone when I should have been letting him go. I made as big a mistake as Cas in doing that, but I want to fix it.”

Dean feels sick. If Anna says one more time that she wants to save Cas…

“Sam belongs with Dean, and Dean he belongs with Cas. And keeping Sam away from his family would be a huge mistake. We’ve all made enough mistakes, please don’t add another.”

Dean lets out a shaking breath as Anna meets his eyes. He’s feeling too many emotions to process.

“Mr. Novak, do you have anything to say?” the judge asks. “Since everyone else got a chance.”

Cas rises uneasily with a hand on Dean’s shoulder. “Everyone said it already: Dean is the best man I know and he loves Sam and will take care of him. If me living in the same place means Sam can’t be with Dean, I’ll move.”

“Cas—” Dean starts.

“But I’d rather not. I love Sam too. And I love Dean more than anything. I want to be part of their life, both of their lives, as long as possible. We all want to start making things right.”

“Alright then, well –” the judge begins before Sam stands up.

“Can I talk?” Sam asks.

The judge’s eyebrows are high. “Your attorney already made a statement.”

“Yeah, but I want to tell you that I’ll be safe with Dean and—”

Judge Henrickson sighs and rolls his eyes. “And that he’s the best thing since sliced bread, yes, I get the idea. The agency recommendation, whatever it is, is noted but I am ruling that Sam should be place with his brother. I trust the agency to create a safety plan and Mr. Winchester to get formal custody papers sorted out. The case is dismissed.”

The judge bangs his gavel for good measure and Dean gets one warning whoop before Sam flies across the room to tackle him. He jumps up and hugs him tight, and neither of them can breathe and it doesn’t matter because finally they’re a family, full stop.

It’s chaos all around Cas, but for once it’s joyful chaos. The courtroom is a sea of people talking and hugging and filling out paperwork and Cas is right there in the middle of it, hugging Sam and Dean and thanking God with all his heart that this is happening.

“Oh holy shit,” Dean says, shaking his head as he looks around.

Mick looks even more amazed than them. “Congrats, I guess.”

“I’m so happy!” It’s Sam’s lawyer that says it. Cas doesn’t know where she came from but she’s jumping up and down in excitement. “And guys, since I’m not Sam’s lawyer after this, if you need any law help with anything, let me know, okay?”
“Us?” Dean asks, looking between him and Cas.

“Yeah, like if anyone gives you crap about the queer thing or you need help in court with the criminal stuff or—” Mick takes the chattering redhead by the shoulder.

“They got it, Charlie. Everyone has our cards, we need to clear out,” Mick says.

“Dean, we need to talk to both of you for a moment,” Ezekiel calls from the door, the other social worker is beside him and she looks like she just drank spoiled milk. It’s extremely satisfying.

“You okay?” Dean asks Cas.

“I’m fine. I’ll wait,” Cas replies. Dean and Sam follow Zeke and Miss Bevell out of the courtroom and to a quiet corner of the lobby.

“Castiel.”

He turns to see Hannah smiling next to Meg, Chuck and Gabe. “Thank you. Thank you all for coming,” Cas gets out before he’s caught in a fierce hug from Meg. Hannah is more restrained with his hug but his smile is warm. “How are you even here?”

“Chuck called us,” Hannah explains. “And we took the day off.”

“Which will give Josie a whole lot of time to go over the files we sent to her that prove it was Alfie and Uriel behind everything,” Meg smiles. “Hopefully you can come back in a few days.”

“Actually, I’m not coming back,” Cas says. Of all the confessions he’s made in the last few days, this is the easiest.

“Seriously?” Meg asks.

“I never liked that job, it was just another thing I did because I was told to do it,” Cas says. “I want to find something I care about.”

“That’s very commendable,” Hannah says, beaming.

“I can give you some great tips on navigating new employment horizons,” Gabe says. “If you want.”

“I thought you owned a porn company?” Cas asks, squinting at him.

“Nah, I pulled out of porn. Wait. That came out wrong.” Gabe grimaces then looks to Chuck with an affectionate smile. “Some bleeding heart made a case that there are maybe better things I can do with my life if I want to keep seeing him.”

“So, you’re staying here?” Cas asks and Gabe nods. Cas looks to Chuck. “But you don’t have a job?”

“Actually, I do. And Gabe might too if he passes the interview with the board,” Chuck says, smiling. “I’m working with the city and a new endowment to expand the shelter and services downtown. We’re setting up a whole new non-profit.”

“Really?” Cas can’t think of anyone better for such a project, nor a better way for Chuck to really do God’s work.

“The pay is shitty and there’s no benefits, but we’re looking for a numbers guy,” Gabe says with a sly smile. Cas glances at Chuck, wondering if this offer was the plan all along.

“Thank you,” Cas says. “I have to think about it.”

“Take all the time you need, it’ll take us a while to get going anyway,” Chuck replies. “For now, enjoy yourself.”

“And enjoy that sweet ass you get to shack up with,” Gabe adds, tilting his head as he looks at said ass across the lobby. Chuck and Hannah both hit him.

“Call us if you need anything,” Hannah says. “And we’ll see you for Christmas, no matter what.” His last words are delivered with a pointed look over Cas’s shoulder. Cas turns to see Michael waiting, looking awkward and alone.

“Thank you all,” Cas says. They exchange goodbye hugs before Cas makes his way to his brother. “I can’t believe you came.”

“Mother told me not to,” Michael says tiredly. “Said she would never forgive me.”

“And?”

“And I told her to shove it.”

Cas smiles. “I’m sure she liked that.”

“She’ll come around,” Michael replies with a shrug.

“I doubt that.”

“Hey,” Michael sets a hand on Cas’s shoulder. “I did.”

“Did you really?” Cas asks and Michael sighs. It's amazing that Michael is here and said what he did, but it's still hard to trust.

“Cas, I’m not gonna say that I understand you or that I approve but, I’m working on it. I am. You and Dean said a lot of things yesterday that I’m still thinking about. And you’re my family, you being—” Michael gulps, bracing himself. “You being gay doesn’t undo that, okay?”

“Okay.” It’s not perfect, but it’s more than Cas ever expected from anyone is his family. “Come here. I promise the homosexuality isn’t contagious.” Michael comes easily as Cas pulls him into a hug. It makes Cas feel like he did when he was young: that someone is watching out for him.

“Don’t be a stranger, okay?” Michael says.

“You too. And check your phone, mom likes to block numbers,” Cas replies. “Goodbye, Michael.”

“Bye, little brother.”

Cas watches his brother go and then turns to see Sam hugging Zeke, while his lawyer talks animatedly with Bobby. Dean catches Cas’s eye and smiles brightly for a moment then frowns. Cas turns to see the focus of his expression. Anna stands with Tessa beside her, a folder clutched to her chest. “Hello, Anna. Tessa.”

“I’m here for Anna, as far I’m concerned, you and lover boy can eat shit,” Tessa sneers.

“Tessa, please. Go somewhere else. I’m okay. Cas, would you come with me? I have Sam’s stuff in
the car.” Anna’s voice is nervous, but Cas doesn’t want to stay with Tessa staring daggers at him so he follows Anna outside into the cold and to the small parking lot by the courthouse. Her back seat is surprisingly full.

“That’s all Sam’s?” Cas asks.

“No, most of it is yours,” Anna replies. “The big lump there are the records and player, I hope I got all the books.”

Cas blinks, still amazed after everything. “A., you didn’t have to bring all this. I just needed pills and pants.”

“I did though. I need to start…moving on,” Anna says. Her voice is unsteady but her face is resolved.

“By getting all of my stuff out of the house?”

“I also filed these this morning.” Anna hands Cas the folder she was holding. He opens it to the find a stack of papers, the top one emblazoned with the words ‘Petition for Dissolution of Marriage.’ “If you want, you can sign them tonight. It’s all down the middle. No support of course. I’ll sell the house and you get half the profit.”

“That sounds fair,” Cas murmurs.

“Look it over anyway, just to be safe. Don’t just trust me.”

Cas finally finds the bravery to look Anna in the eye and smiles. It’s ending. All the years of lies and silence. And over a decade of friendship as well, but maybe, some day, they can salvage something. “Thank you, Anna. What will you do now?”

“I don’t know,” Anna replies and she looks happy about the answer. “I don’t even know if I’ll stay in town once my residency is done. But..I’m having dinner with Ezekiel tonight, actually.”

“Really?” Cas isn’t as good as Dean in communicating something untoward with his tone but he tries. Anna blushes and smiles.

“It’s just dinner. But I also think I need some time with myself, just myself. I’ve never been alone before and I want to see how that feels. I think it will be good for me.” Anna takes a careful breath, as if she’s afraid she might break if she inhales too hard.

“It will be. You’re stronger than you know, A.. You never needed me to do all that you did,” Cas says.

“I hope you’re right.”

“I’ll pray for you; that you find happiness,” Cas says and means it with his whole heart. Anna looks at him with an expression that’s both sad and grateful. “I’m so sorry, for hurting you.”

“I’m sorry too. I wish things had happened differently,” Anna replies. Cas isn’t sure he agrees with that, but he doesn’t say so. “And I’ll pray for you too. And your boys. Speaking of.”

Cas turns around to see Sam, Dean and Bobby coming towards them. “Need any help?” Dean asks.

“Yes, please,” Anna replies.

Moving the bags and boxes with five people isn’t hard at all, and before they know it, Tessa is back
by Anna’s side and they’re all standing awkwardly in the cold.

“Anna,” Sam starts. “Thank you, for...well, thank you.”

“I want to be kept up to date on you, Sam,” Anna replies with a smile. “You’re going to do great things. And Dean?” Dean straightens up where he stands next to Cas. “Take care of him.”

“I promise,” Dean replies without hesitation.

“Goodbye, Cas,” Anna says with a finality that hurts, but in the way taking of a bandaid might. It means the last of the hurt is over.

“Goodbye, Anna.”

Cas watches her and Tessa get into the car and drive away as Dean turns to him. “Come on, Cas, let’s get home.”

Dean makes burgers for dinner, and even manages some oven-roasted potatoes with Old Bay that are pretty dang close to fries. They sit around the table all together, Sam and Cas talk about math and William Butler Yates and Bobby chimes in about T. S. Elliott and Dean has to spend half the meal trying not to get too sentimental. Dessert is ice cream, moose tracks for Bobby and Sam and coffee for Dean and Cas. They fight with spoons over the last bites while Bobby and Sam laugh at them. They argue over what movie to watch (Dirty Dancing doesn’t count as a chick flick because it’s Swayze, Sam) and end up on Top Gun because it’s a crime that Cas and Sam haven’t seen it.

Bobby falls asleep in his recliner halfway through, but Sam likes it. Dean likes that Cas spends the whole movie snuggled against him on the sagging couch and how he remarks that its “remarkably homoerotic” and that it’s not surprising at all the Dean enjoys it so much. Dean scowls, but he doesn’t argue.

“Okay, kids, time for bed,” Dean says as the credits roll.

“Should we wake him up?” Sam asks, looking to Bobby. He snorts and shifts deeper into the recliner. Dean smiles at him fondly. The old man turned down a drink at dinner and smiled more tonight than Dean’s ever seen.

“Nah, he’s good. Come on, Sammy.”

Walking upstairs with Sam and Cas next to him is so different from the first time he came up these stairs. The quiet and emptiness is gone, replaced with something warm and comforting. It reminds him of the nights alone with Cas, the way he felt safe. But it’s more. It’s not going anywhere and it’s...beautiful.

“I’ll wait for you,” Cas says in the hall outside Sam’s door. “Goodnight, Sam.”

“Night, Cas,” Sam replies. He turns to Dean once they’re alone in the hall. “I like my room.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, it’s cool. And I’m glad Anna brought all my stuff. Including the ipod. And the head phones.
Which I’m gonna use. As soon as I get in there.”

“You’ve got school tomorrow, Sam.”

His brother gives him an annoyed look. “You don’t.”

“Oh. Oh. Jesus, Sam…”

“And I can get to school on my own or with Bobby if you need like, more time.”

“Sam.”

“I’m just happy for you, okay?”

“I’m happy you’re here,” Dean sighs. “You don’t need to help me get laid though, okay?”

“Okay, I just wanted you to know.”

“I get that. We’ll…have more room. Eventually.”

“You want to move?” Sam asks and Dean can see him deflate.

“Not for a while. Just one day, okay? You deserve a real home.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Dean, this is a home. It’s got you in it. That’s all I need.”

Dean stares at Sam, one last knot uncoiling in his chest. Maybe that’s what he was feeling before – home. Christ, if this kid makes him tear up again, he’s going to break something. He settles for one more hug for his stupid little brother that he gets to deal with every day for the foreseeable future.

“Thanks, Sammy.”

“For what?”

“For sticking with me.”

“Ditto. I love you, jerk.”

Dean smiles against Sam’s hair, crap soon this kid is gonna be taller than him. But at least Dean will be there to see it. “Love you too, bitch.”

“Now go do stuff with your boyfriend.”

Dean breaks away rolling his eyes. “You keep that music up loud.”

Sam grins as he closes his door and Dean turns to his own room. His and Cas’s room. In a home. Which he has. Holy fuck.

Cas is standing by the window looking out into the night when Dean gets in.

“What you looking at?”

Cas turns to him with a gentle smile. “The snow.”

“What snow? It was dry as a bone out there last I checked.” Dean crosses the room to stand by Cas between the window and the bed. He can feel the cold through the glass. Outside the trees and scrapyard are dark save for the beam of a single light.
“It’s coming. I can smell it.”

Dean chuckles. “You do that too?”

“Since I was a kid.”

“I could always tell it was coming when I was downtown. Always meant it was gonna be a shitty, cold night. Made it sort of hard to enjoy.” Dean shivers at the memory.

“I can imagine.”

Dean slips his arms around Cas’s waist, eyes still on the window and he hooks his chin over Cas’s shoulder. “It was still nice, sometimes, it made everything pretty and clean for a while, before it turned into a mess.”

“Nothing lasts.” Cas doesn’t sound sad, just thoughtful.

“Some things do, and the rest, we just gotta appreciate it while we can.”

“That’s very enlightened of you.”

“I’m a regular philosopher, didn’t you know? Speaking of, when were you gonna tell me you quit your job?”

Cas shrinks in Dean’s arms. “Sorry. There’s been a lot going on. But Chuck and Gabe may have an opportunity for me. I could do some good.”

“But is it what you want to do?” Cas furrows his brow. Dean knows that concept is sort of new for Cas. Hell, he’s working on it too. If Cas asked him what he wanted for his future beyond being with the people he loves, he wouldn’t be able to say.

“I’m not sure. But I have time to figure it out.”

“That we do. Maybe you can go back to poetry,” Dean muses, pulling Cas just a bit tighter against him.

“Oh, yes, very lucrative.”

“Doesn’t have to be lucrative, just has to make you happy.” Dean kisses the back of Cas’s neck. “You deserve to be happy.”

“I think I am.” Dean can see the reflection of Cas’s wistful smile in the window.

“You think? Well I think we can do better than that.” Dean kisses along Cas’s shoulder and rolls his hips.

“Was that a proposition?”

“Hell yeah.” Cas laughs, warm and deep as he turns in Dean’s arms and kisses him properly. It feels so good, just kissing Cas, and knowing he’s entirely Dean’s. “It’s been too long since I’ve had you in me,” Dean whispers.

“I can accommodate that.”

Cas pushes him back and Dean lets him lower them onto the bed. The old springs groan when they move, and the head board jostles against the wall. Dean gets stuck getting out of his stupid slacks and
Cas snickers.

“Very sexy.”

“Shut up, I ain’t a professional anymore, I’m allowed.” Dean says it before he can think and panic bursts in his chest. He still shouldn’t bring that shit up.

“No you’re not,” Cas replies, as warm and kind as ever, like it didn’t matter at all. “You’re just mine.”

Dean’s skin is suddenly warm and it has nothing to do with the fact they’re naked. “Some poet you are, that’s an old line.”

“Still true,” Cas whispers and kisses him again.

Cas takes his time, they both do. He’s gentle and thorough opening Dean up, taking him apart and laying his soul bare with tenderness. Dean’s heavy breath and soft moans fade into the flowered wallpaper and goosebumps rise on his skin as Cas whispers back his name. He slides home into Dean, slow and inevitable and he feels…whole.

In all the back alleys and dirty bathroom stalls it was never like this. Dean was taken and used so many ways, and it was just bodies and cash and survival. Before Cas, he never knew what it was to want to give or to receive in return. He never knew until Cas took his hand, what it meant to feel at home.

He wants to speak, to tell Cas that and everything else he feels, but words escape him, like they always seem to at these moment. They move together, steady as a heartbeat, pleasure cresting and ebbing and rising again until Dean is falling apart in Cas’s arms and they finally break, together.

“I love you,” someone whispers, and Dean can’t say who.

They lay together, breath slowing in the dim gold light of the bedside lamp. There’s nowhere to run, nothing to hide. It’s getting cold and they should clean up, but for now, he just wants to stay here together. He is exactly where he belongs, right now. Home.

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Cas wakes to brightness that stings his eyes as the sun crests the horizon beyond the window. It takes several blinks to register that it’s not just the dawn that’s blinding, but the reflection of the sun on the new-fallen snow. The world outside is pristine and quiet, but not half as beautiful as the sight inside. Dean next to him, sharing Cas’s bed in the new morning at last.

Cas settles back on his pillow, studying Dean’s face: the freckles, his long lashes and full lips. He watches as the sky beyond the window brightens and voices downstairs discuss winter coats and when the bus comes. He knows they should say goodbye to Sam, but leaving this bed is unthinkable.

Instead he prays. Or perhaps that is not the word for it. He thanks the universe for the love and peace he feels in this moment, he lets it fill his heart with light that might be divine.
Dean groans at long last, covering his eyes and burrowing closer to Cas.

“Good morning, Dean.”

“Morning. How long you been up?” Dean asks through a yawn.

“Not long. It snowed last night.”

“Told you it would.”

“I think I was the one that told you.”

Dean shrugs and finally opens his eyes, smiling at Cas with adoration that’s impossible to mistake.

“So, whatcha gonna do today, you useless lay about? Take it easy?”

Cas smiles. “Maybe. I was thinking about what you said, last night. Maybe I’ll write down some poems.”

“Really? Will you let me read them when you’re done?”

“Of course. I was thinking of one just now, if you want to hear it.”

“Always, Cas.”

Cas presses a kiss onto Dean’s forehead and pulls him close.

“Weep not for me,  
For lost years I have suffered  
Do not mourn for my seeking  
Pity not my long walk  

My burden has shaped me  
And led me to heaven  
My road was to paradise  
Here in your arms  

For I have found my God in the light of the morning,  
In the silence of snow  
In the green of the trees  
In the love in your eyes.

I am home at last.

Amen.”
The amazing art is by the fantastic Winchester-Reload who I adore. She's also here on AO3 as SaltyWords.

Again, thank you so much for reading, for commenting, for kudos-ing and recommending this to people. My gratitude to you knows no bounds. If you like me and my fic, please subscribe to me as an author...because there may be ONE more piece coming in this verse, just in time for the holidays, if I can manage it. ;)

I'm on Tumblr as Ibelieveinthelittletreetopper and you can find my twitter from there as well. Please don't be shy about saying hi, I love it.

And I love you. I really do. If god is love between people, each time we love, each time we are kind or bring you, we are touching god. Thank you for the gifts of your love and light. Thank you.

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