A Simple Man and a Wayward Son

by thunderpuffin429

Summary

Former teen country star Dean Winchester is headed to London for the wedding of his old buddy, Benny. During his trip, he meets a hot college counsellor who may or may not have been a fan of Dean's during the 90s, and who may or may not be ever so slightly psychic.

A visit to Ash's tattoo shop and a guest appearance at Charlie's open mic night, and Dean is quickly embraced into the odd little dysfunctional family that Cas has made for himself here in London.

Cas may or may not be amazing enough to break down Dean's wall of relationship-phobia for good.

Then again, it can't possibly be love. Maybe.
A story of unlikely coincidences, unravelling your past, not being able to make your fucking mind up, and helping your friends fight their demons. Comedy, tragedy and a few chick flick moments.

Notes

This was a really enjoyable challenge for me and I'm grateful to everyone who stops by to read it; please let me know what you think!

Some character points before we start:
Dean b Jan 1978, Cas b July 1974, Sam b May 1983
The characters’ hometowns are not as they are in the show; I have mostly borrowed the actors’ hometowns (ie Dean and Sam are from Texas, not Kansas)

Art is by Demon Eyes Angel Skies, and has its own chapter, at the end of the story.

With gratitude to the writers and actors of supernatural for unknowingly letting me borrow their characters. I promise to give them back unharmed.

Thanks for clicking - hope you enjoy :)
Prologue: Come Sit Beside Me

Austin, Texas
October, 2012

Michael saw the guy every day.

He had no idea what the dude did for a living, but their work schedule apparently synced up because they were always making the same bus journeys, morning and afternoon. They’d never spoken, but Michael couldn’t help noticing that the guy was always smiling, always upbeat. He heard him laugh and joke and chat with other passengers, and even on Michael’s grumpiest mornings, smiley guy never failed to cheer him up a little.

Then one day, he wasn’t there.

Michael assumed he was maybe on vacation, and was surprised at how disappointed he was not to see him. The journey felt very quiet, and the atmosphere without smiley guy was pretty subdued.

Michael told his wife about it that evening.

“It’s the strangest thing,” he said, a little perplexed. “Never spoken to him, we’re not friends, couldn’t tell you his name, but the whole bus was, like… sad without him!”

His wife smiled. “It’s not that strange,” she reasoned. “One person can have an effect on the consciousness of a group if they have a big personality. Their emotions bleed out to everyone.”

Michael nodded, considering.

“Maybe strike up an actual conversation with him when you see him again,” his wife suggested. “Eat your fish.”

Three days later, smiley guy was back. Except - he wasn’t smiling.

He gave a cursory little upturn of his mouth and a nod if someone wished him a good morning, but for the most part, he just stood waiting for the bus, staring at the ground.

When they all boarded, he sat near the back by the window, on his own.

Michael frowned, and found himself walking towards him before his brain really caught up to what his feet were doing.

“Hi,” Michael offered, as he sat down heavily beside smiley not-so-much-today guy.

The man glanced at him. “Mornin’,” he said, quietly, then looked out of the window.

“You know,” began Michael, “I hope you don’t think I’m weird, but… for months we’ve been getting this bus in and out of the city, and every day you - well, you really cheer me up, man.”

The guy turned his face to look at Michael, surprised. “I do?”

“Yeah,” Michael nodded. “You are smiling every morning and afternoon, and always so friendly. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you having a bad day. Until right now.”

The guy looked down at the floor.
“Are you okay?” Michael asked, quietly.

Not looking up, the guy shook his head slowly and licked his bottom lip.

“No,” he confessed. “No, man, I’m not.”

He sat back in his seat, letting his head fall back. There was a brief silence, and Michael thought that was the end of that.

“It’s my brother,” the guy finally said, his voice soft and dejected. “He’s the only real family I have, and he has fucking cancer.”

“Shit. I’m so sorry.”

“I mean, he’s the strongest guy, you know?” the guy continued, a troubled frown shadowing his face. “He’s built like a goddam tank - taller than me even though he’s younger; he runs, he lifts weights, he eats healthy shit… And he’s one of the good guys, you know?”

The man’s voice started to get a bit louder, and the words were streaming out faster.

“Like, he cares about people. He’s nice to fucking everyone, he’s an amazing husband… the world needs more people like him, not fewer. Fuck, it makes no sense.”

Michael took a deep breath, knowing there was absolutely nothing comforting he could possibly say, but he felt like he had to try anyway.

“Sounds to me, then,” he began, slowly and carefully, “that if anyone was gonna kick cancer in the ass, it’s gonna be him.”

Michael turned to meet his new friend’s eyes. Slowly, the smile that Michael had become so used to seeing started to return.

“You know what?” the guy said. “I think you’re right.”
Dean waited impatiently for his Skype call to connect. It was six o'clock in the evening in London, so there was no reason why Benny wouldn’t answer. Just as Dean had that thought, his friend’s face appeared on the screen.

“Hey, brother!”

“Don't ‘hey brother’ me!” Dean snapped. “I get an invitation in the fucking mail and that's how I find out you're getting married? You couldn't have called me or emailed me or fucking whatsapp'd me a ring emoji as a fucking clue?!”

Benny raised his hands in defence. “It was s’posed to be a surprise for everyone!” he explained.

“Yeah, well, it certainly was that.”

Dean leaned back and folded his arms. There was a tense silence.

“So…” Benny started, cautiously. “This mean you ain't gonna be my best man?”

A smile crept unbidden round the sides of Dean’s mouth.

“You fucker…” he said, and Benny grinned triumphantly.

“Aw hell, you know you can't stay mad at me, Winchester!”

Dean shook his head and leaned forward again. “Of course I'll be your best man, you dumb fuck!”

Benny threw his hands up in victory.

“But I get to tell the lake story in my speech,” Dean added, with a wink.

“Oh hell, no,” Benny said, hurriedly. “Keep it clean, brother! B’s family are way too classy for the likes of us.”

“Then why the hell is he marrying you?” Dean asked.

“He likes datin’ down, I guess,” Benny chuckled. “Either that or he just couldn't resist the - what did you call me? - the Beariest Bear ever to Bear?”

Dean laughed. “Yeah, that's you, babe! So how'd you propose to the little Lord of the Manor?”

Benny had met Balthazar at Juilliard, where the former had been studying music technology, and the latter acting. Then he’d followed him back home to London after they graduated.

Dean had met his best friend’s man a few times, and at first he'd wondered what the hell he and Benny were doing together; they were such polar opposites. But the more he saw them together, the more it made sense. Their personalities just complemented each other somehow. Benny could bring B back down to earth when he was being a drama queen, and B helped Benny aim high and think positive when he was being down on himself. Balthazar craved the spotlight, and Benny was content cheering him on from the sidelines. It seemed to work perfectly, and they were always very sweet
and affectionate with each other.

“We were in Rome,” Benny was explaining. “European tour with this play, and it was all real romantic and I just thought, fuck it. I took him into a jewellery store, pointed at the engagement rings and said ‘choose’. He looked at me and I said, ‘I ain’t dumb enough to pick out a ring for you; I know you wanna choose your own’.”

Dean hummed a laugh, picturing the scene.

“He squealed, as only he can,” Benny went on, “and picked the most expensive mother fucker in the whole store.”

Dean laughed a full body laugh. “He's worth it though, right?” he asked.

Benny smiled, clearly so smitten still, after all these years. “Yeah,” he conceded. “Nusty English son of a bitch really is.”

“Listen man, I wanna come over maybe like, a week before the wedding,” Dean suggested. “So I can spend some time with y'all and do a little sight-seeing.”

“Yeah, brother, that'd be awesome.”

“The thing is,” Dean held his hand up. “I don't know how Sam will be in June, you know?”

Benny’s expression fell. “Shit, sorry bro, I didn't even ask.”

“It's okay, man,” Dean ran a hand through his hair. “I just don't wanna commit to it and then have to stay here cause he's sick.”

“He'd better fuckin’ not be, cause I've invited him and Jenna too!”

Dean’s smile didn't quite make it to his eyes.

“Here's hopin’, then.”

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“Dean, you have to go, and you have to book your flights now!”

“Sam, stop telling me what I have to do!”

“Why?! You've been telling me what I have to do for the last twenty nine years!

“That's different!”

“Why?”

“Because I was looking after your fucking well-being, like I'm trying to do right now!”

“I don't need you to look after my well-being, Dean...”

“Oh now you don't need me?!”

“...I need you to go to fucking London and stop mothering me for once!”

“Alright!” Jenna’s voice cut through the Winchester war zone.
They was a short silence while the brothers breathed heavily and stared each other down, then Jenna continued.

“Both of you, sit down,” she commanded.

Neither Sam nor Dean moved.

“Sit down right now or, so help me, I will get out my gun,” Jenna said, calmly. “I am not above handcuffing the both of you to these chairs, either.”

“Keep your kinks to yourself, Sheriff,” Dean shot, as he pulled out a blue wooden chair.

Sam followed suit, and slid into the chair opposite his brother at the kitchen table. His wife sat between them, hands clasped on the surface in front of her as she prepared to referee.

“Alright,” she began. “Dean...”

“How come he gets to go first?” Sam snapped, petulantly, and Dean looked smug.

Jenna ignored her husband. “What exactly is it that you’re afraid of?”

“Afraid?” Dean repeated, offended. “I’m not afraid of anything. I just don't wanna go halfway across the world while my little brother stays here and fights fucking cancer, and I'm confused as to why this makes me the bad guy!”

“I’m not -” Sam started, but Jenna silenced him with a raised hand and the same kind of staccato noise one would use to discipline a naughty dog.

Satisfied that her husband was going to behave himself, she turned calmly back to her brother-in-law.

“You know that the doctors are extremely optimistic about Sam’s recovery,” she told Dean, gently.

“I know, but…”

“And there are, like, thirty weeks between now and the time you'd need to fly to England, and chances are Sam will be in pretty good shape by then.”

No one spoke.

“How can I live with myself if something happens?” Dean asked, curtly.

“Dean, do you think I'm going to die?”

The question hung in the air like a black cloud, and suddenly Dean was looking into the eyes of his three year old baby brother. Eyes which were wide with the need to be comforted.

“Of course not,” Dean told him, hurriedly. “But fuck, Sammy, how can I book a vacation while you're going through this shit?”

Sam sighed impatiently. “By the time you actually go, the really awful shit will be done with,” he pointed out. “All the treatments that are gonna make me puke everywhere, the hospital visits, the round-the-clock care... You're not gonna miss the highlights, man, don't worry!”

Dean forced a small smile, trying unsuccessfully to keep the pity out of it.

Sam rapped on the table and stood up. “Book your damn flights, Dean,” he said, wearily, as he left.
Dean chewed the inside of his cheek.

Sam had been getting really tired since his diagnosis, and he needed to lie down a lot. He never said that's where he was going, but Dean and Jenna knew.

“I get it.” Jenna said, once Sam had gone, leaning over and squeezing Dean’s forearm. “You've taken care of Sam his whole life, and this is a very big deal. But you physically can’t solve this one, Dean, and neither can I. We just gotta let the doctors do their thing, and keep feeding him green tea and turmeric.”

Dean slumped back in his chair. “This sucks more than anything that's ever sucked.”

Jenna nodded. “Can't argue with that.”

“Are you okay?” Dean asked.

“Today I am,” she replied, with a shrug. “Yesterday I wasn't, and tomorrow - I don't know. But I honestly do believe the doctors when they say to keep positive. They seem really hopeful.”

“Treatment starts Tuesday?”

“Eight a.m. sharp,” she confirmed, clearly trying to not look like she was dreading it.

Dean took her hand. “I do believe he'll kick its ass, Jen,” he reassured her. “I'm just…”

“Afraid?” she smiled, wryly.

Dean pursed his lips. “Alright, Mrs Winchester, you win. I'm afraid.”

He looked right into her eyes. “I can't lose him.”

Dean's phone started ringing in his pocket, breaking the silence.


Dean had been picking a different classic rock song as his ringtone every week for five years.

“Shut up,” Dean shot back, as he pulled his phone out and stood up. “Get back to your Taylor Swift album.”

He cut off ‘Since You've Been Gone’, and answered, putting the call on speaker and setting his phone on the table so that he could put his jacket on while he spoke.

“Hey, Ellen,” he called.

“It's Jo,” came the voice on the end of the line. “Mom says she would absolutely love it if you would like to turn up to work today.”

Jenna chuckled, and Dean rolled his eyes.

“Tell Madam Sarcasm that I'm on my way right now,” he said, zipping up his jacket.

“Bring doughnuts!” Dean’s surrogate sister demanded, then the line went dead.

Dean shook his head and picked his phone up.
“See ya,” he told Jenna, giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“Later, bitch!” he called up the stairs on his way to the front door.

“Bye, jerk!” Sam's voice floated down.

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Boston, Massachusetts
Monday, January 21st, 2008

“He's really gone?” Cas asked, for about the ninth time that morning. “I - I don't… Where the hell did he go?!”

“No one knows,” Hannah answered, eyes wide with worry. “He's just gone. Office and house totally cleaned out, cell phone restored to factory settings and left in his car, which was left on his driveway… Just - gone.”

Cas' bewildered frown deepened. “And the note said what?”

“'So sorry, please don't try to find me',” Hannah recited, looking pained and exhausted.

“That's it?”

She nodded.

“Fuck,” Cas ran a hand through his hair. “What the hell do we do?”

“I guess… Call a staff meeting?” Hannah suggested, timidly.

“Me?”

“Well, yes, you are technically his second-in-command.”

Cas wondered if he looked as horrified as he felt. “I - I'm no leader, Hannah,” he insisted. “I haven't got the first clue how to run this company.”

“That isn't true,” she countered, following him as he paced agitatedly round his office. “I believe in you, Castiel; you can absolutely take charge here.”

“But I shouldn't have to!” Cas protested. “How the fuck dare he just disappear like this! I don't understand.”

“Look, I'll go and get you some coffee and we'll work it out,” Hannah placated, trying to keep the situation calm, as she always did. “Just, have a seat. And breathe.”

She hurried out of the room and closed the door.

Cas took her advice and sat at his desk, chewing on his lip in distress. He stared at his computer screen, wincing at the thirty-nine new emails in his inbox; likely all people wondering why Chuck wasn't answering his phone. Cas put his head in his hands.

This was what his dream had been about.

Castiel had peculiar dreams sometimes, dreams in which he would feel a particular emotion very strongly, and see signs and symbols. His mother used to call them premonitions, but he disagreed,
arguing that they weren't detailed enough for that.

He'd had one the week before his mother passed. He’d felt an overwhelming sense of loss in that dream; there had been a silver lily, and everything else had been dark purple.

Three days previous to this hellish nightmare of a morning, he'd dreamed of loneliness, of abandonment. He’d been pushing a huge yellow rock up a steep hill and no one would help him.

He should've known, should've looked up the symbols, should’ve asked Pamela...

Cas took a deep breath and told himself to get it together and stop panicking. Maybe he could do Chuck’s job. Hannah would help him. His boss was clearly having something of a breakdown, and for some reason had taken himself away to deal. No doubt he’d be back soon. In the meantime, Cas would just have to do his best.
An in-depth internet search had led Dean to discover that the only places in London he could afford to stay for an extended period of time were in decidedly suspicious areas, so he’d elected to find somewhere outside of the city. He’d settled on an unthreatening looking town called Hatfield, and booked a three week stay in a cute little place near the train station.

Having found his rented apartment - flat, he corrected himself in his head - Dean decided to go check out his surroundings, find somewhere to get dinner, and check in with work. He wasn’t meeting Benny ‘til Saturday, and his touristy plans didn’t kick in ‘til Monday, so he had two and a half days to mooch around and get his bearings.

He sat down outside a Cafe Nero, hoping the vicious rumour that English people can’t make coffee wasn’t true, and called the Tennessee office, knowing that no one would be in at Austin right now. Ellen and Jo always took Wednesdays off.

“Good mornin’, Hunter records, you’re speakin’ with Garth, how may I help you?”

Dean smiled, and put on what he believed to be a flawless English accent. “Oh hello there, this is Elton John calling. I need to speak with Leann Rimes, do you have her number?”

There was a spluttering from the other end of the line. “Uh… why… no, no we don’t sir, she isn’t signed with us, um, hang on lemme - uh…”

Dean heard a familiar voice hollering from the background.

“Who is it?”

“Please hold!” Garth yelled hysterically down the phone.

Dean laughed, then suddenly found himself being serenaded with his own voice. He cringed a little, but was put out of his misery by a gruff voice abruptly cutting off the song.

“Elton John, huh?” Bobby’s sarcasm carried over the continents. “Well that’s a new one, Dean.”

Dean knew that the emphasis on his name was for Garth’s benefit, and the ‘ya idjit’ went unsaid by his boss.

“Bobby, why the hell am I still the hold music?”

“Because,” Bobby answered, “As much as it pains me, you’re still one of our best selling artists, boy.”

“Well, that’s encouraging, seeing as I haven’t made a record in over a decade… How is our business still going?”

“The sass and stupidity of my employees keep us afloat somehow, I guess,” Bobby snorted. “Now, why in the hell are you callin’ us when you’re meant to be on vacation?”

“I said I’d check in,” Dean said, defensive. “So, I’m checking in.”
“Uh-huh,” came the surly response. “Well, your timing’s pretty perfect; I’ve just finished my meetin’ with our lawyer.”

Dean perked up. “Is he still there?”

“Yeah, hang on…”

A moment later, Dean’s brother was on the line.

“Hey man, how was your flight?”

“Oh, you know, nine hours and twenty-three minutes of the purest form of hell,” Dean answered cheerfully. “More to the point, why are you working?”

“Come on man, I’m fine,” Sam answered.

“Fuck that,” Dean said, emphatically. “You were sick for a long time, Sammy and you need a longer recovery period than this. Yeah, yeah, I know, all-clear, blah, blah, but your body still needs to get over the effects of the treatment and you need to get back to your ideal weight and you -”

“Okay, Dean, calm down,” Sam interrupted. “I’m only doing one day a week for the next couple months, okay?”

Dean exhaled, relieved. “Okay, good,” he settled. “So who’s suing Hunter? Why are you there?”

Sam laughed. “No one’s suing you. I was just helping Bobby draw up some new contracts.”

Dean took a sip of his coffee and grimaced. Damn, the rumours were true. He started on his pastry instead, and evidently baking is something the English can do. He hummed appreciatively.

“You fly to Nashville?” he asked, mouth full.

“No, Jen and I drove down yesterday to stay with Bobby for a couple days,” Sam said, not even bothering to call Dean on his appalling eating manners after thirty-odd years. “I’m going to one more meeting across town, then I’m meeting her for lunch.”

“Alright, give her a big hug from me.”

“I will,” Sam said, his smile clear in his voice. “Hey, you know you lost the bet, right?”

“I am aware.”

“So you gonna find a tattooist over there, or…”?

“I know a guy in London!” called Garth’s distant voice.

“Jesus, yes, okay, I’ll get it done!” Dean took another bite of his pastry.

Sam laughed. “Hey, no hard feelings if you back out. You know I’m not gonna hold you to it! Okay I gotta go, I’m putting Garth back on, okay?”

“Yeah okay, take care, Sammy.”

“You too, see ya!”

Dean didn’t have time to repeat a goodbye before Garth came back on the line and started babbling
again.

“Dean, Dean, bro you gotta find this guy Ash to do your tattoo. He’s from Alabama but he lives in London and I met him at Comic Con and he's so cool! We still talk on tumblr sometimes; I’ll text you his website address…”

Dean sighed. “Alright, thanks, Garth.”

“No prob D-Winch!”

Dean closed his eyes, shook his head, and ended the call.

* * *

The next day; Thursday, June 13th, 2013

Cas took the same train into London every day. The 8:24 from Hatfield.

He really enjoyed living in England. God knows the weather absolutely sucked, he was no closer to understanding the rules of Rugby Union, and he still had trouble deciphering the accents of some of his East London colleagues, but he was having a great time. He liked his job, he liked his little house in North Hertfordshire, and he’d made some good friends.

As always, he shared the platform at eight-fifteen with the same familiar faces. He had names for all of them in his head. There was Giggly Student A and Giggly Student B, Grumpy Skateboard Boy, Awesome Shoe Lady, Old Tattoo Dude, Hair Girl, and Beardy Guitar Guy. Today though, there was a new addition to the group, whom Cas instantly christened Impossibly Gorgeous Man.

Cas came up the stairs at the station and there he was, sitting on the metal bench reading the paper, dressed in blue jeans, brown boots and a plain black t-shirt. Cas literally stopped in his tracks to look at the guy, which didn’t go down well with the line of people behind him who were also trying to get up the stairs.

Cas apologising profusely to everyone made Impossibly Gorgeous Man look up to see what the kerfuffle was, and good grief he had wonderful eyes. He smiled warmly at Cas, then went back to his paper.

Cas hovered awkwardly by the vending machine as he waited for his train. Every so often he stole a glance at Impossibly Gorgeous Man, and couldn't help but think he looked a little familiar.

His phone vibrated in his pocket and he fumbled to dig it out.

Charlie: Morning cutie! You still coming tonight?

Cas drew a hand down his face. He had so much work to do, but he'd promised Charlie that he'd be at the bar for the next four nights.

Cas: yeah but I can't stay late

Charlie: You can stay at mine!

Cas sighed. Now there really was no excuse.
Cas: fine but you're singing jekyll and hyde with me


Cas: you know gavin hates it when you make him play jason robert brown

Charlie: Gavin can suck it.

Cas chuckled and signed off as the train pulled in -

Cas: whatever carrot top just make sure I have a g&t and a private table waiting for me at
7:06 precisely ;)

Cas pocketed his cell phone and stood at his magic door spot. He always predicted exactly where the
train doors were going to stop, and he hadn't been wrong in eighteen months.

They opened right in front of him as always, and he waited to let a few folk off, then stepped aboard.
He and his bag slid in to a window seat, and Cas suddenly wondered whether Impossibly Gorgeous
Man had boarded the same train.

Evidently he had, because Cas heard a cheery, “Oh shit, sorry man!” , and looked up to see that the
gentleman in question had accidentally knocked into Beardy Guitar Guy on his way to his seat, and
offered an apology in a decidedly un-British way. Cas warmed hearing that accent. Even though the
guy clearly hailed from a few states south-west of where Cas had lived, it still felt a little bit like
home.

Impossibly Gorgeous Man sat down across the aisle from Cas and took out his phone, intently
studying something. He looked up and caught Cas’ eye. Cas smiled.

“Hey, man,” Impossibly Gorgeous Man said, leaning over. “If I'm going to Camden, I wanna get on
the Northern Line, right?”

“Oh, yeah,” Cas answered. “Get off at King’s Cross and then it's just two stops north bound.”

Impossibly Gorgeous Man brightened. “You sound almost as far away from home as me!”

Cas laughed. “Yeah, I moved to England from Boston three years ago. I’ll have been living in
Hatfield for two years in September.”

“That's cool! What do you do?”

“Um, I'm a counsellor in a secondary school in North London.”

“Oh that's awesome, good for you!”

Cas smiled, realising how much he missed that inherently American sincerity. English people were
great, but cynicism was weaved right into their everyday speech. It was nice to talk to a genuinely
well-mannered southern boy. And damn was he easy on the eye.

“That's gotta be tough, though?” Impossibly Gorgeous Man added. “Counselling teenagers… I'm no
good with that age group, man.”

Cas shrugged. “It can be hard some days,” he admitted. “But I love teenagers.”

“Yeah?”
“Oh yeah,” Cas said, earnestly. “People think they’re apathetic and lazy, but it's the opposite. They're very passionate about everything. If a teenager likes a band, they love it and if you don't, you're a moron. If a teenager gets a crush, it's Romeo and Juliet style life-or-death obsession and you better not question it. They feel everything very deeply, and they're so easily knocked down that we have to make sure we're doing everything we can to help them up again.”

Cas paused briefly for breath, then his unfettered stream of consciousness resumed; “I get kids come to me who are so low cause they're just being asked for so much, you know? They have to choose their subjects at school, which could determine their whole future, they wake up each day not knowing which bits of their body will have changed, or whether they're going to be attracted to boys or girls. They worry how many likes their selfie got, they're panicking about their grades and their performances in sports and in music exams, they’ve got pressure at home… They're navigating a fucking minefield, and everyone's too quick to dismiss their feelings.”

Cas paused as he caught the look in Impossibly Gorgeous Man’s eyes.

“Sorry,” he said, embarrassed. “You were just making polite conversation and I, for some reason, made a speech.”

“Hey, don't apologise,” Impossibly Gorgeous Man insisted, with a sincere smile. “It's cool that you're so passionate about your job. You obviously care very deeply.”

Cas nodded.

“I wish I'd had a counsellor like you at my school,” Impossibly Gorgeous Man went on, with a cheeky grin. “With a face like that, I'd have told you anything.”

He winked, and Cas blushed.

“Is anyone sitting here?”

A tight, sharp voice cut across them. A thin blonde lady dressed in designer everything was indicating the aisle seat next to Cas.

“Uh, no,” he replied, moving his bag. “Please…”

She sat down and started frantically tapping on her tablet, effectively ending Cas’ conversation with Impossibly Gorgeous - Sweet, Flirty, Beautiful, Smooth - Man, who leaned back in his seat across the way, and put his headphones in. Cas gazed out the window, wondering when he’d become the kind of man who blushes just because a Texan winked at him.

Ten minutes later, when the train pulled in to Finsbury Park, designer blonde lady and Cas both got up to disembark. Cas tapped Impossibly Gorgeous Man on the shoulder, and he pulled out his earbuds, smiling up at Cas.

“You're almost at Kings Cross,” Cas told him. “Have fun in Camden.”

“I will,” the guy grinned. Then he added; “And, hey, it was real nice talking to you. I'm staying in Hatfield, so maybe we'll travel together again soon.”

“I certainly hope so,” Cas smiled, then walked to the doors and hopped off just before they closed behind him.

* * *
Garth’s directions were surprisingly accurate and helpful, and Dean found ‘Mark of Kane’ tattoo studio pretty easily. He’d called yesterday to explain what he wanted and book his appointment, and Ash said he had a free spot the following morning due to a cancellation. So, shortly after eleven a.m., Dean was settling himself in a black leather reclining chair, the drawing of his tattoo transferred on, and Ash firing up his needle.

Dean hadn’t known what to expect - Garth’s endorsement of someone as ‘cool’ wasn’t necessarily a guarantee of quality - but he was pleasantly surprised. Ash was friendly and funny and, despite the fact that his style belonged in nineteen eighty-six, Dean felt confident enough to trust him with the task of permanently scarring his body in an aesthetically pleasing way.

Dean wasn’t alone in the studio; a redheaded girl was already having her leg inked as he arrived. She greeted him cheerily as he sat down.

“Morning!” she waved. “Beautiful day for a tattoo, huh?”

“You know,” Dean smiled as he wriggled to get in the most comfortable position. “I’ve heard more American accents this morning than I have English ones. Is everyone in this city a U.S. immigrant?”

Red laughed. “Well they certainly are in this building!” she grinned. “Me and Ash are from Orange Beach.”

Dean nodded his approval. “I’ve been there,” he said. “It’s beautiful.”

“Sure is,” Red replied, dreamily, then changed her expression as she looked back at Dean. “It gets old fast though,” she commented, turning her nose up. “We craved the bright lights and the big city, baby!”

Dean grinned at her as she continued.

“Meg already had all that, though.” She looked at her tattoo artist, who so far hadn’t acknowledged Dean’s presence. “She just moved here for the weather.”

“Oh yeah?” Dean smiled, glancing over, and the dark haired girl with the needle in her hand looked up. She was hot. In a cold, scary way. “And where was Meg living?”

Meg licked her lips. “New York,” she said, eying him with what was either disdain or lust. Could've been both.

“Well, that explains the warm and cheery tone,” Dean teased.

Meg raised an eyebrow and fought back a smirk. “And where are you from, cowboy?” she asked, Bronx accent thickening with each syllable. “From the way you walked in here, I’d guess you rode all the way from Texas…”

“Oh, you watched me walk in, huh?” Dean didn’t know why he was flirting, but it seemed to be thawing out the frosty New Yorker, who couldn't stop herself blushing a little.

“I’m from Austin,” he told her, then Ash pressed his needle into his skin, and Dean made a noise like a puppy who got his paw trapped in a car door.

“First time?” Meg asked, pierced lip curled up into a smirk.

“No ma’am, just an embarrassingly low pain threshold.”
Red laughed and leaned over a little to look at Ash’s outline as Meg got back to her own work.

“It’s gonna look bitchin’,” she said. “Star Wars fan, huh?”

Dean nodded. “Yes and no. I mean, yeah, I am, but I’m not getting this just so I can look cool at conventions.”

He looked up and met her curious gaze. “I kinda lost a bet,” he clarified.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. My brother bet me he’d beat his cancer in less than a year, and I told him if he did it in less than nine months I’d get Jar-Jar Binks tattooed on my ass. Seemed to be the motivation he needed, cause he’s in remission as of ten days ago.”

“Awesome!” she cheered, sincerely. “Although, not to quibble, but…”

“Yeah I know, it ain't Jar-Jar and it ain't on my ass. He told me I didn’t have to go through with it, but I couldn’t back down totally. So, we compromised with Yoda.”

“Well you chose the right guy for it,” Red smiled as she leaned back against the back of her recliner. “Ash is Head of Sci Fi up in here. I have an Ewok on my ankle and a Tardis on my shoulder blade and he did them both.”

Ash nodded, proud, but didn’t look up from Dean’s arm.

Dean raised an eyebrow. “How many tattoos do you have?”

Red closed one eye as she counted in her head.

“Ten,” Meg cut in, impatient and bored. “You have ten tattoos, Charlie.”

“Right,” Charlie - apparently - agreed, though she still didn't look convinced. Then something seemed to click. “Oh yeah! I forgot about that one!” she giggled.

Meg rolled her eyes and wiped down some excess ink from Charlie’s thigh with the paper towel in her hand. Then she started coloring again and addressed Dean.

“So, cowboy…”

“Dean,” Dean stated. “My name is Dean.”

Meg smiled out the side of her mouth. “So, cowboy Dean, what do you do?” she asked, without looking at him. “When you’re not having jedis carved into your skin, I mean.”

Dean flinched a little at the description. “Uh, I work for a record label,” he said. “Country and folk music; just a small independent thing, got offices in Austin and Nashville. Ash knows one of my colleagues.”

“Yeah! Garth, man, he's a riot,” Ash said.

Dean was thrown, wondering what elusive side of Garth Ash had seen to make him draw such an improbable conclusion.

“I love me a bit o’ country,” Ash continued. “Dolly Parton was my first crush.”
Meg sneered. “Yeah, and you've had a thing for blondes with giant fake tits ever since.”

“So that's why our relationship never worked out!” Charlie said, sarcastic.

“Yeah, exactly,” Ash snorted. “It had nothing whatsoever to do with you preferring minge to man-meat.”

“Woah!” Dean blurted, at the same time as Charlie and Meg both loudly chastised Ash for his tasteless vocabulary.

“The fuck have I walked into here?” Dean exclaimed in mock-horror.

Meg chuckled. “Let me break it down for you, gorgeous. Charlie and Ash were teenage sweethearts. I gather it was nauseating. Five years ago, he followed her over here so they could realise their dream of owning a bar and a tattoo shop. Then, one night while stoned, it finally dawned on Charlie that she's a screaming homo.”

Charlie nodded solemnly. “Screaming.”

“So they broke up,” Meg continued, dryly. “Little did they know at the time that she was totally and inescapably preggo with his offspring.”

“Good timing, right?” Ash grinned. “Managed to plant one just before the fat lady sang!”

Dean laughed. “You're still friends though, clearly?”

“Sure,” Ash said. “Best fucking friends, man, to the death! I mean, I was mad as hell at her for breaking my heart, but Audrey mended it as soon as she was born.”

“Audrey, huh?” Dean smiled. “Cute.”

“Damn straight she’s cute,” Ash set his needle down and pulled up his shirt. On his rib cage was a portrait of a little cheeky face with dark hair and mischief in her eyes. “Check it out!”

“Oh my god,” Dean exclaimed. “That’s amazing! I mean, I have no idea if the kid looks anything like that, but damn that’s realistic!”

“It looks exactly like her, thank you very much,” scoffed Meg.

“You did that?”

“Of course I did. I’m the only girl Ash trusts with his body, isn't that right, Ash?”

Ash made a face as he resituated his T-shirt and resumed work on Dean’s arm. “I trust you to fill in the empty bits with art, babe, that’s as far as it goes!”

Meg winked at him.

“Okay Charlie-horse, we’re all done for today,” she said, killing her needle and giving a final wipe-down, then sitting up to click her back, having been hunched over Charlie’s thigh for the best part of the morning.

Dean looked over and could see that Charlie had been having colors put in a cool pin-up girl with long black hair, the face of whom looked oddly familiar…

“Is that…? Dude, do you have Cher tattooed on your leg?!”
“Hell yeah!” Charlie said, the look in her eyes daring Dean to say something bad about Cher.

“Bro, she used to do Cher for a living,” Ash said in a way that sounded as though he didn’t quite believe it himself.

Dean pursed his lips. “Wow, I, uh, well I guess there are worse ways to make a living… Was her husband cool with it?”

Charlie stuck her tongue out. “I didn't do her, smart-ass, I did an impersonation. Although, if she offered, I would be on that.”

Meg turned her nose up as she peeled off her gloves. “Jesus, Charlie she’s like seventy five years old.”

“So what? It’s fucking Cher!”

“You know,” Ash added. “That bitch has had so much plastic surgery, her body is probably younger than you are.”

“Hey, watch who you're calling a bitch, bitch!” Charlie glared at him.

Dean chuckled and shook his head. He'd been in this shop barely an hour and already he felt like he’d made three new friends.

“You sticking around, Char-bar?” Ash asked Charlie, as Meg wrapped her leg up to heal.

Charlie looked at the Batman clock above the door. “Sure,” she said. “Got nowhere to be til the school run.”

“Cool, make me a coffee?”

“Oh, me too!” Meg pleaded as she gathered up her ink bottles. “I got an hour til my next appointment.”

Charlie rolled her eyes. “Fine. Dean?”

“Uh, sure, if you’re making some. Black with two sugars please!”

Charlie disappeared into the little back area.

“Get those chocolate chip cookies out too!” Ash called.

“Got it!” Charlie yelled back.

The buzz of Ash’s needle started up again and Meg came over to inspect his progress.

“Lookin’ good, cowboy,” she said.

“Me or the ink?” Dean challenged.

Meg laughed. “Both, equally,” she conceded. “Though, honestly, you’re a bit too pretty for me, honey. Puts me off my game if my boyfriend has longer eyelashes than me.”

Dean squirmed inwardly but kept his annoyance to himself. He’d learned a long time ago that if you’re the first one to mock your own insecurities, no one else can use them against you. Yeah, he could play this game.
“I got poutier lips too,” he said in a Betty Boop tone, finishing the statement with a dramatic air kiss.

Meg and Ash both laughed.

“So what exactly is a Texan record producer doing in central London?” Ash asked.

“Well, my buddy is getting married in Chelsea on the twenty-ninth. I haven’t had a vacation in, like, ever, so I thought I would take the opportunity and stretch out my trip. Be a London tourist for a couple of weeks.”

“That’s cool!” Charlie chimed from the back room. “Hey, you know, you should totally come check out my bar!”

“You have a bar?”

“It’s not her bar,” Meg said.

“Not yet!” Charlie corrected, cheerfully, coming back into the room with a tray of mugs and cookies.

“I’m the entertainments manager,” she explained to Dean. “...and my boss has more or less promised I can take over when he retires.”

“Cool,” Dean smiled, finding Charlie’s perkiness extremely infectious.

“Oh my god, it’s so fun,” she continued, setting the drinks down. “Mondays we’re closed, but Tuesday is poetry and prose, Wednesday is funk and soul, Thursday is musical theatre cabaret, Friday is Open Mic, Saturday is drag night and Sunday is smooth jazz!”

“And when is Cher night?” Dean teased.

“Whenever I damn well feel like it,” Charlie deadpanned, then giggled into her cookie.

“Hey, maybe you’ll find someone to sign to your label at Open Mic,” Ash suggested.

“Or you could play!” Charlie squealed. “Please tell me you play? You’re southern, you must own a banjo, right?”

Dean laughed. “Uh, no, I don’t own a banjo.”

Charlie’s face fell.

“But I do play the guitar, and I can sing.” He regretted it as soon as he said it.

“Yay!” Charlie lit up again. “Oh my god you have to play tomorrow! You can borrow Ash’s guitar!”

Ash raised his pierced eyebrows.

“Ha, we’ll see,” Dean appeased Charlie. “I’ll definitely come by at least; just give me a time and a place.”

“It’s kinda hard to find if you don’t know the area,” Meg said. “Why don’t you and your hot bowlegs meet me here at seven thirty and we’ll go together.”

“Are you going to make fun of my eyelashes again?”
“Oh no, treasure, I’ll have moved on to your soft skin by then…”

Dean was about to fire back a retort when suddenly the incessant buzzing ceased.

“Okay Deano, you are all done, my friend!”

“Already?”

“Yep - tiny Yodas only take so long, my man. Go ‘head, check him out!”

Dean hopped down from the chair and walked over to one of the mirrors. There at the top of his left arm was a perfect little 3D black and grey Yoda, holding his lightsaber up and looking like he was ready to kick ass.

“Oh yeah! Dude, that’s awesome!”

“He's so cute!” Charlie said, coming over to stand next to Dean.

“Yoda is not cute, Charlie,” Dean berated. “He's a badass. And so am I.”

“Come back here and let me wrap ya’up, badass,” Ash instructed.

Dean returned to his chair and let Ash do his thing, as Meg approached and pressed a tube into his hand.

“It needs creaming twice a day,” she said.

“Don't we all?” Dean winked, and his inner Jiminy Cricket cringed. “You can't get wet for twenty four hours.”

Meg smirked. “You can't get wet for twenty four hours.”

Dean licked his lips slowly and decided to let that one go. “Yes, ma’am,” he said.

Having left the studio sixty five pounds poorer, but three phone numbers richer, Dean took himself round Camden market, then sat on the deck of a pub by the river, with a beer and a sandwich.

Dean: I'm here, bro! Settin’ in! Currently in Camden with a lukewarm beer and a view of a big red bus #london #practicallynative

Benny: Awesome brother! I'll send you directions for Saturday, behave yourself!

Dean: Always ;)

___________________________

Nashville, Tennessee
Friday, August 4th, 1995

“Welcome back on this beautiful afternoon! You're listening to Beth on Rockin Country one-oh-two-point-nine and I'm here with young heartthrob Mister Chester Dean, howdy Chester!”

“Howdy,” Dean said, awkwardly, into the microphone in the small radio booth.

“We're gonna play Chester’s new record, which I know y’all are dying to hear, but first, Chester, lemme ask you - all the young ladies wanna know - are you seein’ anybody?”
Dean coughed. “Uh, no ma’am,” he said. “I'm still waitin’ on Miss Right.”

Through the glass at the other end of the booth, Bobby gave him a double thumbs up.

“Well, I'm certain there's plenty of gals out there wanna apply for the position! Let's hear that voice now, which I can promise you ladies is just as nice as his face…”
The Headteacher at Cas’ school was quite possibly the most terrifying person he had ever met. He had a voice like a Shakespearean villain, and cheekbones that would have made Vincent Price jealous. His skin was so pale it was virtually grey, and his eyes had a glassy, threatening quality. He had the look of a Victorian funeral director rather than a teacher, and possessed an uncanny ability to drop the temperature of a room by a few degrees just by being in it.

“He’s like the angel of bloody death,” Patrick, one of Cas’ colleagues, had remarked one morning in the staff room. “All he’s missing is a fucking scythe.”

So, it was with some trepidation that Cas approached Mr Tod’s office that afternoon.

“Come in,” came the icy voice.

Cas went in, feeling like he was entering the lair of a particularly sinister Bond villain. He attempted to remain as cheerful as possible, despite feeling like all the joy was being sucked out of him.

“Good morning, Julian,” he ventured, noting that even with all the lights on and the blinds open, the room had an extremely dull quality to it, like someone had turned the contrast down on the monitor.

“Mr Novak,” the Head replied, flatly, from behind his desk. With one long, thin hand, fingers together, he gestured to the chair in front of the desk.

Cas sat down in it and waited. His boss hadn’t even looked up yet; he was writing with a scratchy fountain pen in what Cas assumed to be immaculate cursive script. Mr Tod would probably have been more comfortable with a pot of ink and a quill.

Finally he replaced the cap on his pen, set it down at a perfect right angle to his paper, and looked at Cas, folding his slender fingers together on the desk.

“Thank you for coming,” he said, mouth thin and straight.

“Oh course,” Cas shifted nervously in his chair, and pulled at his slightly-too-tight suit trousers. “What can I do for you?”

Mr Tod looked at Cas’ face for longer than would be comfortable for a normal, socially-functioning human being, then inhaled deeply through his nose.

“I have had a phone call,” he intoned, with soft and effortless command. “From the father of Miss Jasmine Foster in 11MH.”

Cas stiffened. Jasmine had been coming to see him once a week since he started here nearly two years ago. She had all manner of complicated issues, as well as what Cas considered to be an extremely damaging relationship with her parents.

“He isn’t happy, Mr Novak,” Mr Tod said, pointedly enunciating every word.

“Really?” Cas sighed, looking down at the desk. He forced himself to raise his face to the pale one in front of him. “What isn’t he happy about?”
“He seems to think that your sessions with Jasmine are detrimental to her emotional and psychological health.”

Cas opened his mouth to defend himself, but Mr Tod silenced him with a single raised hand.

“Can you confirm for me, Mr Novak, that Miss Foster has been in conversation with you about her…” he formed the next words with difficulty, as though it were the first time he’d ever said them. “…gender identity?”

“Yes,” Cas said, through slightly gritted teeth. “It’s what we talk about almost exclusively. It’s the source of most of her anxiety, her parents being the other main contributing factor. I’ve detailed it all in my reports.”

“I gather that you’ve been encouraging her to…” Mr Tod paused as he consulted his notebook. “…‘live an androgynous existence and reject the body she was given by creation’.”

“Is that what her father said?” Cas asked, incredulous.

The Head replaced the notebook on the desk, and re-wrapped his fingers around each other.

“He would like Jasmine to discontinue her sessions with you.”

“What? No, that’s - that’s a terrible idea, Sir!”

Mr Tod stared, unblinking, into Cas’ face.

Taking advantage of the silence, Cas pressed on with an explanation.

“Jasmine feels she was born with the wrong biology.”

Cas elected not to use the pronouns that he knew Jasmine would have preferred. He suspected that Mr Tod was somewhat closed about the concept of gender, and was wary of exacerbating the situation, so he stuck to ‘she’s and ‘her’s.

“She’s adamant she wants to have gender reassignment surgery when she’s old enough,” he continued. “When she leaves school at the end of this term, she plans to move in with her cousin, and live as a boy named Jamie. If she thought her friends and family would accept it, she’d start living as a boy right now.”

No response.

“Do you know her parents are so religiously motivated that they believe it’s possible to pray anxiety out of someone? They don’t consider depression to be a real thing; they think it’s just the devil trying to discourage you, and they won’t let her go to the doctor and get medication for it.”

Still nothing.

“This is a very troubled young person, Mr Tod, and she needs me.”

The Head breathed in, mouth still closed, and sat back in his chair, hands in his lap. He exhaled through his nose, and blinked for what seemed to Cas to be the first time during the entire exchange.

“Mr Novak,” he said, quietly. “I am an old fashioned, old man.”

Cas closed his eyes, steeling himself for what was coming, whilst reminding himself that if he lost his temper, he would also lose his job.
“I have no desire to learn how to operate a smartphone, I find myself entirely indifferent to the internet, and two years ago I discovered quite by accident who Ann Summers is, and nearly suffered a coronary incident.”

Cas stifled a shocked laugh at the unexpected admission.

“However,” his boss continued. “Out of touch as I may be, I have nothing but the utmost contempt for people who try to force their oppressing religious beliefs on their children.”

Cas’ eyebrows shot up in pleasant surprise.

“I find it abhorrent that a father would wish anything but happiness for his child.”

“Julian, I… that’s…”

“Unfortunately,” Mr Tod lifted a hand again. “Miss Foster is fifteen years old. Decisions about her personal welfare are therefore not ours to make. I am, regretfully, compelled to respect her father’s request.”

Cas rubbed his hands down his face, stomach knotting at the idea of Jasmine having no one to talk to or seek advice from. His palms started sweating and his knee started bouncing involuntarily. He’d seen the marks on her arms. If she felt alone, if she thought Cas had abandoned her…

“Having said that,” Mr Tod’s careful voice cut through his thoughts. “If Jasmine were ever to feel unsafe on school property, and needed to sit in your office every now and then to get herself together, then that can’t be helped now, can it?”

Cas’ face flooded with relief.

* * *


“Oh come on Gavin, you can do it!” she beamed.

“Would it kill you to bring me some Lloyd Webber every now and then?” Gavin grumbled, Edinburgh accent thickening with annoyance.

Charlie ignored him and went back to checking the tables, while Gavin begrudgingly added her request to his pile.

Musical Theatre Cabaret Night was always popular at the bar. Anyone who wanted to sing had to book a slot with Charlie, and email her their music so she could give it to Gavin, the bar’s resident super-pianist.

Charlie always saved a slot for herself and Cas at the end of the night, so they could knock out a duet. They’d done ‘As Long As You’re Mine’ on a dare from Ash one week, and absolutely killed it, so it had become a thing.

Charlie looked at her watch. Six forty. People generally started drifting in around seven, so...

“Bradbury!”

*Shit.*

“Oh, hey, Mr Crowley!” Charlie plastered a stiff and insincere smile onto her face to greet her boss,
wondering why the hell he was even here on a Thursday.

“Sunday takings are abysmal,” he informed her, matter-of-factly, sidestepping any and all pleasantries. “I fear jazz is dead, my dear.”

His voice was reasonably quiet, but he had a knack for increasing his vocal volume to maximum on any given word, and without warning.

“Oh, I think people just don’t go out much on a Sunday, Mr Crowley,” Charlie ventured. “You know, they have work the next day and stuff.”

“Bollocks,” her boss assured her. “It’s because there’s nothing less appealing than watching a tiny ginger witch singing fly me to the fucking moon!”

Charlie sighed. She’d been defending their headline jazz act for the best part of three years.

“Rowena has a small but loyal following…”

“Oh yes,” Crowley nodded, his tone dripping with sarcasm. “A small but loyal following of old bastard men who buy one drink the whole night and ogle my staff.”

“I’ll work on it,” Charlie assured, attempting to pacify him. “We can get some special guests to do an act, or maybe have like a trivia night or something - people love quizzes!”

Crowley narrowed his eyes.

“If we don’t start taking double what we’re taking now on a Sunday,” he said, carefully. “She’s gone. I would make more money if I bought a big screen TV and showed fucking football games on it.”

“But that’s not the kind of clientele we want, is it, darling?” Crowley’s wife suddenly appeared behind him, looking impeccable as always, and laid a calming and controlling hand on his shoulder.

“No it isn’t, Bela, sunshine of my life, apple of my eye,” Crowley agreed, in the surliest way imaginable. “But at this point I’d be happy to sell my soul for some fucking decent bar takings!”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” Bela rolled her eyes and winked conspiratorially at Charlie, who blushed furiously and looked at the floor. “Everything will be absolutely fine. Charlie will think of a way to solve it, and in the meantime, why don’t you go and get yourself a nice Scotch?”

“Fine,” Crowley said, sulkily.

Bela leaned down a few inches to place a lipstick-heavy kiss on his cheek. “Pinot Noir please, darling,” she said.

Charlie wondered, for the seventy-thousandth time since meeting them, how on earth Bela and Crowley ended up together. He was a short, curmudgeonly fellow with a receding hairline and a short temper. She was a well-educated, graceful woman with a wardrobe to die for and a voice like pressed velvet. Meg had once postulated that Crowley must be a fireball in bed.

“We won’t stay long,” Bela said, knocking Charlie’s thoughts back to centre. “You know he doesn’t really care for West End Wendy night.”

Charlie stiffened at the derogatory nickname; she’d become quite protective of the musical theatre crowd that stopped by on a Thursday, and she didn’t like it when Bela looked down her nose at
them.

“We’ll stay tomorrow though, of course.”

For some reason, Bela and her husband always came down for Open Mic night. What they found so appealing about an endless stream of acoustic guitarists was anyone’s guess, but Charlie appreciated the support.

“Sure,” she nodded, putting on her go-to peppy expression, and Ms Talbot-Crowley swanned off.

After all this time, Charlie had never stopped being flustered in front of Bela. Beautiful women made Charlie even more awkward than usual, and this one in particular always managed to recreate in her the sensation of being a nerdy teen trying to talk to one of the popular girls.

Despite her intimidating presence, Bela was always on Charlie’s side. She’d been the one to champion Charlie’s idea of using the bar as the unofficial headquarters of the LGBTQ American Immigrant Society of London. Charlie had joined that organisation back when she was pregnant, and it had taken her approximately twelve minutes to join the committee and be appointed the new membership secretary. She’d made some great friends, including Charlie’s own little angel, the lovely Castiel.

The first time he came to the bar, she’d told him that his eyes alone were almost enough to make her want to sleep with a dude again. He’d laughed and they were friends instantly. She’d teased him about being named after an angel despite his being a filthy sodomite, and he’d teased her for being a geeky, tattooed, gaming lesbian cliche. Then they bonded over off-Broadway musicals and the relationship was solidified.

“Evening,” came a sweet voice at Charlie’s ear, pulling her out of her thoughts.

“Oh, hey!” Charlie beamed. “I didn’t know you were working tonight.”

“I’m not.”

Charlie blinked.

Tamara had always been her favorite of all Crowley’s barmaids. She had the most fabulous eyes, and gorgeous lips, and such a lovely rich voice, the kind which should be reading the news on the BBC. Charlie had been hooked from day one, but wasn't certain at first whether Tamara was into girls or not. Charlie’s gaydar wasn't terribly accurate, so she'd drafted in the cavalry one evening.

“She didn't check me out once,” Ash had said.

“That doesn't make her gay, honey,” was Meg’s scathing retort. “That just means she has standards.”

The diagnosis had been ambiguous, but Meg had noted that Tamara had looked at Charlie’s chest and lips more than was strictly acceptable, so she was betting on gay.

The bet was a solid one, because Charlie and Tamara had been kind of unofficially seeing each other for a month.

“So you’re just here to hang out?” Charlie asked, hopefully.

“Yes,” Tamara smiled. “I am just here to hang out. And stare at you while you sing.”
“It’s bad manners to stare,” Charlie teased, face close to Tamara’s.

“I don't give a shit,” Tamara smirked, brushing her lips against Charlie’s.

“Hey!” Crowley barked from the bar. “I don't pay you to stand there necking your girlfriend, Bradbury!”

Charlie and Tamara exchanged a look. They were so used to Crowley; they knew there was no real malice behind his angry short-man nonsense.

“I should finish setting up,” Charlie mumbled, pulling away.

“Okay,” Tamara whispered, putting a little seductive quality into every movement and syllable.

She slid off to get a drink and Charlie blew out a breath. How in the world that goddess was interested in her she couldn't fathom, but she was going to enjoy it while it lasted.

* * *

Dean returned to his rented accommodation at around six that evening. He was thoroughly impressed with himself for having navigated his way back from the centre of London, and he was slouched on the couch with a pizza on his knees, new tattoo creamed, and Back to the Future on the sizeable television.

Dean enjoyed his own company - always had. Evenings like this rated pretty high on his enjoyment scale. He could have done with a whiskey to chase down the pepperoni, but other than that, it was ideal.

Back home, Dean would often go over to Sam and Jenna’s for Sunday lunch, and it was great. He loved his brother and sister-in-law more than anyone else in the world. But after a few hours he’d begin to crave his own space again. It was the same when he went to Ellen’s. Ellen and her husband had raised him after he lost his Mother, and his Dad went awol, and their daughter Jo was the little sister Dean and Sam never knew they wanted. He felt safe and at ease in their company and in their home, but again it was better when it was temporary. Ellen had been offended when he’d declined her invitation to stay the night on Thanksgiving last year, but Dean just wanted to go home. He wanted to sit on his own in his underwear, play his guitar, and smoke.

Maybe it was being thrown unexpectedly into the spotlight at a relatively young age that had impacted Dean to the point where he now just wanted to be left alone. He still liked entertaining, and there was certainly still a side of him that was a natural show-off, but peace and anonymity were now infinitely preferable to fame and attention.

At the time, it had been wonderful. Bobby, who had been Dean’s Father’s closest friend, had heard Dean sing one night, and within a matter of weeks there were contracts and radio interviews and talk of tour dates, and it was all extremely exciting.

Up to that point, Dean had been expecting to work construction all his life, or maybe become a mechanic. He didn’t have the academic flair of his brother, who’d wanted to be a lawyer since the age of eight, nor did he consider that he had the business acumen of his Dad or the rest of his surrogate family. So, discovering that he had a money-making natural talent was like a sunbeam bursting through a decidedly bleak cloud.

The promise of fame and fortune and all the action his relatively inexperienced libido could handle, was understandably appealing, and Dean had gone along with everything. Calendars, magazine articles, local TV appearances, collaborations with any other artist who showed the slightest interest,
and he’d even had a few strategic ‘dates’ with other minor celebrities, in an attempt to bolster both
their profiles. Ellen had insisted that it was crucial to be seen at the right events with the right people.

It quickly dawned on Dean that he would likely not be so successful if it weren’t for the way he
looked. Yeah, he could sing and he could play the guitar, but so could a million other people. His
face and his body were selling the posters, not his talents.

It hadn’t taken Dean long to get completely disillusioned and frustrated with the whole industry.
He’d had a vague idea of how it all worked - his Dad, Bobby and Ellen had been running Hunter
Records since the early seventies, and he’d grown up around it all - but it was an entirely different
experience from the inside. He’d found being used as a marketing tool very unpleasant, as was the
realisation that ‘teen stars’ are among the most disposable of human commodities.

Even now, Dean found it hard to trust people who were nice to him for no apparent reason. In the
back of his mind he always suspected that they must want to use him for something; never quite
convinced that someone could just like him with no ulterior motive.

He was frankly relieved when his album sales started to decline, and gladly accepted Ellen’s offer of
joining the production side of the team.

It hadn’t all been bad. He’d had some unique experiences, both on stage and off, and met some
awesome people. Benny, for one.

Dean had been doing a mini tour over the summer of ninety six, with a couple of Hunter’s other acts.
Benny was working as an apprentice technician at a theatre in Louisiana, and Dean had been
inexplicably drawn to him. They’d clicked instantly and hung out all the time during the two weeks
Dean was playing down there. That’s not all they’d done, either.

Dean devoured another slice of pizza and let his brain wander back to that night. He didn’t re-visit it
very often, because his relationship with Benny now was so far removed from those days, it felt
weird thinking about him like that. But occasionally he indulged in the memory.

The two of them had been sitting on the warm ground out the back of the theatre having a cigarette
and a bottle of beer after a show. Everyone else had left, and Dean hadn’t wanted to go back to his
hotel room just yet. He remembered having to convince Ellen that he didn’t need a chaperone.

The conversation had turned to sex, as it inevitably does when two eighteen year old boys are
talking, and Benny had revealed to Dean for the first time that he was gay. Growing up in the South
in the eighties and nineties, Dean didn’t exactly have many gay friends, and he’d been intrigued.

“You don’t look gay.”

Benny laughed. “Is that right? And what do gay men look like, Dean?”

“I don’t know,” Dean frowned. “But you’re really - big and muscly and you have a beard and
stuff.”

Benny laughed again and took a drag. “Gay boys come in all shapes and sizes Dean, just like
straight boys. You’re being kinda prejudiced.”

Dean blushed. “I’m sorry,” he said, sincerely. “Shit, I didn’t mean to offend you.”

Benny held his hand up. “Oh, I ain’t offended,” he smiled.

“So… do you have a boyfriend or a partner or something?”
Benny shook his head. “Nah,” he said. “I ain’t never met another queer guy in this whole fuckin’ town! I’ll get me some when I go to college. I’m goin’ to New York. They don’t give a shit there, brother. I’ll find someone.”

Dean took a puff of his cigarette, and suddenly felt strange thinking about Benny with another boy. His face got a little hot.

“So, if there’s no other gay guys round here,” he said, with a cough. “Does that mean you’ve never had sex?”

“It does mean that,” Benny nodded. “Hell, never mind sex, I ain’t even been kissed!”

Dean looked at his friend and frowned. “How do you know you’re into boys if you’ve never done anything with one?”

“Did you know you were into girls before your first kiss?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Well there you go, then.”

There was a silence, then Benny added, mischievously; “How do you know you’re not into boys if you’ve never done anything with one?”

Dean went bright red, and tried to stutter a reply, and Benny hurriedly retracted.

“Woah, woah!” he chuckled. “Calm down, cowboy, I’m only messin’ with ya.”

Dean took a long drink and a calming breath, and stared into Benny’s face.

“I just feel bad, you know?”

“What?” Benny asked.

“No one should get to eighteen and still not have had their first kiss.”

Benny turned his face to Dean’s.

“You offerin’?” he winked.

Dean didn’t drop his gaze. “What would you do if I was?”

Benny raised his eyebrows and took a swig of his beer.

“We-ell,” he drawled. “I would definitely take you up on that offer, Dean, because you, my brother, are what they call - fine.”

Dean grinned. “Well, that’s true,” he said, and drained his drink.

He put the empty bottle down on the ground beside him, and, before his brain could persuade him not to, he turned and pressed his face into Benny’s.

The feel of Benny’s short, soft facial hair was weird but kind of exhilarating, and once Benny got over his shock and actually started kissing back, it was pretty hot. It was really different to kissing a girl. It was more kind of - solid, and the taste was more, well, manly. Dean could taste beer and cigarettes, and smell Benny’s aftershave and hair gel. The hand on his arm was heavier and bigger
than a girl’s too, and it was oddly thrilling to be with someone physically larger than himself.

It hadn’t gone any further, and they’d broken away, laughing. Benny had thanked Dean for his first kiss, and it hadn’t been awkward the next day like Dean had been expecting. He kept waiting for the embarrassment to kick in, but it never did. He was glad his Dad wasn’t around to find out that he kissed a boy, and lord knows the Hunter publicity team would definitely kick his ass if they found out, but he discovered that he wasn’t ashamed in the least.

And if, alone that night in his hotel room, he’d replayed the whole thing with his hand down his pyjama pants, well he could blame that on the alcohol...

Dean smiled to himself as he polished off his pizza. He was grateful that Benny had stayed in his life. Benny was Dean’s best friend in the whole world, bar Sammy. He’d unwittingly sparked off Dean’s bisexuality, something that neither of them would realise for another decade after the kiss, but, with the exception of one highly drunken skinny-dipping incident in a lake the following summer, they’d stayed purely platonic.

Dean shifted on the couch, noting the semi that had formed underneath his pizza box.

What with thoughts of younger Benny, and that fucking crazy-hot guy from the train this morning, he was clearly having a guys-only week. Sometimes that happened. Generally Dean was equally attracted to beautiful girls and boys, but sometimes he found himself solely turned on by one gender for a little while. His flirting with Meg earlier had been reflexive; he wasn’t actually interested, though she was definitely his type of girl. Kinda cute, funny, sassy and a bit mysterious. He was looking forward to hanging out with her as friends while he was here.

That train guy though. Christ on a cracker, he was fucking gorgeous.

Dean slid his empty pizza box away and began to stroke himself inside his sweatpants. No finesse, no ceremony, just quick and rough and desperate.

Tuning out Marty and his temporal shenanigans for a few minutes, Dean’s brain flitted from images of deep blue eyes to the feel of Benny’s stubble, to the sound of that deep passionate Bostonian voice and that sexy, crinkly smile, to Benny’s husky laugh, back to those damn eyes again…

“Aaahh! Oh shit!” Dean cursed, as he came all over his hand.

As he panted his way down from his orgasmic high, it occurred to Dean that what with all the worrying over Sam, and getting ready for his trip, he hadn’t had a date or been laid in months. No wonder he was ready to blow in seconds.

He dropped his head back on the couch and briefly contemplated using the complimentary pizza napkin to clean himself up.

Come on, dude, he scolded himself. Even you’re not that lazy…

He hauled himself up and headed for the shower.

* * *

Cas pushed open the door of the bar just as Charlie was introducing the first act. He waved to the bar staff and headed to his usual table, at which he was pleasantly surprised to find Tamara.

“Hi, Cas,” she smiled, getting up to give him a kiss and help him with his bag.
“Hey, Tammy,” he said, warmly, as he sat down.

“I hope you don’t mind me crashing your table,” she said. “It’s a bit busy tonight so Charlie squeezed us in together.”

“Oh my god, I don’t mind at all,” Cas assured her, picking up the gin and tonic that was waiting for him and taking two highly undignified gulps.

Tamara chuckled. “You needed that,” she observed.

Cas grabbed a handful of curly fries from the big bowl in the middle of the table.

“You have no idea,” he said, mid-chew.

Eight powerful renditions of some theatrical gloriousness later, Gavin took a break, and general house music started playing.

Charlie was relieved of page-turning and sound-balancing duty, and came towards Cas and Tamara’s table.

“Hey!” she greeted, giving Cas a hug and a kiss.

“Hi honey, sorry I was late tonight,” Cas said. “Work shit then commuter chaos.”

“Oh, that’s okay,” Charlie replied, as she slid in beside Tamara.

“Everyone sounds great!” Charlie’s kind-of girlfriend encouraged.

“Yeah, they’re a good batch, right?” Charlie agreed. “And Gavin’s crushing it, as always.”

“Let me get you a drink,” Tamara said, getting up. “Cas?”

“One more of these, please,” Cas requested, indicating his long-empty glass of gin and tonic.

Charlie watched Tamara walk to the bar.

“She’s pretty dreamy, huh?” Cas teased.

“Yeah,” Charlie sighed, as Gavin approached the table.

“Charlie? Sorry to interrupt. Hello, Cas.”

Cas smiled. “Gavin, wonderful playing tonight, as always.”

“Thank you,” Gavin smiled. “Charlie, Billie says her music’s in the wrong key. Can you print another one?”

Charlie rolled her eyes. “Ugh, yes, hang on…”

She got up and started to make for her office. “Tell Tammy I’ll be right back,” she told them.

“ Fucking divas,” Gavin cursed. Then he turned to Cas. “So, you and Charlie are gracing us with The Next Ten Minutes later, then?”

“Yeah,” Cas confirmed, apologetically.

“You know,” Gavin said, cheeky glint in his eye. “You’re doing absolutely nothing to subvert the
stereotype that all gay American men dress flawlessly and love musical theatre.”

Cas laughed. “I tried to fight it, Gavin, I really did,” he smiled. “I just can’t resist a finely-tailored suit or a well-structured melody.”

Gavin smiled, and took a cigarette out of his pocket.

“My mother took me to see The Sound of Music when I was twelve,” he declared. “She bloody loved it, but I remember thinking it was all a load of tripe.”

Cas gasped in mock horror. “You can’t not love The Sound of Music, Gavin, come on, now.”

“Sorry,” Gavin grinned. “But it’s all bollocks, isn’t it? I mean, the two main characters barely speak, they have precisely nothing in common and yet they fall madly in love. It’s the same with most of these bloody shows - everyone’s in love after ten minutes and singing impassioned nonsense about someone they’ve only just met. At least Last Five Years has a somewhat credible romantic storyline.”

Cas narrowed his eyes. “You prefer the musicals that are about heartache and breakups?”

“Well, it’s more realistic!”

“People don’t watch musicals for the realism, Gavin,” Cas scolded. “They’re not documentaries. It’s escapism.”

Gavin shook his head and helped himself to a cold curly fry.

Cas registered the information Gavin had shared about his mother.

“I can’t imagine Rowena liking old romantic musicals…” he mused.

“Oh, aye,” Gavin confirmed. “She used to have a soul and everything.”

He winked, and Cas laughed.

“You know you love her,” he teased.

“I do,” Gavin sighed. “I mean, I feel like picking her up and throwing her sometimes, but…”

Charlie came bustling back to the table.

“Here ya go,” she said, out of breath but triumphant. “Fabulous Baby in E flat.”

“You’re a wee star,” Gavin told her, taking the sheets. “I’m gonna go smoke this before act two commences.”

He squeezed through the crowd toward the beer garden, just as Tamara appeared with Charlie’s drink.

“Here you are,” the barmaid smiled, and leaned forward to give Charlie a kiss. “You’re doing a great job,” she murmured, before returning to her seat.

Charlie flushed and Cas winked at her. He was thrilled that she was so happy. Tamara was beautiful and funny and very sweet with Charlie’s daughter. The joy Cas felt for his friend almost completely offset the loss he felt at her hanging out with him less.
Almost.

______________________________________

**Boston, Massachusetts**

**Wednesday, December 31st, 2008**

Pamela regarded Cas carefully, eyes kind but intense.

“In England?”

Cas nodded. “In England.”

“So, are you gonna go?”

“I think so,” Cas sighed. “I mean, I kind of applied for it without really thinking. But, it might be just what I need.”

“When would it start?”

“September,” Cas answered. “Post-graduate course for one academic year. I can start next year or defer until two-thousand-ten.”

Pamela sat down, setting down the refreshed cookie tray on the kitchen table. “It sounds good to me, Cas. Retraining and meeting new people in a new place. Fresh start.”

Cas nodded, slowly. “I just don’t know if I wanna go back to college, you know? University, I should say.”

“Well, you don’t have to decide now, right?” Pamela frowned. “You need to do your big trip first. Your whole travelling and finding yourself deal.”

“Yes,” Cas said, picking up two cookies and dipping one in his tea. “I really can’t wait to be as far away from here as possible. No offense.”

“None taken, sugar,” Pamela smiled. “And you had the dream again last night?”

Cas nodded. “I’ve had variants of it for the last month.”

“Okay,” Pamela said, considering. “Which elements are the same?”

“The bar, the guitar, and the colors.”

“And the feeling?”

Cas swallowed.

“Yes.”

Cas had known Pamela and her husband since childhood. She’d always been the friendly neighborhood kook, even as a kid. Always with the healing crystals and the chakras and the psychic spiritual stuff. Most people never took her seriously, but Cas had always adored talking to her about it all. She was genuine and grounded, despite the hippie vibe, and she calmed him down like no one else. Plus, she was a total badass and he loved her a lot. She was the only one who helped him interpret his dreams since he lost his Mom.
“Well, I don’t need to tell you about red and pink,” Pamela began.

“Unconditional love, and sexual desire!” came a voice from the living room.

“Thank you, Jesse!” she called back.

Cas grinned. “He’s finally learning.”

Pamela rolled her eyes.

“But you said you feel - sad?” she queried, seemingly set on establishing exactly what was going on in Cas’ subconscious.

Cas scrunched his face up, unsure. “Kind of,” he said. “It’s more like... anticipation of being sad. Like I’m about to say goodbye.”

“And the flower?”

“Red rose. But that’s love again, right?”

Pamela frowned. “Not necessarily,” she said. “Flowers don’t usually mean emotions with you.”

She leafed through her notebook.

“With the exception of lilies, nature for you is usually indicative of a place; something geographical.”

Jesse came into the kitchen at that moment to refill his coffee.

“When’s your flight out, Cas?” he asked, as he passed.

“Uh, January twelfth,” Cas answered.

“Are you going to the U.K.?”

“No - Southeast Asia.”

“Huh,” Jesse pondered.

“Why do you ask?” Pamela quizzed her husband, suspicious.


Cas and Pamela stared at each other.

Pamela’s face broke into a grin. “Looks like you’re going to university, sugar.”
“Oh my god, it looks awesome!” Jo’s face appeared next to Ellen’s on the screen of Dean’s laptop.

“Well, a deal’s a deal,” Dean smiled, rolling his sleeve back down over Ash’s artwork.

“So how’s England?” Ellen asked.

“Cloudy,” Dean answered. “How’s America?”

“Free and brave,” Jo shot. “Are you meeting Benny this weekend?”

“Yeah, tomorrow. And I'm going to an Open Mic night in…” Dean looked at his watch. “…six hours.”

Jo raised her eyebrows. “Open Mic? You gonna sing?”

Dean shrugged. “I might.”

“Well no one’ll know you, honey,” Ellen teased. “Couldn't sell you in the U.K. no matter how hard I tried.”

Dean hummed a short laugh. “Yeah, they really weren’t interested in me.”

“You’re simply not classy enough for the British market, Dean,” Jo explained, with sarcastic disappointment. “They’re not into dusty cowboys who can only play three chords.”

Dean’s eyes narrowed. “Thank you for your opinion Joanna, but I’m pretty sure it was more because they just weren't ready for this!”

He slid his hands over his chest with a slightly uncoordinated roll of his rib cage, and pulled his lips up into an aggressive pout.

Jo made a fake gagging sound, and Ellen laughed. “No one’s ready for that, honey.”

Dean stuck his tongue out at them. “So, anything going on over there?”

Jo rolled her bottom lip out. “Not really,” she answered.

Ellen’s eyes flickered to Jo’s, just briefly, then down a little. Dean knew both of them well enough to get suspicious.

“What was that?” he demanded.

“What?” both ladies answered, simultaneously.

“You just did that non-verbal Harvelle communicating thing that you do,” Dean said, waving an accusing finger between them. “What's going on?”

Ellen and Jo exchanged another look, and Ellen sighed.

“John's staying inside for a little longer,” she told him, quietly.
Dean took a deep breath and licked his lips, thoughtfully. So his Dad didn't get parole. Again.

“What did he do?”

“What do you think?” Jo said, with a bitter laugh.

“Hey,” Ellen snapped, slapping her daughter on the leg with the back of her hand. “Don't be like that.”

“It's okay,” Dean sighed. “So he got in another fight?”

Ellen nodded.

“Anger management therapy really doing the trick, huh?” Dean said, with a wry smile and sad eyes.

“Sam went to see him, you know,” Ellen told him, quietly.

Dean nodded, slowly. He had suspected as much, but never actually asked his brother. Nothing like a life-threatening illness to make you build bridges with an estranged parent.

His father had managed to get away without jail time following a few of his arrests, but he’d been serving this stretch - his third - for sixteen months. They hadn’t even known where he was until Bobby received a birthday card.

The first time John had been sent down was for grievous bodily harm. He’d mistakenly thought he’d found the electrician who wired their house, and decided to exact revenge for the fire that killed Dean and Sam’s mother. Every arrest had involved some sort of alcohol-fueled violence.

“I'm not going, Ellen,” Dean stated, defiantly, before she could even ask. “Not again.”

There was a stiff silence.

“Ever think that the state of your relationship is one of the things that makes him so angry?” Ellen tried.

“That's not anger, Ellen, that's guilt,” Dean spat. “And he fucking deserves it. How can you still be defending him?”

Ellen rubbed her hand across her mouth.

“Because somewhere under all that is one of my best friends,” she said, voice heavy with years of worrying about the Winchesters. “It breaks my heart, Dean.”

“You should be madder with him than any of us,” Dean said, suddenly fuming. “He dumped me and Sam on you and Bill, and fucking disappeared all the damn time, then goes and gets himself arrested - what - five, six times? Expecting you or Bobby to bail him out…”

Ellen raised her hands. “Okay, Dean, okay.”

There was a cold pause, then Dean's voice came, quiet but decisive. “I don't wanna see him.”

“Fine,” Ellen conceded. “But Dean, I need you to know I'm not mad at him for leaving you and your brother with me. I never will be.”

Dean looked up at her.
“I loved raising you boys,” she smiled. “Y’all were a giant pain in my ass, but I wouldn’t have traded you for anything.”

___________________________________

Austin, Texas
November 18th, 1983

Ellen sat in the kitchen, baby Jo on her lap, and baby Sam in the high chair next to her.

“John!” she called, again.

There was no response.

Bobby emerged blearily from the living room where he’d been crashing for almost six weeks. He’d wanted to be near the family for support, after the fire. This family which had become his own over the years. They were all reeling still from the terrible shock.

Sam clapped his hands and babbled at the sight of his surrogate Uncle.

“Feedin’ time at the zoo?” Bobby yawned, and Ellen answered with a highly unamused expression.

“I thought one little’un was hard work,” she grumbled, as Jo grabbed a fistful of her mother’s hair. “Now I’ve got two babies, a five year old who won’t talk, and a grown-ass man who won’t eat. JOHN!”

Bobby pulled up a chair next to Sam, rubbed a hand over his eyes, and poured himself a coffee.

“You're doin’ a good thing, Ellen,” he told her. “John's worse than me when it comes to his feelings - he'll start managing soon. It's still too raw.”

Ellen stroked a hand through little Sam’s hair.

“Mary was so wonderful,” she said, quietly. “Poor little mites.”

“At least this one’ll never know the difference,” Bobby muttered. “It's Dean I feel sorry for.”

Upstairs, Dean sat cross-legged on the end of the bed, staring out the window. He liked Aunt Ellen’s house, but he wanted to go home. He wasn’t allowed though, because his house was all burnt.

Mostly it felt like it happened ages ago, but also sometimes it felt like it just happened yesterday.

Dad had woken him up, and it’d been all smoky. Dean didn't understand why; he thought maybe some clouds had come in through the window. Dad had been really panicky and shouty. He’d told him to carry Sammy outside and wait, so that's what Dean had done. Sammy wasn't very heavy, but the smoke had made Dean cough and his eyes water, so he remembered moving quite slowly.

Out in the front yard, Dean remembered Ellen’s husband Bill running past him towards the house, then Ellen was there and she took Sammy from him. The three of them had huddled on the grass on the other side of the street, then Dean had heard the sirens. He'd been excited about seeing a real fire truck.

He remembered seeing Dad and Bill come out of the house, carrying his Mom. The firemen had run to meet them, and then an ambulance came, and everything was blue lights.

Dean’s memory was a bit patchy after that. He remembered the smell of the hospital, but not how he
got there. He remembered Ellen hugging him too tightly, and his Dad crying. He never knew Dads cried.

Dean himself hadn't cried until his Mom’s funeral. He didn't join in the prayers, cause he was mad at God for taking her away.

Uncle Bobby said there ain't no such place as Heaven and Hell, and your soul just goes to a different plane of reality. Dean didn't know what that meant. He hoped his Mom was happy on the plane, but really he just wanted her to come back, and comb his hair and make him a sandwich and run him a bath. Ellen didn't do any of those things properly.

The door creaked open, and John came in. He looked old.

“Hey, son,” he half-smiled.

Dean didn't say anything. He meant to, but he couldn't.

“Listen, I've gotta go away for a couple days, okay? Just a work thing. Ellen’ll watch you while I'm gone.”

Dean's insides felt scrunchy, and he thought he might cry, but nothing happened in his face. He wanted to scream at his Dad not to leave him, but it was like his mouth forgot how to work.

John’s eyes got sad.

“Be a good boy, Dean,” he instructed in a low voice. “Take care of your brother.”

Then he left without even giving Dean a hug or a hair-ruffle. Dean heard his boots on the stairs, then the front door clicked, and he heard Bobby call out for John.

A few moments later, the engine of their Impala growled into life outside the window, and Dean didn't see his Dad again for three months.

_______________________________________

Wood Green, London
Friday, June 14th, 2013

“Thanks, Mr Novak.”

“You’re welcome, Danny,” Cas smiled. “That’s what I’m here for.”

Cas sighed as the thirteen year old closed the door behind him. Fucking internet bullying. Poor kids had no escape. Cas resisted the urge almost daily to scream just turn your damn phone off! to them all, but he knew it wasn’t as simple as that.

There was a knock at his door.

“Come in.”

Patrick pushed open the door to Cas’ office and greeted Cas cheerily.

“Hey, sunshine, how’s it going?”

Cas smiled at the Irish Math teacher, not least because he was carrying a very large mug of coffee.
Cas had learned while at university that he found the way English people make coffee to be pretty unacceptable, and was only ever satisfied with his own coffee maker at home. Patrick had offered to make him a coffee on his first day at the school, and Cas had reluctantly accepted for the sake of his manners and of making new friends. He'd been delighted to find that apparently the Irish sure know their coffee, and Patrick was the only person allowed to make him one from then on.

Cas, as a professional brain unraveller, deduced that his emotional connection with coffee was a metaphor for his link to home. For Cas, coffee equalled America. It equalled deep-rooted feelings of comfort and security.

“Hey, Patrick. Ah, thank you!”

Patrick set the mug down just as the bell rang. End of break.

Cas didn't get his breaks at the same time as the other members of staff, because between lessons was when the kids came to see him. This meant that he rarely hung out in the staff room, which suited him just fine.

It wasn't that Cas was inherently antisocial, it was just the fewer friends he made, the fewer friends there were to lose. He was well aware how sad that was, but he was content to keep his colleagues at a certain emotional distance. He didn't go out of his way to avoid them; happy to interact with them when the opportunity presented itself, but he didn't actively seek to socialise with them either. It wasn’t self-inflicted isolation; more that he was just very particular about who made the cut into his inner circle.

Cas had precisely four friends in London - Charlie, Tamara, Ash and Meg. Frankly, they were more than enough. There were people in his life who he liked, such as Gavin and Rowena, and the guy that ran the little store on the corner of his street. They were all very nice. But they weren't his friends. He wouldn't call them up if he was in trouble, or expect them to speak at his funeral.

He also liked a lot of the people he'd met at the LGBTQ American Immigrant Society. He'd even had a couple of hook-ups with people there, all of which he’d regretted almost instantly. He hated resorting to one-night-stands, but he didn't want a long term relationship, and a boy’s gotta eat.

Patrick was Cas' favorite person at the school. He was chilled and had a dry sense of humor, and he and Cas were into the same TV shows. It was Charlie, though, who was his best friend - the only one who even vaguely knew any of what had happened to him in Boston, and the person that reminded him most of poor Pamela.

“Well, it's been delightful to spend time with you, as always,” Patrick ribbed, as the ringing died out. “But year ten will be waiting for me. I'm certain they're all itching to get back to the theory of probability.”

“I'm sure they'll find a practical application for it,” suggested Cas, with a smile. “When they’re eighteen and start playing poker.”

Patrick chuckled. “Professional gambling is a valid and worthy art,” he winked. “Catch you later, Cas, have a good weekend.”

“You too Patrick, thanks again for the coffee.”

Cas was looking forward to getting home to bed that evening. He was going back to the bar to support the weekly Open Mic night, but he'd told Charlie that he was definitely sleeping at home tonight come hell or high water. He wanted to wake up on Saturday morning in his own room, and
stay in his pyjamas the entire day.

He drank some of his coffee, and started to type up his notes from his session with young Danny.

* * *

“So, long story short,” Jenna was saying. “He's cleared to fly and we can get travel insurance, but I don't know whether we'll be able to get flights with only two weeks to go.”

Dean pulled a face down the phone.

“Okay, well keep me posted,” he instructed. “You don't wanna miss my speech, believe me!”

Jenna laughed. “Oh god, poor Benny…”

“Hey, he knew what he was signing up for.”

“Okay, well look, I gotta go, Dean - I'll call you when we know what we're doing.”

“Okay, Jen, see ya, tell Sam he's a bitch and I love him.”

“Will do!”

Dean ended his call, silently thanking the network gods for his international service plan. He got himself a beer from his fridge, and sat down at his little dining table. Having caught up with all of his family, both biological and surrogate, he now had nothing to do til he was due to meet Meg and go to this bar where Charlie worked.

Maybe he would sing. No one would recognise him, as Ellen had charitably pointed out. It would be nice to get an opinion of his talents from some total strangers; people who weren't trying to suck up or be nice. He could get an honest reaction.

He picked up his cell again, and found Ash’s number.

Dean: Hey man it's Dean. Would like to take up the offer of your guitar later if still on the table?

He moved himself and his beer onto the couch, and flicked on the TV. A few minutes of ER reruns later - damn young Noah Wyle really was cute - his phone beeped.

Ash: Duuuuuude! Absofuckinlutely I'll tune her up for ya \m/

Dean smiled, but his stomach tightened a little. He hadn't sung live for years. Fuck what was he even going to play? This was a terrible idea. He almost texted Ash back to tell him he'd changed his mind, but then he told himself to stop being a pussy and just do it.

He googled a few chord charts, and made a note on a piece of paper of all the songs he could confidently perform from memory.

Yeah, he thought, reading over the page with growing conviction. This is going to be fine.

He looked at his watch. Still a few hours to go, and now that his stomach had stopped nervously churning, he found he was hungry.

Alright, he told himself. Cheese sandwiches and then we'll decide what to wear. Even if what comes out of your mouth is horrible, at least you can distract them with a killer outfit. Appearance trumps
talent, after all.

Boston, Massachusetts
Friday, April 10th, 2008

Cas had a package waiting for him in the office.

It was sitting on top of a huge pile of paperwork that Hannah had put in his in-tray. Almost all of the documents had a note marked URGENT or PLEASE DEAL WITH THIS ASAP stuck to them.

Cas ran his hands through his unruly hair, then rested his elbows on the desk, fists folded together against his mouth.

He closed his eyes, then almost immediately opened them again in case he fell asleep. Having Hannah shaking him awake at his desk was something that needed to not happen again. He was having enough trouble retaining authority as it was, without the staff knowing he couldn’t stay conscious for a full working day.

He pushed aside his untouched lunch, and picked up the flat, square package. Anything to avoid actually dealing with his mountainous workload. He turned it over, trying to deduce what was inside, then decided to just open the damn thing.

It was a CD in a clear plastic case. On the CD were written the words ‘Castiel Novak, with my apologies’, in scrappy handwriting.

Cas frowned, and put the CD into his computer. It played automatically. It was a song that he’d never heard before; a single guitar which was then joined by a man’s voice. It was a voice he recognised, but not one he had ever known to be particularly melodious.

“If I had wings like Noah’s dove, I’d fly up the river to the one I love. Fare thee well, my honey, fare thee well…”

Just then, Hannah came in and started speaking, but Cas hushed her and signalled for her to close the door.

“One of these days and it won’t be long, call my name and I’ll be gone…”

Hannah frowned. “Who’s that?” she asked.

“I remember one night, a drizzling rain, round my heart I felt an achin’ pain…”

“I think - I think it’s Chuck,” Cas answered, baffled.

“Chuck?” Hannah repeated, incredulously. “Chuck recorded a song?”

Cas leaned over to the speakers and turned the volume up. There must be a message in these lyrics somewhere, something to account for Chuck’s mysterious departure. Maybe it would tell them where he was. Hannah sat down on the other side of the desk, and they listened together, intently, until the end of the song.

“…if I had listened to what my mama said, I’d be at home in my mama’s bed. Fare thee well, oh honey, fare thee well.”

Chuck’s voice tailed off and the guitar played its final chord. Then the track ended. There was
nothing else on the CD.

Hannah and Cas looked at each other, confused.

“What was all that supposed to mean?” Hannah asked, sounding sad and furious at the same time. “Was that him trying to explain himself?”

Cas sat back in his chair, feeling more lost than ever. “I have no clue,” he admitted. “I was hoping…” he sighed heavily and looked at the ceiling. “I don’t know.”

Hannah stood up.

“Well,” she said, with a sarcastic smile. “He said ‘farewell’ about twelve times so I think we can assume that he’s not coming back.”

“Hannah - ” Cas began, getting out of his chair.

“Come on, Castiel,” she interrupted, obviously frustrated but shoving it all down and forcing a professional tone. “He thinks he can just vanish, then play games and send us nonsense songs? Well, we don’t have time for that. We’re trying to run a company here.”

Cas knew that Hannah was just as hurt and shocked by Chuck leaving as he was, maybe even more so. If she kept burying it all like this, she was going to snap.

“There wasn’t a postmark on the envelope,” he mused. “It was hand-delivered.”

“So what?” Hannah demanded.

“So… maybe he’s still around, keeping an eye on us?”

Hannah laughed, darkly. “Keeping an eye on us? He’s not keeping an eye on anything, Castiel! He’s probably on a beach somewhere in Mexico or Hawaii, and he’s drinking Pina Coladas and playing his little guitar, and this is him giving us one last ‘screw you’ and letting us know that he’s gone for good.”

Cas’ brow furrowed. He felt sick at the thought of that being true. He wanted this to be a sign from Chuck that he was still thinking about them and that he was on the mend from whatever mental health problems he’d been having, and he’d be making a triumphant return any day to save them all.

Hannah was looking out the window. She seemed to be gathering herself. She smoothed out her jacket and turned to Cas.

“Come on, Sir,” she said, voice now completely empty of any emotion. “You have a meeting.”

With that, she left the office, leaving the door open for Cas to follow her.

Cas reluctantly picked up the files he needed, closed down the music application on his computer, and followed Hannah to the meeting room, feet feeling heavier with each step.
Despite her snide tone and spiky exterior, Dean couldn’t help but like Meg.

She’d been waiting for him outside Ash’s studio just like she promised, and was proving excellent company on the walk to the bar. As they approached it, Dean could already hear music and loud voices. Friday nights evidently kicked off early around here.

The hanging sign above the door read ‘The Rabbit and Hounds’, with an accompanying painting in a square frame.

“So, what’s the crowd like in this place?” Dean asked, looking up at the faded picture.

“English enough that they’ll applaud politely even if you suck.”

“Awesome.”

Meg smiled out the side of her mouth and pulled open the door.

The pub was a strange mix of traditional and contemporary decor. The floor was mostly carpeted - the carpet in question looking distinctly worn, and with a pattern and color scheme straight out of the seventies - but the area near the bar, to the left of where Dean and Meg had come in, had wooden flooring. As did the small stage on the opposite side.

The ceiling, and the wall behind the stage, still had their original wooden beams, though they’d been painted a rich shiny black. The other walls had been bedecked with paintings and framed records, and curious trinkets hung at random intervals. Dean saw vintage goblets, metal bird-cages, old war medals, and what appeared from this distance to be a rabbit’s foot.

Between the bar and the stage were rows of round tables, almost all of them already occupied. Several people were milling around, drinks in hand.

“Come on,” Meg nudged him over to a space at the end of the long bar.

There were four people working behind it. One of them seemed to recognise Meg, and came straight over to them.

“Hi guys,” the barmaid smiled, seeming not in the least bit affected by working a job which Dean knew could be pretty hair-pullingly stressful.

The barmaid had one of the most flawless faces Dean had ever seen. She had amazing skin tone, and her mouth shape reminded Dean a little of a backing singer he had once worked with. Well. Worked with, and slept with. Her name was Cassie. She’d been of Nigerian descent on her father’s side, and Dean wondered whether this girl had Nigerian heritage too. Her dark hair was cropped short and close to frame her face, meaning that you couldn’t miss that perfect jawline and big beautiful eyes. Eyes and lips were Dean’s favorite things about the human face. Anyone he’d ever been attracted to had killer eyes and full lips.

“Tamara, this is Dean,” Meg introduced.
Tamara smiled at him. “Oh, yes, our newest American import.”

Dean grinned back at the first genuine Londoner he'd met since his arrival. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“You too,” she answered. “Drinks?”

“Very, very large ones,” Meg insisted.

“Not too large,” Dean held up a finger. “I ain’t performing while inebriated, sweetheart; I’m not Axl Rose.”

Once furnished with Meg’s pint of cider and Dean’s bottle of lager, Meg led him down to a table in the middle of the room, third row from the stage. Around said table were Charlie, Ash, a younger guy that Dean didn’t recognise, and - holy fucking shitballs - the guy who’d been on his train yesterday. The gorgeous fucking guy who’d unknowingly contributed to Dean’s most recent orgasm.

Christ. What the fuck.

The guy looked up as Dean and Meg neared the table, and recognition dawned on his face.

“Hi, Dean!” Charlie squealed, far too happy to see a guy she’d only known for a day. She jumped up and gave him a big hug, which Dean returned, despite himself.

“Hey,” he said, as he was released. “I’m here, as promised.”

“Good thing too, dude,” said Ash. “Didn't haul this across town for nothin’.”

From under the table, Ash pulled out a dark green Fender, the body of which was adorned with various band stickers and Sharpie’d-on graffiti. The strap had skulls and roses all over it, and Ash threw up the rock sign with his other hand as he passed the instrument to Dean.

Dean opened his mouth to express his thanks, when another voice cut across him.

“Charlie!”

Charlie turned, and Dean followed her gaze to the tall, regal looking lady coming up behind him.

“Well, hello,” the lady cooed, locking eyes with Dean.

“Bela, this is Dean!” Charlie enthused. “He's visiting from Texas and he's gonna play tonight!”

“How wonderful,” the lady said, in a voice seemingly on loan from Mary Poppins, but with a predatory expression borrowed from an entirely more X-rated genre of entertainment.

She put her hand on Dean’s forearm, holding him in place for no apparent reason while she addressed Charlie.

“Ready to start?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Charlie confirmed. “First act is lined up and ready to go.”

“Great,” Bela said, then turned her attention back to Dean. “I look forward to experiencing your work, Dean.”

Dean wasn't wholly comfortable with the close scrutiny and uninvited physical contact, especially
having clocked the wedding ring on this chick’s hand, but he forced a smile. Apparently she was in charge, and he wasn’t about to make a problem for Charlie.

“Hope I don’t disappoint,” he said, and took a large swig of his drink.

“I don’t imagine you ever could,” Bela purred, and strutted off back towards the bar.

“Wow,” Dean said, eyebrows high. “She’s - friendly.”

Charlie made a face. “Sorry,” she cringed. “Bela has no boundaries and no discernible dignity when it comes to fresh meat.”

“What did you call me?”

“Oh my god, I didn't mean that!” Charlie blurted. “I just meant that's how she sees you!”


Ash raised his glass in reply.

“So, Dean, let me introduce you,” Charlie said, putting her hand on his upper arm.

Dean found that Charlie's contact, in contrast to Bela’s, was very welcome. He found her oddly comforting.

“This is Gavin,” she told him, indicating the curly-haired young man on Ash’s right.

“Hello, welcome to the circus,” Gavin said, cheerily, in an accent that Dean was sure was British, but maybe not English.

“He's our resident pianist,” Charlie went on. “His mom sings on our jazz nights. They're from Scotland.”

One point to me, thought Dean. All hail king of the British accents.

“And this,” continued Charlie. “Is my favorite person in all the world, apart from my daughter.”

Dean looked down at the face that had crept into his fantasies.

“Hello, Charlie’s favorite person in all the world apart from her daughter,” he grinned. “I've seen you somewhere before, haven’t I?”

Train guy looked up, and licked his lips before answering. An action which definitely stirred something a few inches below Dean’s stomach.

“I believe we shared a platform and then a carriage yesterday morning,” the dark-haired Bostonian said, in that impossibly hot, low rumble.

“You did?” exclaimed Charlie.

“I'm staying in Hatfield,” Dean told her.

“Oh my god, serendipity or what?!” she gasped, as train guy stood up and held out his hand to Dean.

“Cas,” he said.
“Cas,” Dean repeated, taking the outstretched hand, trying not to notice the size of the guy's fingers.

“It's short for Castiel,” Charlie told Dean, sounding pleased with herself. “He's named after an actual Angel.”

“Is that so?” Dean smiled.

He’d looked Cas up and down before he could stop himself. He was dressed much more informally than he had been yesterday, in beige slacks and a dark gray t-shirt. It wasn't a particularly close-fitting outfit, but Dean could still see the faint outline of a pretty fit body under there. And his arms were really defined. Dean licked his lips and hoped he wasn't coming over like a creep, just eyeing up the poor dude.

“Yeah, he's our own little Clarence,” Meg contributed from her seat at the table. “Heavenly and pure as the driven snow, if you don't count the gay porn addiction.”

Cas closed his eyes, and Dean knew that feeling. Who needs enemies when you have friends who are determined to embarrass you at every opportunity?

“Well, Cas,” Dean smiled, causing Cas to open up those awesome eyes again. “Eight million people in London and I run into you again. That's gotta be angelic powers.”

Cas smiled, and Dean was relieved to have relaxed him.

“I guess so,” Cas agreed.

Charlie flitted off to get ready for the first performer, and left them to it. Cas pulled out the seat next to him, invitingly, and Dean happily parked himself in it, leaning Ash’s guitar against the table.

Cas cleared his throat and threaded his fingers together on the table.

“So your destination yesterday was Ash’s chair?”

“It was,” Dean nodded, drinking some more of his lager.

“Charlie told me she'd recruited someone for tonight from the studio, but I didn't get any details. I hope you're not here against your will; she can be hard to say no to.”

“Oh, don't worry,” Dean said, finding himself unable to wipe the smile off his face or tear his eyes away from Cas. “I'm very pleased to be here.”

He swallowed, and realised they only did half an introduction.

“Dean Winchester, by the way,” he said.

“Oh, I used to live there,” Cas smiled.

“What?”

“Winchester.”

“Virginia?”

“No, Hampshire,” Cas explained. “On the English south coast. I did a post-graduate course at Winchester University.”
“No kidding!”

“It's a wonderful city,” Cas told him. “It has a very beautiful cathedral.”

“Well, I never knew we had a cathedral,” Dean grinned. “I should go see it while I'm over here.”

He nudged Cas’ shoulder. “I'll need a tour guide though,” he winked.

Cas blushed. Dean considered cranking up the flirting just to see how red he could make that pretty face, but decided instead to let his new angel friend off the hook.

“So, what were you studying?”

“Oh, adolescent psychology.”

“Of course,” Dean nodded. “School counsellor.”

“Right,” Cas raised his glass.

“So tell me Cas, are all British colleges basically Hogwarts? All stone floors and blazers and scary professors?”

Cas laughed. “Not quite,” he said. “But it certainly was a very different atmosphere to Harvard Law.”

“Wait, you went to law school?” Dean asked.

“I did indeed,” Cas confirmed. “I stopped practicing law in two-thousand-eight.”

“My brother’s a lawyer. He went to Stanford,” Dean said, proud to share that information whenever he could.

“Really?” Cas sounded impressed. “That's awesome, is he older?”

“Five years younger, a foot taller and a hell of a lot smarter.”

“Oh, I'm sure that's not true,” Cas said, though Dean didn't think he sounded convinced.

“So, hold up,” Dean said, processing. “You went from earning, what, six figures a year to talking to teenagers about their problems? Dude…”

Cas laughed. “I know it seems like a strange leap, but it's a lot more fulfilling.”

Dean looked into Cas’ eyes. There was something a little sad about them, but there was also something very honest in there. Something genuine and - yeah, Meg had the right word - pure.

Dean could almost believe that this was a person who wanted to help others for no other reason than because it's the right thing to do. But you don't live for a few decades without acquiring some emotional shit, and if you've moved halfway across the world there must be something going on. Dean wanted to find out what it was. He also kinda wanted to strip Cas naked and lick him from head to toe, but that was neither here nor there.

Dean drained his bottle, as Bela suddenly appeared beside them and flashed a shark-like smile.

“Dean, my darling,” she said in a silky voice. “You're down to play at nine forty.”
Dean smiled. “Suits me,” he said.

“Can you fill twenty minutes?” Bela asked.

Dean licked his top teeth inside his closed mouth, resisting all the ‘filling’ innuendos that had appeared uninvited in his brain.

“I sure can, ma’am,” he said, decisively.

“Super,” Bela said, pouting unnecessarily on the ‘oo’ sound, and sashaying away.

“You know,” pondered Dean, watching her. “I cannot decide if I’m attracted to her or if she terrifies me.”

Cas huffed a laugh. “It can't be both?”

Dean pressed the corners of his mouth down as he nodded, considering.

“She'd eat you alive,” Cas suggested.

“Oh I don’t doubt it, but what a way to go!”

Cas laughed again, and rapped his hands on the table. “You want another drink?”

Dean stood up as Cas did, finding that he needed to answer the sudden call of nature. He told himself it was down to drinking too fast, cause it couldn't possibly be nerves...

“I'd love one, thanks. I gotta go to the bathroom; be right back.”

As Dean sauntered as casually as he could to the bathrooms at the back of the pub, he vaguely hoped that Cas was checking out his ass. He also hoped, not so vaguely, that he could still sing. It had been a while. He knew he could still play, cause he noodled around on his Les Paul almost every evening. That guitar was his most prized possession, along with his car. He'd even researched how much it would be to ship it over with him, but decided against it after reading some horror stories about musical instruments being trashed or stolen in international transit. Ash’s Fender was pretty cool, and he was looking forward to showing off on it as much as he was dreading being back in the spotlight.

*It must be nice to be emotionally stable,* he mused, as the bathroom door closed behind him.

Cas reached the bar, and turned a beer mat over and over under his fingers, waiting for Tamara to finish serving her other customers so he could get her attention.

He still couldn't get over it. One minute he'd been settling in for another mediocre evening, then he had looked up and - *Impossibly Gorgeous Man.*

*Impossibly Gorgeous Man* was here in the pub. *Impossibly Gorgeous Man* had made friends with Charlie and Ash and Meg, and now he was here. In the pub.

And, *Impossibly Gorgeous Man* was looking really fucking extra-impossibly gorgeous in his distressed blue jeans and charcoal colored t-shirt under an open red plaid shirt with the sleeves rolled up. Pretty simple, as outfits go, but sweet Jesus did he know how to work it.

The strum of a guitar announced that the first act was about to start. Cas looked at his watch; an hour and forty minutes before he'd get to hear Dean sing. A tingle of anticipation ran through him. It's very difficult not to look sexy with a guitar, but Cas had a feeling that Dean was going to exceed all expectations.
Dean. It really suited him, and rolled off the tongue slightly easier than Impossibly Gorgeous Man.

Cas still couldn't put his finger on what it was that was familiar about Dean. He reminded Cas of someone, maybe, though he couldn't think who.

***

The evening passed relatively quickly, and extremely pleasantly. Dean fitted in instantly with the little squad, and they all chatted easily. He was very well-mannered and confident.

Dean told Cas all about his friend Benny's wedding, and Cas could see in his eyes how excited he was to be a Best Man. Dean obviously cared about Benny a great deal.

He got on great with Ash, and every now and then would laugh with his whole body at something Ash said. It was a very infectious sound, though Cas selfishly wished that he was the one making Dean laugh like that. He would love to have him all to himself and not have to share him. Cas’ mind meandered through some of the possible scenarios which involved being alone with Dean. The things he would do…

Meg returned from the bar and slid into the seat next to Cas that Charlie had recently vacated, steering Cas’ brain away from impure thoughts. For now.

“Hey, hot stuff,” she greeted, passing him another gin.

“Thanks,” Cas said, eagerly accepting what he calculated to be his sixth G and T of the evening.

Meg leaned in conspiratorially, and whispered in his ear; “He's been flirting with you all night, you know.”

Cas pulled his head away and frowned. He glanced at Dean, who was bent over the other side of the table, debating something with Gavin.

“I'm not sure,” Cas told Meg. “I think he's just like that.”

Cas had thought, after Dean’s flattery on the train, that he was gay. But, having heard the way he spoke about Bela, and observed the way he looked at Tammy, he was now pretty certain that he was bi. He still wasn’t quite sure if Dean was into him, or not, though. It could all just be meaningless flirty banter.

Meg shook her head. “Uh-uh,” she said, firmly. “He's been looking at you the way Ash looks at a freshly rolled joint.”

“Like I'm gonna reduce his brain function and make him hungry?”

“Like he can't wait to wrap his lips round you and suck…”

Cas’ cheeks got hot at that, then he and Meg pulled apart as the current song ended and the crowd applauded and cheered. Dean sat up as well, back to his previous position, and his knee started bouncing compulsively, brushing against Cas’.

“Are you alright?” Cas asked.

“Uh, yeah,” Dean answered. “I guess I'm a little nervous. I haven't sung in a while.”

The performers so far had all been pretty good. Three guitarists and two keyboard players, all with strong voices.
Cas smiled at Dean. “You’ll be fine.”

“You have absolutely no basis for that statement,” Dean informed him, with a wry laugh. “For all you know, I could have a voice like a Canadian goose, and the guitar technique to match.”

“True,” Cas chuckled. “But something tells me you're pretty good, Dean Winchester.”

“Oh, I am,” Dean winked. “Wait - are we still talking about singing?”

Charlie’s voice came over the mic, as the previous act unplugged and departed.

“Oh everyone,” she said, voice reverberating around the old walls. “Two more live acts left before we let you loose on the jukebox!”

She looked over at their table.

“Ready, Dean?”

“Oh, boy,” Dean breathed.

He put down his drink and wrapped one hand round the neck of the guitar.

“Go get em,” Cas whispered.

“Alright! Cowboy time!” Meg cheered.

“Yeeeeaaahhh Deanooooo!!!” Ash yelled, clapping his hands.

Dean got up and made the short journey from their table to the stage.

He cleared his throat and spoke into the mic.

“Hi, everyone,” he began, with a little wave of his left hand. “Uh, I'm Dean, I'm visiting from Austin, Texas.”

There was a “woo-hoo!” from the crowd.

“Thank you, one person,” Dean grinned, as he started finger-picking the intro to his first song.

“Um, so anyway I thought I would do some old-school country and blues, and if you know it, sing along! I go out walking… after midnight… out in the moonlight…”

Cas felt like his heart grew a size, and if he weren't in public, another part of his anatomy might have, as well. Dean’s voice was like butter. Hot, gooey, smooth, sexy butter.

As Dean sang, realisation hit Cas like a bat.

“Holy shit,” he said, softly.

“You okay there, Clarence?”

“I just figured out where I know him from.”

“Where?” Meg asked, frowning.

Cas tore his gaze away from Dean to fish out his cell. He started googling, and when he’d found what he was looking for, he turned the screen towards his friend.
Meg's jaw dropped.

"No fucking way."

Cas turned his phone back around and looked at the face on the web page, then up again at Dean’s face to verify that they were one and the same. He exhaled slowly.

Cas still had in his possession a Vonda Shepard album that he’d purchased in the late nineties. It was a compilation of duets, and one of those duets had been with hot young country singer, Chester Dean. Their track had been one of Cas’ favorites on the album, and had lead him to buy a couple of Chester’s own records. He’d definitely developed a moderate-sized crush on the guy, and more than once had bought a magazine purely because Chester was on the cover.

Cas had, at the time, assumed that Chester Dean was among the most hetero of all alpha-male cowboys, and in retrospect now wondered whether he’d been urged by his management to keep his bi side under wraps. Queer celebrities in the nineties were on thin ice; just ask Ellen DeGeneres.

It was also presumably the management company who made Dean change his name. Dean Winchester was a beautiful name, but Chester Dean was a pop star.

A few minutes into his Patsy Cline tribute, Dean segued seamlessly into an instantly recognisable introduction; one that made Ash and Charlie hollar like lunatics.

Cas chuckled and put his phone back in his pocket.

“BI-IG WHE-ELS KEEP ON TURNIN’!” Ash belted, obnoxiously loud and painfully far from the tune.

“Dear Lord,” Meg mumbled.

Cas smiled, hopelessly gone on this guy that he’d apparently already been crushing on for fifteen years.

“He knows his audience, I’ll give him that,” Meg added, swigging some more vodka and cringing in Ash’s direction.

By the time Dean reached the second chorus, the entire population of the pub was with him. Cas shrugged at Meg.

“If you can’t beat ‘em…” he grinned, and crooned along with everyone else, swaying his glass in the air. “Sweet home, Alabama…”

Meg shook her head and chuckled into her drink.

Dean was feeling relaxed, finally.

He’d been so nervous. As stages went, this was probably one of the smallest he’d ever been on, but fuck, it had been a long time since it was just him and a guitar and a roomful of slightly inebriated punters waiting for a show.

But here he was. He was pleasantly surprised at the voice that came out of his mouth, and relieved that everyone seemed to be on his side.

From his little stool downstage center, Dean had a pretty good view of the whole pub. Charlie and Ash were, predictably, being very supportive and cute. Dean had deliberately chosen songs that you
can’t help but sing along to, and the masses seemed to be in full voice. Scary hot landlady was eyeing him up hungrily from near the bar, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Including Cas.

Dean couldn’t believe his luck. Virtually the first person he’d met in this country, and he was intelligent, interesting, funny, handsome, and into guys. And, by some miracle - or some meticulous planning by a benevolent deity - the guy not only lived in the town where Dean was staying, but was best fucking friends with the people who’d decided to adopt him for the duration of his stay.

Dean smiled round the lyrics as he watched Cas yell the raucous song along with everyone else. Their eyes locked on the line *Lord they get me off so much*, and Dean loaded it with as much subtext as he could. From that point on, he made it a point to catch Cas’ eye at least once every few bars.

The Skynyrd went down a treat, and Dean continued his twenty minutes with a mixture of classic and current country that had the occupants of the pub practically line-dancing by the end. He concluded the set by hauling Charlie up to sing ‘Islands in the Stream’ with him, and they finished to rapturous applause.

As Dean left the stage to return Ash’s guitar to him, Charlie took the mic.

“Let's give it up one more time for Dean!”

The crowd hollered again, and Dean received quite a few slaps on the back and high fives as he navigated his way back to his new friends.

“Dude!” Ash exclaimed as he took his guitar. “I'm never washing this thing again!”

Dean laughed, a little bashful. “Thanks for lending her to me, man.”

Meg eyed Dean, knowingly. “Not bad, cowboy,” she smirked.

Dean gave a little bow of his head, then turned to Cas, who was staring at him with a weird look on his face.

Dean was surprised to find that he was desperately craving Cas’ approval, but there was nothing coming from the guy but silence. Dean diverted himself from embarrassingly appealing for Cas’ opinion, by offering more alcohol.

“You want another drink, Cas?”

Cas nodded. “I’ll come with you.”

Dean accepted some more compliments as they squeezed their way to a space at the bar, then the horde’s attention was summoned back to the stage, where a guy on keys had just started a cool electro-pop set.

“Another gin and tonic?” Dean offered, wondering why Cas hadn't said anything yet.

*Maybe he doesn't like country music and doesn't want to hurt my feelings, Dean thought. Or maybe he thinks I suck.*

“Oh, I think you've earned something stronger than that,” Cas smiled. “Let's have Tammy break out the whiskey.”

Dean beamed. “Awesome plan!”
“That was a great set,” Cas offered.

“Thank you.”

Okay, not particularly gushing but I'll take it.

“Although…”

Here it comes.

“Although?”

Cas bit his lip and wouldn't quite look Dean in the eye. “Isn't it cheating to participate in an amateur Open Mic night if you're already a professional musician?”

Dean froze.

No way.

“What?” he managed.

Cas finally made eye-contact and chuckled. “It struck me when you started singing,” he explained. “I thought ‘I know that voice’.”

Dean put his hand over his eyes. “Shit,” he said, just as Tamara reached them. “Busted.”

“Here's our new resident rockstar!” Tammy grinned. “What can I get you?”

Cas answered for them; “Two Jack Daniels on ice please.”

“No problem!”

Dean drew his hand down from his eyes and looked at Cas, who was looking extremely pleased with himself.

Cas put his hand on Dean’s shoulder and smiled. “Don't be embarrassed,” he urged. “I loved my Chester Dean albums.”

Dean raised his eyebrows. “Albums? Plural?”

Cas nodded. “Big fan,” he confessed.

As soon as Dean realised that Cas was being sincere and he wasn't making fun of him, he relaxed and he felt a huge smile break out on his face. Back to flirt mode.

“Is that so? Well, did you ever send me any letters, or… underwear?”

Tammy appeared with their whiskey.

“No, I did not,” Cas smiled, reaching for his wallet.

“On the house,” Tammy insisted, and moved off before Cas could protest.

“Did you used to get sent a lot of underwear, then?” he asked, turning back to Dean.

“Oh, yeah,” Dean nodded, remembering some of his more suspicious fanmail. “More than my fair share. Panties, hair, fingernails… people are fucking crazy.”
He took a drink, relishing the familiar smooth heat on his throat.

“I had some really sweet cards and letters sometimes, but mostly I got sent pure filth.”

Cas raised his eyebrows, awaiting elaboration.

“One guy sent me erotic poems and drawings every week for four months,” Dean told him.

“Wow,” Cas smiled, lifting his glass to his face. “That's a lot of free porn.”

“They were pretty good, too!” Dean said. “My favorite was ‘All The Ways I Want to Blow You’.”

“That was one of his poems?”

“Yep, it went on for seven pages.”

“And were there illustrations?”

“There were.”

Cas laughed. “You kept it all, right?”

“Of course!” Dean replied. “Kept all of my fan mail, man.”

“Not the fingernails, though?”

“Nope - those went on eBay.”

Cas laughed. “In all seriousness,” he said, chewing on his lip a little. “You really are very talented, Dean.”

Dean was caught midway between glowing at Cas’ praise and wanting to shrink away from the close attention. Occupational hazard of being an ambivert. The endless cycle of leave me alone - don't ignore me - leave me alone - don't ignore me - leave me alone.

“Why, thank you, Mr Novak,” he clinked his glass against Cas’, and the whiskey in each was promptly downed.

Dean glanced sideways at Cas, and was struck once again with how handsome he was. He had definitely been at the front of the line when God was handing out profiles.

“Well, I should get going,” Dean announced, reluctantly. “I got some Best Man shit to do tomorrow and I should probably sleep.”

“Are you going back to Hatfield tonight?” Cas asked.

“Yeah, you?”

“Yes, I'll ride with you.”

Dean winked. “Best offer I've had all day.”

________________________________________

Austin, Texas
December 14th, 1995
“Dean?”

Dean answered without looking up from the present he was wrapping. “Yeah?”

“Is Uncle Bobby gay?”

Dean stopped and looked at his twelve year old brother across the table. Jo had also stopped what she was doing and was looking at Dean, expectantly. Clearly they'd been discussing this, and Sam had been elected spokesperson.

“No,” Dean clarified. “He's not gay. He's just - single.”

They was a short silence.

Jo coughed. “So he's not with Rufus?”

Dean frowned. “No, Jo, they're just friends.”

“Oh.”

“It wouldn't matter, anyway,” Dean added, getting back to his wrapping. “It's okay to be gay.”

“I know that,” defended Jo.

“Yeah, me too,” Sam chimed in. “There's a girl in my class who has a gay brother and I've met him and he's really cool. He's twenty and he drives a red convertible.”

Dean smiled. At least the kid has his priorities down.

“Well, there you go, then,” he said.

“Amelia in my class is gay,” Jo told them, proudly.

“No she's not,” scoffed Sam. “She goes to second base with guys at the park.”

“How do you know that?” quizzed Dean.

“Kevin told me.”

“Well how does Kevin know? And how do any of you know what second base is, anyway?”

Sam looked impatient. “Dean, I'm not an infant.”

Dean raised an amused eyebrow, then returned to cutting up his strips of tape.

“Okay,” said Jo. “So Amelia's bisexual, then. She definitely likes girls too.”

“My dad says there's no such thing as bisexuality,” Sam declared, making Dean look up again.

Something about that sentence made Dean bristle.

“Bullshit,” Jo asserted.

“What? That's what he said.”

“When did Dad say that?” Dean asked, making an extra effort to keep his voice level.
“David Bowie is bisexual,” Jo interjected.

“I heard him talking to Bill last time he was home,” Sam said. “There was something on the TV about sexuality. Dad said that if you say you're bisexual, that just means you don't have the guts to admit you're cruising the highway to Gayville.”

“Well maybe your dad's a fucking bigot.”

“Hey!” Dean kicked Jo under the table.

“What are you all talking about?” Ellen demanded, coming into the kitchen armed with bags. “And Joanna-Beth, I better not have just heard the f-word come outta that mouth, young lady.”

“No, ma’am.”

“Good,” Ellen frowned. “Now put the homework on pause, and help me put all this away will you? You too, superstar.”

The three of them begrudgingly laid down their pens, or in Dean's case, his scissors, and started unloading Ellen's groceries.

Dean still felt uncomfortable about Sam’s information. He didn't know why he cared what his Father's views were on bisexuals, and frankly it didn't surprise him that John had a homophobic streak, but he felt really - bothered.

“You okay, Dean?” Ellen asked.

Dean shook himself out of his thoughts and noticed that he was frowning.

“Yeah,” he said, forcing a tight smile and focusing back on the vegetables in his hand. “Yeah, I'm fine.”
The train back to Hatfield from Finsbury Park after Open Mic night was packed. And it was really fucking loud.

Dean and Cas had to stand, because there wasn’t a single unoccupied seat. The train was packed full of mostly men, all in various stages of inebriation. There was a can of beer in the hands of every one of them.

“Everyone certainly is merry tonight,” Dean observed.

“There’s been a game at Arsenal,” Cas said.

“Excuse me?”

“Arsenal,” Cas repeated. “It’s a football club. We just passed their grounds.”

“Oh,” Dean said, looking out the window, then back to scan the occupants of their carriage. “Looks like they won.”

Cas nodded.

“I’ve gotten on this train before when they’ve lost,” he told Dean. “It’s not pretty.”

“Soccer’s a serious business, huh?”

“You have no idea,” Cas confirmed. “And don’t call it soccer. I made that mistake when I moved over here. It's football.”

A very tall guy near them starting singing, loudly, if singing was even the appropriate description. It was more like tuneless chanting, and whatever the words were meant to be, it was all coming out in one long incomprehensible slur. Apparently it was a classic among the other passengers, however, because before long they were all joining in with him.

It sounded like complete nonsense, but everyone was 'singing’ so sincerely, and the absurdity made Cas smile. He looked at Dean and they both started laughing.

“Hey!” one guy shouted at them. He was about two feet away from them, clinging onto the handrail by the train door. “What’s so funny?”

He stumbled a little towards them, his balance adversely affected by the movement of the train, and whatever that was in the blue can he was holding.

“Nothing,” Cas assured him.

The guy wobbled a few inches closer. “What did you say?!”

“I said nothing,” Cas repeated. “I was just talking to my friend.”

Drunk guy frowned at Cas and turned his nose up. “You’re American,” he deduced, pointing a finger at Cas’ chest.
Cas felt nervous. Drunk guys pumped up with post-sport-success adrenaline were dangerous in any
accent. The alcohol in his system and the hot guy at his side bolstered him, though.

“Yes, I am.”

“Oi, lads!” the guy yelled, summoning the attention of his Arsenal-supporting comrades.

“Shit,” cursed Dean, under his breath.

“Yankees!” drunk guy announced at the top of his voice.

Two other men got up out of their seats, apparently intrigued by the concept of *Americans*.

“The whole ‘violent English football hooligan’ thing is exaggerated, right?” Dean asked out the
corner of his mouth.

Drunk dude number two came towards them, unsteadily, and got right up close to Dean’s face.

“What you sayin’ about football?” he slurred.

“We might be about to find out,” Cas murmured to Dean.

“American football’s shit,” drunk dude number two declared, then swayed back, had some more of
his drink, and just stared at them.

The other two guys laughed as if that was the funniest thing anyone had ever said, ever.

“Don’t bother.” Cas said to Dean, fearfully anticipating that Dean would try to engage the men in a
conversation, or worse, a fight.

Cas suspected their best course of action was to ignore these guys until they got bored and sat back
down again.

Only fourteen more minutes before they got to Hatfield.

“What did you say, mate?” drunk guy number one demanded, jabbing Cas with his fingers.

“Hey,” Dean snapped, shoving the guy’s hand away. “No need to get physical, *mate.*”

“Don’t touch me, Uncle cocking Sam,” the guy commanded, but his wasted appearance offset any
force he tried to put behind his words.

Drunk guy number two was still just staring at Dean, his eyes having gone that weird, unfocused,
slightly scary way that very drunk eyes go.

The other people on the carriage seemed entirely uninterested in the exchange, all busy with their
own noisy and indistinguishable conversations. Cas hoped they’d notice if a brawl broke out, if only
so there’d be some witnesses...

“American football isn’t even football,” drunk guy number three piped up, apparently keen to keep
the argument going. “You should stick to fuckin’ baseball and other pussy sports.”

He punctuated the word ‘pussy’ with a little push to Cas’ arm. It wasn’t particularly threatening, but
it was evidently enough for Dean.

“Hey, back off,” Dean moved to put himself between Cas and the drunk guys.
“Alright, mate,” drunk guy number three laughed. “Protecting your boyfriend?”

“What’s the matter?” Dean asked, and Cas could hear the smile in his voice even though he was now behind him and couldn’t see his face. “Jealous?”

“Fuck off!” drunk guy number three shouted. “I’m not gay! I’ve got a wife!”

“And she’s a very lucky woman,” Dean deadpanned.

Drunk guy number three snorted with derision, and staggered back to his seat. “Fucking load of old shit,” he muttered as he went.

Dean looked right at drunk guy number one.

“We got a problem, here?”

The guy scowled, and stumbled back to lean against his trusty handrail again.

“Why are all American blokes gay?” he spat.

“Small print in the constitution,” Dean said, taking a step back so he was next to Cas again.

Cas looked sideways at him, then over at their original combatant. He seemed to have submitted, no longer looking Dean in the eye.

“Fucking pussies, the lot o’ ya,” drunk guy number one told the trash can next to him.

Dean then turned to drunk guy number two, who was still inexplicably staring with a deranged look on his face.

“You okay, buddy? Wanna take a picture?”

The train came to a stop at a town called Potters Bar, and thankfully all but about five of the Arsenal supporters disembarked, including the three who'd taken issue with their colonial carriage-mates. They all made a point of knocking into Dean and Cas as they left the train, but karma was quickly served when drunk guy number one tripped and ended up flat on his face on the platform.

Thankfully, the passengers that were left in the carriage were reasonably calm, and there was no more hassle from anyone. Cas slid into a recently-vacated window seat, and Dean dropped down next to him, pushing two empty beer cans off onto the floor.

“Well,” Dean sighed. “Glad that little interaction was short-lived. One or two drunk guys I can take, but we could have wound up being pretty outnumbered.”

Cas looked out of the window. He wasn't sure if that had been xenophobia, homophobia or just drunken nonsense, but he hadn't liked it.

He also wasn't sure how he felt about Dean standing in front of him like that. On the one hand he was a little offended at the implication that he couldn't defend himself, but on the other he quite liked the idea of Dean protecting his honor. No fantasy quite like a knight in shining armor; Prince Charming swooping in to rescue the damsel in distress. Not that Cas was making himself the damsel in this scenario…

“You okay?”

Cas blinked, realising he hadn't said anything since the incident.
"Yes, sorry, I'm really tired. Long week."

"Those guys didn't upset you?"

Cas smiled. "I can handle myself, Dean. I go into London every day, and I've lived alone for a long time."

"Oh, I didn't mean to imply that you can't take care of yourself," Dean said, hurriedly. "Christ, Cas, your biceps are the size of my thigh - I wouldn't wanna be on the wrong side of you."

Cas blushed for what had to be the four hundredth time that evening.

"I - I have some weights in my house," he stammered.

Dean smiled at him. "I don't for one second think you're weak, Cas. Stepping in front of you - I don't know, it was just instinct I guess. I didn't mean to offend you."

Cas looked into Dean’s eyes. Instinctively wanting to shield people from harm was just another facet of Dean’s personality which Cas could file under ‘reasons why I'm screwed’.

"I'm not offended, Dean," Cas assured him. "Please don't apologise. There's nothing wrong with being naturally protective. Probably an older brother thing?"

Dean huffed a little laugh. "Yeah, probably."

They sat in sleepy, companionable silence for the next few minutes until the train pulled into Hatfield.

"That's the building I'm staying in," Dean said, pointing to the large grey block of flats visible from the station steps.

"Convenient," Cas smiled. "My house is about a seven minute walk in that same direction. I pass that building every day."

"Awesome, you can walk me to my door like a proper gentleman!" Dean grinned.

"You wanna put your arm through mine while I escort you, m'lady?" teased Cas, desperately hoping Dean would actually take him up on the ridiculous offer.

Unfortunately - or fortunately because it was such a wonderful sound - Dean just laughed.

They were at the main door of Dean’s apartment block far too soon for Cas’ liking. He'd enjoyed Dean’s company so much, and every time he remembered that Dean was also Chester Dean, he felt a tingle run right through his body. This whole thing was like a dream.

Then, suddenly, the dream got immeasurably more wonderful.

"Look, Cas - I realise, given that my presence here is temporary, this might not be a very appealing offer, but… I’d like to ask you out on a date."

Cas raised his eyebrows and he thought he might be having a stroke.

"Oh," he said, and could practically feel his brain rolling its eyes at him. Good one, Shakespeare.

He cleared his throat and tried again. "I would love to go on a date with you, Dean. Temporary presence is - not an issue."
Dean smiled, and Cas swore the street got brighter. “Awesome! Lunch on Sunday?”

“Sounds terrific,” Cas replied, and he really meant it.

“Great!” Dean beamed. “What's your number? I'll call you tomorrow night.”

They exchanged numbers, and Dean wished Cas a goodnight with a warm smile, and headed into his apartment building. Cas sighed as he watched him, then scolded himself for being pathetic.

He couldn't help the butterflies though, as he strolled down the street. God, it had been a really long fucking time since Cas had met anyone that did that to him.

The situation was ideal, too. It literally couldn't turn into anything serious because Dean was going back to the U.S. in a few weeks. It could only be short-term, fun, no strings. Perfect. Kind of a shame, but perfect.

Cas figured that the less time he spent with people, the less the risk that he'd accidentally hurt them. A disaster he may be, but better to be a disaster with a small radius of effect.

____________________________________

Winchester, England
November 22nd, 2010

Cas stared at his laptop screen, the picture in front of him going hazy as the tears filling his eyes made it difficult to focus.

“Oh my god,” he choked out. “Jesse, I'm... I don't know what to say.”

Cas had answered the Skype call eagerly when he'd seen it was Pamela calling, but it wasn't Pamela’s face that had popped up. It was Jesse’s, blotchy and haunted. Cas’ stomach had dropped like a stone, and he'd known what Jesse was going to tell him before he'd even opened his mouth.

Pamela had been hit by a car. She'd landed on her head and it was lights out instantly.

“She fucking knew,” Jesse sniffed. “I knew she'd had a dream but she wouldn't tell me what it was. I knew she was scared, even though she was hiding it pretty well. I thought it was about me. She kept telling me she loved me. I thought it was me. I thought I was... She fucking knew, man! Why didn't she just stay home?!”

Cas hadn't had one of his dreams since he left Boston. His selectively-psychic mind had apparently not felt it necessary to forewarn him that he was about to lose his best friend.

Pamela. Why the fucking fuck.

Cas didn't know how to comfort Jesse. Even if he'd been in the same room and not thousands of miles away, he wouldn't have known. He felt numb. Pamela was the last good thing about Cas’ home town. And she was gone.

God fucking damn it.

____________________________________

Savile Row, London
Saturday, June 15th, 2013
Dean followed Benny’s directions to the most insanely upperclass store he’d ever seen. It had a fucking doorman, and Dean had never been so intimidated in his life.

He stepped inside, looking around nervously for any sign of his friends.

Dean heard B before he saw him.

“Oh sweet Jesus, who let that underwear model in here?!”

Dean looked over to the other end of the store, looking for the source of the familiar barb.

He caught sight of the skinny blond, who was brandishing a glass of champagne, and Dean made his way across the plush carpet, feeling very out of place.

“A little early for that, ain’t it?” he mocked, giving Balthazar a hug.

“Hello, darling,” B bellowed, as he wrapped one arm round Dean’s shoulders and kissed him dramatically on the cheek.

“Look at that face,” he said, pulling back from the friendly embrace. “Still looking like Da Vinci’s wet dream, despite your advancing years.”

Dean shook his head, fondly. “Are you gonna stop flirting with me after you’re married?”

“I make no promises, but I’ll do my best.”

B’s eyes flicked over Dean’s shoulder, and suddenly Dean was gripped from behind in a bear hug. The provider of which just happened to be his favorite bear.

“DEAN!” boomed the low, husky, and clearly delighted voice.

“Ben…” Dean choked out. “Ease up bro, I can’t fucking breathe!”

Benny relaxed the constricting hold and spun Dean around. He gave a little laugh of pleasure when he looked into Dean’s face, and pulled him in again for another hug. “God, it’s so damn good to see you, brother.”

“Alright, alright,” Balthazar’s voice cut it. “Put him down!”

Benny let Dean go, but gave his arm one more affectionate squeeze. Dean punched Benny amiably on the shoulder, an action which he knew his buddy would understand as ‘good to see you too’.

A very thin man in a very designer suit approached them with more champagne on a silver platter.

He regarded them with gentle snobbery. “Gentlemen.”

“Ah, thanks,” Benny took two glasses and handed one to Dean.

“Cynthia will be out to take your measurements, Sir;” thin-and-clipped told Dean.

“Fab, thanks George,” Balthazar said, before Dean could even speak.

George swanned off and Dean made the executive decision to down his drink, in the hopes it would make him feel less uncomfortable.

“I’m definitely not in the right tax bracket for this place,” he observed, nervously, looking around at
the immaculate white sofas and - yep - that was an actual chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Benny chuckled. “Me either, brother. These people talk to me like I just crawled out from under a rock.”

“Yes, and you always play up your accent just to upset them,” B accused.

Benny shrugged and looked at Dean, mischievously. “Hey, it's fun,” he admitted. “They get a kick out of it - I’m a novelty.”

“You're a liability,” B corrected.

After Dean had been thoroughly poked and prodded, and measured up for an absurdly expensive tux, the three of them returned by cab to B’s lush Kensington apartment.

Balthazar was what was known as ‘old money’. Which basically meant that his family had a long history of being nauseatingly wealthy. A jaunt down the generational branches of his family tree would've revealed Earls, Lords and maybe a Duke or two all the way back to the Great Fire of London.

B was, in Dean’s fond opinion, totally bat-crap crazy. But he had a huge heart and would do anything for his friends, and Dean felt lucky to be included in that circle. He’d been kind of a dick to B when they first met; defensive and suspicious because of how protective he was of Benny. He’d been won round pretty quickly though, and was soon forced to begrudgingly accept that this posh, peculiar man was actually probably his best friend's guardian angel.

Dean still found it amusing that his common-as-dirt, foul-mouthed Louisianian buddy had wound up in a little palace like this. Benny had clearly made his mark on the joint - there was a dirty old banjo against the coffee table and some very questionable liquor in the kitchen.

Benny and Balthazar had told Dean that he was welcome to stay with them while he was in England, but he’d declined. He had no desire to encroach on any pre-wedding romantic vibes, and, remembering the stress of the planning for Sam and Jenna’s wedding, he frankly preferred to stay a little removed from the happy couple during the run up to the big day.

It had been many months since Dean had had the opportunity to just hang out with Benny, and it didn't take them long to totally relax and start trading gossip and dredging up old, entertaining anecdotes from their misspent youths.

When B pressed Dean for some details on his current love life - “the more sordid the better” - Dean told them about Cas.

Benny laughed, impressed. “In the country for three days and already got a date! That’s the Dean I know!”

“He’s so cool,” Dean grinned, taking the beer that B offered him. “Insanely hot, really smart and he bought a couple of my records back in the day.”

“Well he ain’t that smart then.”

“Fuck you.”

“And hey,” Benny added. “The fact that you’re goin’ back to the other side of the Atlantic in a couple weeks means your cowardly ass is safe from any commitment. Perfect!”
Dean frowned. “Come on, man,” he protested.

“I’m just tellin’ it like it is, Dean,” Benny pointed out, not unkindly. “You haven’t stuck it out with anyone for longer than three months since we entered the new millennium.”

“Four syllables, wow, Kensington really is rubbing off on you, Ben.”

“Suck it.”

“Now, now, boys,” Balthazar cut in, placing on the coffee table a platter of cheese that had materialised from somewhere. “Play nice. Don’t tease the beautiful boy, Benjamin.”

“Thank you, B,” Dean looked smug, as his pseudo-brother-in-law settled himself on the couch between them.

“You’re welcome, petal,” B cooed, giving Dean's knee a squeeze. “You carry on keeping to yourself for the sake of a quiet life, if that’s your choice. It's not your fault you can’t decide between Arthur and Martha.”

Benny snorted, and Dean pulled a face. “What the fuck? Is that supposed to be you being on my side?”

B shrugged and helped himself to some Brie.

Benny chuckled. “Dean, you know I love you, but boy you ain’t gettin’ any younger. Jus’ don’t like the thought of you ending up alone.”

“Well, thank you for your concern, Benny-buzzkill, but I have no intention of ending up alone. I’m sure my lobster is out there somewhere.”

“Your what?” B frowned.

“It’s a Friends reference,” Benny sighed. “Poor Deano got stuck in the nineties and can’t get out.”

“Lobsters mate for life,” Dean explained.

“That’s… sweet?” B took another bite of cheese. “But Dean, another pressing concern here is your sperm.”

Dean choked on his beer. “My sperm?” he repeated. “Why is my sperm a pressing concern for you?”

“If you want to have kids,” B continued, matter-of-factly. “You need to get cracking before your testicles dry up.”

“Excuse me, my testicles are nowhere near drying up!”

“That’s what everyone thinks,” B exclaimed, brandishing his tiny cheese fork in Dean’s face. “But you hit forty and all of a sudden your sperm store depletes, and those that are left are swimming in the wrong direction and couldn’t find an ovum if it slapped them in the face.”

“Sperm don’t have faces,” Benny interjected.

“Not the point,” B snapped.

“...and what’s the ovum slappin’ with? Eggs don't have hands.”
“Are you guys having kids?” Dean asked, bringing the sarcastic exchange to an abrupt halt.

Benny and B exchanged a look.

“We’ve been thinkin’ about it,” Benny admitted, taking B’s hand.

“We might adopt,” B added, with a dreamy expression. “Go all Madonna.”

Dean smiled as he looked at his friends.

“That’s cool,” he said, quietly. “You’ll make awesome Daddies.”

B snorted. “Benny already does.”

“Okay!” Dean hurriedly got up off the couch and headed into the kitchen.

Benny and B were cracking up behind him.

“Dean!” B yelled. “Come back, I’m kidding!”

“No, you’re not!” Dean called from near the giant wine rack he was perusing. “I’m going to have to go bleach my brain now!”

He shook his head as the laughter carried across the hall. Damn them both, but they were right about him.

Dean knew the clock was ticking on finding someone and settling down, but the thought of actually doing so still brought him out in a cold sweat.

People are always cool when you first meet them; everything’s fun and breezy and sexy. Then a few months in and bam suddenly there’s baggage and arguing, and sex becomes a chore, and Dean is desperately craving his freedom again. Maybe he could meet someone who’d make the magic last for more than just a few weeks, but he doubted it. Relationships were awesome in theory, but in reality everything gets boring after a while, and Dean Winchester wasn’t put on this earth to be bored.

The beginning part was always great though, and so he felt no qualms about allowing himself to get excited about his date with Cas. That guy was fucking sexy, and very cool, and a little vacation-sex never hurt anyone.

Smiling at the thought, he pulled out a bottle of Claret and headed back to the soon-to-be Mr and Mr Lafitte.

Who were lying on the couch making out.

Dean raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips, then turned back to the kitchen. He settled himself on a stool at the breakfast bar, pulled the stopper out of the wine, and started chugging.

* * *

It took Cas a whole twenty four hours to put two and two together. He was eating dinner in his house on Saturday evening, and he froze with a forkful of food halfway to his mouth as comprehension screeched in his brain.

The dream was about Dean.

The dream he’d kept having before he left for his trip, the dream where he was in a bar, and all he
could see was a guitar, and the colors and the rose. The dream where he felt such hard to describe emotions, which had made it so difficult for Pamela to decipher.

It was about Dean.

He'd stopped having that dream months ago, but he remembered it vividly.

Pamela had been sure it was about love, but surely Cas wasn't about to fall in love with Dean? He'd be more than happy to date him casually while his trip lasted, but it couldn't turn into love. Surely.

Although - there was the sadness element of the dream. The goodbye thing.

*Shit,* maybe Cas was going to fall for the handsome bastard, and his heart was destined to break in some awful airport terminal farewell.

Cas shook his head and stabbed frustratedly at his lemon chicken. Well, it didn't matter, anyway. He wasn't about to call off his date because of a dream. He'd just try to take the future as it came, and enjoy the part where he got to stare at the beautiful musician. A little heartache was nothing new.

He set his fork down and rubbed his temples.

*Stupid brain.*

One of the things that had drawn Cas to psychology was the desire to find the science behind his heightened intuition. There wasn't much to be found. Most academics were still wildly cynical about the idea of psychic ability, and saw no legitimacy in linking it with basic human physiology. Cas did meet one professor who was happy to discuss his precognition with him, and directed him to a few online studies to read, but he never really got any answers.

Cas had conceded that he'd have to wait a while before paranormal, supernatural stuff was taken a bit more seriously. If his abilities didn’t freak him out so much, he’d contribute to the field and make a case study of himself, but he didn't like the thought of making a spectacle of himself in that way.

Besides which, it wasn’t something he could control. It happened when it happened. It wasn’t like he could predict the lottery results or tell you how many fingers you had held up behind your back. His unconscious mind threw up sensory shit when it felt like it, and Cas was at its mercy.

It had happened last night.

He had fallen asleep thinking about Dean, hoping to induce a little midnight movie starring himself and the stunning Texan, but his treacherous subconscious had other plans. He had heard a discordant saxophone, and he had stepped on a black lily. It had, bizarrely, made a sound like a roll of thunder as it disintegrated under his shoe.

*Not a lily. Not again.*

It had been a lily before his Mom passed. Lilies meant death. Someone was going to die, and Cas had a truly awful feeling that he knew who it was.
Soaring Ever Higher

Hatfield, Hertfordshire
Sunday, June 15th, 2013

“We got a last minute deal on flights!” Sam yelled, excitedly, from Dean’s computer screen. “We're definitely coming to the wedding!”

Dean beamed. “Aw, man, that's awesome! Where are you gonna stay?”

“Jenna’s online looking for a hotel as we speak,” Sam said. “We’re landing next Friday morning, twenty eighth.”

“My morning or your morning?”

“Yours - eight a.m. U.K. time.”

“Cool! Have you told Benny?”

“Not yet, gonna call him next.”

“Dude, if you'd called me two hours ago I could've just handed him the phone, I just came from his place.”

“Two hours ago I was asleep, Dean. It's only just coming up to six thirty here.”

Dan glanced at the clock on the microwave.

“Shoot, I gotta get ready…” he muttered.

“For what?”

“Oh,” Dean said, wincing in anticipation of the impending third degree. “I got a lunch date.”

“What? With who?”

Dean took a deep breath and launched into a hasty explanation of how he talked to Cas on the train but didn't really think much of it, but then met him again in the pub and really hit it off, and how Cas knew that he was Chester Dean, and that he's cool and smart and funny and hot.

“Obviously it's destined to be pretty short-lived,” he concluded, before Sam could lecture him about not getting too attached. “But it'll be fun while it lasts.”

“And he doesn't mind that it's just a fling?”

“How dare you,” Dean said, in mock indignation. “Just a fling! I'm not just anything, Samuel. I'll be the best time the guy's ever had. The enigmatic stranger from distant lands who rocked his world. He'll gaze into sunsets for years to come and think of me forever as the one that got away.”

“Alright, alright, stop!” pleaded Sam. “Have fun on your date and good luck rocking this poor bastard’s world.”

* * *
Cas: he's not here yet. unless he's gone in without me. should i go check?

Charlie: No way! He's not the kind to go in without his date. Southern manners an’ all. You are a little early.

Cas: i have no idea why i’m so nervous

Charlie: It's adorable.

Cas: shut up

Charlie: Did you wear the t shirt?

Cas: yes i have on the exact outfit that you instructed

Charlie: Good boy! He won't be able to resist you, promise ;)

Cas: i can see him walking across the street… christ i forgot how hot he is... ttyl

“Hey, Cas!”

“Hello, Dean.”

“Sorry I'm a little late - my brother called.”

“Oh, it's fine, really,” Cas assured him. “I haven't been here long.”

“Good,” Dean smiled. “Shall we?”

They settled in a corner booth table, and after making some small talk about English weather, the conversation started to flow pretty easily.

Cas looked even better than Dean remembered, and the fact that he ordered one of the biggest burgers on the menu made him extra attractive.

They exchanged details of what they’d done the day before, and Cas had laughed at Dean’s tales of Balthazar.

“He sounds fun,” Cas had said, as the waitress brought them their drinks and giant burgers.

“He is,” Dean conceded. “ Fucking crazy, but he’s a good guy, and he makes Benny really happy.”

“You’ve known Benny a long time?”

Dean nodded. “Yep, since I was a teenager.”

Cas raised his eyebrows. “So he’s the one I go to for all the skeletons in the closet, right?”

Dean laughed. “Yeah, I gotta keep him close man, he knows too much. Even more than my brother.”

Dean shared a few stories about Sam, and for some reason was really pleased when Cas declared that he thought he would get on well with Sam if they met.

Aware that he was talking about himself a lot, Dean asked Cas about his friends. Cas immediately told him how much Charlie meant to him.
“When I met her, she was determined to be my friend whether I liked it or not, and you shouldn’t argue with a pregnant lady, so…”

“That’s an unusual family dynamic, huh?” Dean said, recalling how Meg had caught him up to Ash and Charlie’s little backstory. “I mean - do they all live together?”

“They did for a while,” Cas explained. “Ash lives in the apartment above the studio, and Charlie lives in this big house in Finchley with two other single moms. It’s a good deal; they all share the babysitting and the school pickups. Charlie’s a wonderful mother.”

“And you met her at the American Immigrant Gay Club?”

Cas laughed. “It’s not called that, but yes.”

“I feel kinda bad for Ash,” Dean said, digging into his lunch. “I mean, you move across the world with the love of your life and she dumps your ass cause she realises she’s gay? Then you find out she’s carrying your baby! That’s some soap opera shit, man.”

To Dean, it was one more cautionary tale to reinforce his resistance to relationships. Even when you think you’re secure and settled, unexpected shit can happen and fuck everything up. It wasn’t Charlie's fault, but Dean didn’t think he would’ve been able to stay friends with someone who did that to him.

“He seems to have dealt with it,” Cas shrugged. “Ash is the most laid back person I’ve ever met. Deceptively smart, too. He got accepted onto an electrical engineering and computer science course at M.I.T.”

“Really?”

Cas nodded. “But he turned it down to pursue art.”

Dean huffed a little laugh and shook his head. Shame on him for judging by appearances - the one thing he hated people doing with him.

“I had seriously just assumed he was this high school dropout stoner,” he admitted.

“Oh, he’s often stoned,” Cas said, with a sideways smile. “But his I.Q. is at a genius level.”

“That’s awesome, so little Audrey will get free ink and help with all her homework.”

“She’s so cute,” Cas smiled. “And so loved. She’ll get a great upbringing. Charlie will teach her all about acceptance and diversity…”

“…and Ash’ll teach her who’d win in a fight between Iron Man and Superman?”

“Iron Man,” Cas said, automatically.

“Dude, you didn't even think about it.”

“I don't need to think about it,” Cas explained. “Iron Man is played by Robert Downey Junior and therefore wins everything by default.”

“Big R.D.J. fan, huh?” Dean asked, amused.

“Oh, it's way more serious than that,” Cas insisted, eyes twinkling. “My love for him is unshakeable and unconditional, and has been ever since season four of Ally McBeal.”
Dean laughed. “Oh my god, I loved that show!”

Cas’ face lit up. “Me too!” he exclaimed. “It’s why I became a lawyer!”

Dean smiled, imagining Cas all suited up with his briefcase, being powerful and assertive in a courtroom.

“Although,” Cas continued, “Real law firms are nowhere near as cool as that, and the people in mine weren’t nearly as sexy. There were no unisex bathrooms or secret rooms behind stalls either. Devastating.”

Dean chuckled and took a bite of his enormous juicy burger.

“Okay,” he said, still chewing. “So Robert Downey Junior is your true love, but who was your first?”

“First celebrity crush?”

“Celebrity and real.”

“Okay. Well, before I even knew what sex was, I had a crush on Fred from Scooby-Doo.”

“Your first crush was an animated character?”

“Yep. I was seven. And I remember wanting to be Daphne so that I could hold his hand.”

“Aw,” Dean scrunched his nose. “That's adorable.”

“And my first real crush…” Cas pondered. “Was a boy who worked at the movie theatre in my town. I was ten. His name was Joey and he always gave me extra popcorn.”

“Nice!” Dean nodded. “And did we ever get into Joey’s pants?”

Cas pulled a face. “No, sadly Joey was extremely straight, and six years older than me.”

“Tough break,” Dean smiled. “You knew you were gay at ten?”

“I guess I must have, but I wouldn't have known to describe it like that. I just knew that boys made me feel funny in a way that girls didn't. My brother knew, cause I remember he just came into my room one day when I was twelve and, apropos of nothing, he told me a whole story about his friend who’d just come out and how totally cool it was. I didn't say a single thing in response, and he walked out without a word when he was done, but it was the most comforting thing.”

“That's cool,” said Dean, wishing he'd had a big brother or cousin or someone to reassure him in the same way. “So you've been out pretty much since day one?”

“Yes,” nodded Cas. “I never really came out, though, which was nice I guess. Never needed to announce it. When my friends and I hit puberty, and they would talk about girls they liked, I'd contribute with the names of the boys I liked and it was just silently acknowledged by everyone, I guess. No one was ever mean to me about it, and no one batted an eyelid when I brought my first boyfriend home.”

Dean let his mind indulge in a brief image of cute, teenage Cas making out with a boy for the first time in his bedroom. He took a swig of his drink.

“I didn't officially come out as anything til like six years ago,” Dean confessed, after swallowing.
"My sister-in-law was the first person I ever talked to about it. She's bi, too."

"You came out to her?"

An amused sound escaped down Dean's nose. "I didn’t need to, she totally called me on it one day at a baseball game."

"Not being subtle about checking out the players, huh?" Cas teased.

"Exactly!" Dean nodded. "We met some of the guys after, and I was talking to one, and apparently I was, to quote Jenna, ‘blushing and giggling like a fourteen year old girl’.”

Cas smirked. "That must have been quite a sight."

"Anyway, when Sam went to the bar she was immediately all over it. ‘So Dean, you know it’s okay to like boys as well as girls, right?’"

Dean shook his head as he remembered his bewilderment and subsequent epiphany during that conversation.

“I had no idea I was bi, honestly. I always wrote everything off as a harmless guy-crush.”

“Guy-crush?” Cas raised a skeptical eyebrow.

“It’s a thing! All straight men have one for either Chris Pine, Ryan Reynolds or Idris Elba.”

“Is that so?” Cas asked, amused.

“Yes,” Dean asserted. “Anyway... so I was talking to Jenna about it for basically one week solid. She talked to me about all the shit she got from people telling her to ‘pick a lane’, and how she was ‘just doin’ it for attention’. She told me that you have to shut everyone out and just do you, you know? I was freaking out cause I had never thought about labelling myself like that, and I grew up around some pretty homophobic attitudes and I was panicking. She came over to my place one evening - she’d made me a pie. She sat me down and asked me three questions.”

Dean cleared his throat and numbered his list off with his fingers.

“One, do I get turned on by the thought of being with a hot chick. Two, do I get turned on by the thought of being with a hot dude. Three, would I be happy settling down with someone, irrespective of what they had in their underwear.”

Cas smiled warmly. “I like her phrasing.”

"Yeah,” Dean gave a half-a-smile and took another swig from his bottle. “I answered yes, yes, and a solid maybe.”

“Why only maybe?”

“Cause I was like - okay, so if I like pecan pie and cherry pie equally, how can I choose just one for the rest of my life? No matter how perfect the pecan is, there will surely come a time when I crave cherry, right?”

“I guess,” Cas frowned.

“So, I asked Jenna if she felt like she was missing out now that she was with a guy for the long haul.”
“What did she say?”

“She said that occasionally she does get a yearning for a girl’s touch, but ultimately she has everything she needs in the man she loves. Plus, you know, lesbian porn is abundant and overflowing.”

Cas was pensive for a moment.

“So you think if you settled down with a guy, there would come a point where you’d need a woman and vice versa?”

Dean was surprised at how many personal feelings he was prepared to volunteer. Still, at least he could get all his cards out right from the get go. He wouldn’t be leading Cas on; there was already no expectation on either side. Might as well be totally up front.

“I honestly don’t know,” he sighed. “But it’s a real concern, man. It stops me entering into anything serious cause I don’t wanna be like, ‘well these six months have been great sweetheart but I really need some dick now so I’ll see ya!’”

Cas laughed but there was trouble in his eyes.

“I guess you just have to hope you find someone who satisfies you enough that you don’t miss the other set of genitalia,” he suggested. “Or, you find a partner who is extremely understanding and trusting, and lets you go for a paddle in someone else’s pond every now and then.”

Dean found himself powerless to keep the slightly pearl-clutching expression from his face.

“It’s not as uncommon as you might think,” Cas went on, clearly having noted Dean's shock. “Monogamy isn’t an automatic assumption any more. Monogamy is also not as important as trust. I’ve known people who regularly invite a third into their marital bed, and I know committed couples who are in open sexual relationships. More often than not it’s the slightly more unconventional couples that are the strongest.”

“I don’t know man, you gotta be pretty damn secure for that shit,” Dean said, rubbing the back of his neck. “I think I’d get too jealous.”

Cas shrugged. “When you find the right person, I think all that goes away.”

Dean regarded his date carefully. “What makes you so sure about all this?” he asked. “You had that kind of relationship?”

Cas smiled, a little sadly.

“Nope,” he said, taking a swig from his bottle. “But back home I used to have a very dear friend who lived a somewhat pansexual and polyamorous life, and she was the happiest person I knew.”

There was a beat.

“And so was her husband.”

Dean shook his head. “Man, makes me realise how fuckin’ southern I am!” he chuckled.

“There's nothing wrong with being traditional,” Cas reassured him. “As long as that's how you want to be and not simply how you think you should be.”

A brief silence descended.
“Back home,” Dean mused.

“What?”

“You said ‘back home’,” he clarified. “Boston’s still home, then?”

Cas shifted in his chair. “Oh,” he stared at his drink. “I guess it's not any more, but - y’know.”

Dean nodded, though he really didn't understand what Cas meant. “You going back any time soon for a visit, or...?”

Cas shook his head hurriedly. “No,” he said, firmly. “No, I don't have any reason to go back there.”

“No?” Dean raised his eyebrows. “No folks or family or friends to go see?”

Cas looked at Dean, as if he were trying to decide something.

“What?” Dean asked, nervous at being so intently studied.

Whatever Cas had been looking for, he apparently found it, and answered Dean's enquiry.

“My parents are both dead,” he said, plainly. “I have my brother Gabriel, and two sisters, and several nieces and nephews, but they're all scattered around the world, and all my friends are here now.”

He took a drink.

“There's literally nothing in Boston but bad memories.”

There was a pause.

“And my cat,” Cas added. “I do miss my cat. I gave her to my old neighbor.”

“Dude,” Dean said, quietly. “I'm so sorry about your parents.”

Cas shrugged and looked down at the table.

“It's fine,” he said. “It was a long time ago. I was in high school. My Mom caught septicaemia, which took her in a matter of weeks, and then like eight months later my Dad had a cardiac arrest at the gym. It was pretty brutal, but we got through it. I lived with Gabriel until I went to college.”

“I lost my mom when I was five,” Dean supplied, a fact he wasn't usually so quick to share. “Smoke inhalation when our house went up because of a wiring fault.”

“Shit,” Cas cringed. “That's horrible. I'm so sorry.”

“Yeah,” Dean downed the remainder of his drink.

Cas opened his mouth and then closed it again. Dean feared that he was about to ask him about his father, so he decided a subject-changed was needed, stat.

“Well, this conversation got real dark,” he said, with a wry grin. “How did we get from non-monogamous bisexuality to childhood trauma?”

Cas chuckled. “No idea,” he said.

The dragging up of bad memories notwithstanding, Cas was having a truly fantastic time. The conversation with Dean never felt forced or awkward, and he was feeling more drawn to him with
each passing minute.

As a psychology graduate, Cas was automatically interested in finding out what made people tick, but Dean was somehow extra fascinating.

“Dean, may I ask you something really personal?”

“Sure,” Dean replied. “We seem to be on a roll here.”

He gave Cas one of those damn winks, and Cas smiled.

“When you're with a guy…” Cas began.

“I switch, but I prefer being the bottom.”

Cas’ eyes got a little wider, then he exhaled a small surprised laugh. “How did you know that's what I was going to ask?”

Dean shrugged. “It's what everyone wants to ask,” he smiled. “I don't even need to ask you,” he added.

Cas raised a questioning eyebrow.

“That!” said Dean triumphantly. “That right there is the eyebrow of a top.”

Cas laughed again. “I have top eyebrows?”

“Yes, sir,” Dean confirmed. “I can spot that shit a mile off. I bet you don't mind being a bit dom sometimes too.”

“Well,” said Cas, rubbing a contemplative hand across his chin. “I do quite like you calling me sir…”

Dean laughed a gloriously uninhibited laugh, and Cas accidentally fell a tiny bit in love with the sound.

“So, jazz night tonight, huh?” Dean asked.

“Yep,” Cas nodded. “With the added treat of Charlie’s quiz.”

“So… Jiz night!” Dean declared, proudly.

Cas shook his head and tried to swallow back his smile.

“Unacceptable,” he mock-scolded, having another gulp of his drink.

Dean nudged him under the table with his foot. “Can I be on your team?”

Cas flooded with delight. He'd been wondering how to ask Dean if they could continue their date into the evening, and now he didn't have to.

“Well, that depends,” he answered, smirking out of one side of his mouth. “What are your special subjects?”

“Sports, sci fi, and country music,” Dean replied without a thought.

Cas gave a faux-serious contemplative nod.
“Yes, we may have an opening for you on our team, Mr Winchester,” he said, business-like.

“Well, I may have an opening for you, Mr Novak…”

Cas nearly choked on his burger.

“I am so sorry!” Dean said, putting his hand over his eyes. “I have, like, innuendo Tourette's.”

Cas laughed. “It's fine!”

“I just can't help it,” Dean qualified. “It's like a reflex. Got me into some trouble at times.”

“I can imagine,” Cas smiled. “Well you're not in trouble with me. Not yet.”

He winked at Dean, who smiled back and licked his lips.

Cas genuinely couldn't remember having this successful a date in at least a decade. Figures that Dean was only here for two weeks. Still, that was the whole point of this. The short-term nature of it was the best thing about it. Not enough time to hurt or get hurt.

_Better the contempt of the familiar cannot start_, his mind provided. _Damn musicals. What was that song…?_

“Where the hell have you gone?” Dean asked, amused.

Cas gave himself a mental shake. “Sorry,” he said. “Just got a song stuck in my head and I was trying to figure out what it was.”

“You did a total Ally just then, dude.”

Cas frowned, quizzical.

“You know,” Dean prompted. “When Ally McBeal would phase out into fantasy land. Did you see a dancing baby or were you hearing Al Green?”

Cas smiled broadly. “Damn, you really know that show,” he said, wondering when it would be appropriate to reveal the full extent of his own fanatical love for Ms McBeal and co. “And, hey, I guess you knew Vonda Shepherd, right?”

“Yeah, a little,” Dean said, nodding. “I sang with her on an album once. She was really nice.”

“I have that album,” Cas confessed, with a smile. “You’re track eight.”

Dean laughed. “I am?”

“Yes; right after 'Chances Are', which she recorded with Robert Downey Junior.”

“Oh, great, so it’s not just the irresistible charm that he and I have in common!”

Cas laughed. “God, I wanted Larry and Ally to end up together so bad.”

Dean shook his head.

“I see judgement in your eyes,” Cas accused, but still smiling. “I’m not ashamed of emotionally investing in fictitious relationships.”

“Oh, I’m not judging you,” Dean told him. “Believe me, I was emotionally invested in a lot worse
than Ally McBeal.”

Cas raised his eyebrows, inviting elaboration.

Dean sighed, looked around, and leaned forward. “Baywatch,” he whispered.

Cas laughed out loud.

“Came for the pretty people in bathing suits, stayed for the love triangles,” Dean grinned.

“Ally had pretty people too,” Cas said.

“Very pretty,” Dean agreed. “And a very cool script. And Peter MacNicol, who is one of the most underrated actors of all time.”

“Oh. My. God.”

“What?”

“I feel exactly the same way about Peter MacNicol!” Cas enthused. “He’s a genius!”

“Right?!” Dean nodded emphatically, augmenting his words with energised hands. “His performance in Ghostbusters was epic, and Numbers is so cool!”

“And he’s done voice overs for so many animated series and video games,” Cas added.

“He’s real versatile too, you know,” Dean raved. “He’s a comedy legend and an amazing dramatic actor…”

“Did you know he directed some episodes of Ally McBeal?”

“I did not know that! Plus, he’s from Texas, which obviously ramps him up the awesome-meter.”

“I’d like to ramp you up the awesome-meter.”

There was an abrupt silence.

Then they looked at each other and dissolved into fits of laughter.

“Dude!” Dean said, through a chuckle. “I think that might be the first time I’ve ever been out-innuendo’d.”

Cas gave a kind of half bow, turning his hands up in gratitude of the acknowledgement of this great achievement. Making Dean laugh was now officially in his top five favorite things to do.

“Shall we get our check?” Dean asked. “Or you want something else?”

Cas looked at his watch.

“Uh, if we’re going to the Hounds we should get a train soon, I guess,” he said. “They’re not as regular on Sundays.”

“Okay,” Dean agreed, drumming his fingers on the table. “I wanna change first and shower and stuff.”

“Yeah, I guess I could do with a shower, too,” Cas said, catching the eye of the waiter and miming the international check please sign; the old pen-in-the-air move.
“You wanna come back to my digs?” Dean asked.

“Sure,” Cas smiled.

* * *

Dean let Cas shower first, and tried not to think about it.

He had three unread texts in his phone. One from Sam, begging him to behave himself on his date, one from Garth, begging for a picture of his tattoo, and the most recent one was from Benny, not begging for anything, just making a subtle enquiry.

**Benny: you score?**

Dean chuckled and hit reply.

**Dean: he's currently naked in my apartment**

**Benny: WTF?! Bro why the hell are you texting me then?! Go boy go!**

**Dean: haha! He's in the shower ;) Had an awesome lunch and we're going back into the city for this quiz thing. No sex. Yet.**

**Benny: Dude. An afternoon AND evening date on the same day. Serious shit.**

**Dean: Totally. I'm gonna propose before the night's out.**

**Benny: don't forget - no glove=no love**

**Dean: you're an asshole**

**Benny: Nope! Just tryna protect YOURS!!**

The water in Dean's en suite shut off, and Cas emerged a few minutes after. He was back in the clothes he’d been in before, having declined Dean's offer to borrow some of his, but his hair was now damp and he had that fresh, pink glow about him.

He looked fucking delicious.

“Nice water pressure,” Cas grinned. “Better than mine.”

Dean beamed back. “Glad you approve. My turn! Make yourself at home. You sure you don't want to borrow a shirt or something?”

“I'm fine, thank you, though.”

As Dean passed him, he caught a familiar scent.

“Help yourself to a bit of my Calvin Klein, didja?” he asked, nudging Cas with his shoulder.

“Just a little spritz,” Cas confessed, sheepishly. “You don't mind?”

“No at all,” Dean replied, in what he hoped were seductive tones. “It's kinda nice having you smell like me. Like I've marked my territory.”

Dean hoped he wasn't pushing the banter too far, and he winked to reinforce the fact that he was
definitely kidding.

“More hygienic than peeing all around me, at least,” Cas returned.

Dean laughed with relief. “Yeah, that'd be going a little too far for our first date, I think.”

He headed into the shower, hoping Cas would do as much naked-picturing as he had...

Cas wasn't sure what to do with himself. It felt wrong to just hang around in Dean's bedroom on his own, so he went out into the main area of the apartment, which was an open plan arrangement of kitchen, living room and dining room.

There was a large bookshelf which took up most of the wall, and one of the books was lying open on the arm of the couch. Cas was glad that Dean liked to read.

It was all very modern, very clean, very Ikea. Cas felt that this space didn't suit Dean's personality at all. He imagined Dean's home back in Texas to be full of character, very colorful and maybe with some handmade furniture. Presumably Dean lived alone; he hadn't mentioned a housemate or a pet. He hoped Dean wasn't lonely. Such an amazing person deserves somebody to appreciate him.

Unannounced images of himself and Dean curling up on a sofa watching TV, or making dinner together flickered through Cas’ mind.

Two days, he told himself. You've know him for two days. And you'll be dating him for a maximum of like a week and a half. If he even wants to see you again. You don't want anything more than that, anyway. Stop. Calm the fuck down.

Dean came out of his room after a little while, looking jaw-droppingly good. He'd changed into a dark blue button-down with the sleeves rolled up and the first couple of buttons undone at his neck, and a pair of just-tight-enough jeans.

“Ready?” he asked, and for fucks sake that smile did things to Cas’ insides.

Cas swallowed. “Um, yeah - yes. Ready.”

Dean stalked towards him, still adjusting one of his sleeves. Cas froze where he was, in the middle of the room, feeling very exposed.

A look came over Dean's face. If asked to describe it, Cas probably wouldn't have been able to find the words, but it was a look that was heavy with promise and - desire.

Oh my god he's going to kiss me, Cas thought, as he felt his heart rate speed up. Impossibly Gorgeous Man from my train, who turned out to be Chester fucking Dean, is going to kiss me.

“So, Cas,” Dean said, softly, as he stepped closer. “I know, this, um, can’t really turn into anything, but, I, uh…”

He ran a hand through his hair and laughed a little, nervously. He stopped and looked Cas dead in the eye.

“I really like you,” he affirmed, with a small, coy smile.

Cas returned it with one of his own. “I really like you too, Dean,” he said, quietly.

Dean bit down on the right side of his bottom lip.
“So, uh, you wanna be my, um - my holiday romance?” he grinned, taking another step towards Cas. “And then, you know, after I go home we can be facebook buddies, and fangirl over nineties TV shows together.”

Dean was now very much in the realm of Cas’ personal space. They weren’t touching, but they were close enough to feel each other’s breath, and Cas’ skin was tingling.

“Sounds good,” he said, a little embarrassed at how breathy and high his voice came out.

He swallowed in an attempt to get it back to normal, then added; “Especially the romance part.”

He ran a hand up Dean’s arm, following it with his eyes.

When that hand reached Dean’s impressive bicep, Cas squeezed gently, and looked into Dean’s face, which was mere inches from his own.

Dean licked his lips and leaned in.

Cas’ brain short-circuited and got stuck in a loop of oh shit oh shit oh shit…

Their lips connected and Cas felt a wave of electricity rush through him, the likes of which he hadn’t felt since he was a teenager.

Dean put one hand round the back of Cas’ neck, as they both started to open and close their mouths slowly, caressing each other’s lips with their own. Cas closed his eyes and just felt.

Dean released a low moan, the sound of which kicked Cas into the next gear. He put his hands on Dean’s hips and pulled him flush against him, and slipped his tongue inside Dean’s warm mouth. Both of Dean’s hands moved to the back of Cas’ head, and the kiss deepened, both tongues now fully committed to the activity.

After not nearly long enough, in Cas’ opinion, the making out eased off, and they closed their mouths against each other a final time. They pulled away slowly, though not too far. Their faces were still close, and Cas opened his eyes to get happily lost in Dean’s.

Dean ran his hands from Cas’ head down his back then to his hips, mirroring where Cas had placed his own hands on Dean’s body.

Cas inhaled a deep breath and then let it out shakily through slightly pouted lips. He felt a bit dizzy.

“So, that - kinda rocked,” Dean appraised, in a voice low in both volume and pitch, a sexy little smile dancing round his mouth.

Cas hummed a gentle laugh. “It kinda did,” he agreed.

“Lucky for you, I’m a gentleman,” Dean murmured, nosing at Cas’ neck. “Or we would never make it to the bar tonight.”

Dean kissed Cas’ neck once, then slapped him affectionately on the ass before turning to find his jacket.

“Oh, you think I’m that easy?” Cas smirked, skin still hot from Dean’s touch. “Just because you were famous in the nineties doesn’t mean you can get into my pants on the first date, you know.”

Dean turned back around, pouting. “But I had three albums,” he whined, play-sulking.
Cas laughed. “Okay, fine, you can suck me off on the train home.”
Though My Mind Could Think

*Austin, Texas*

*June 24th, 1990*

Dean had no idea where his Dad kept going.

Ellen and Bill’s excuses were getting weaker every time. Or maybe it was just that Dean was seeing through them now that he was getting older.

He knew his Father wasn’t working in Tennessee with Bobby, because when he’d called, Bobby said he didn’t know where John was. So that had been a giant lie. Lately, Dean had heard Ellen telling Sam that John was touring the country looking for acts to join Hunter. Sammy bought it, but then he was just a kid. Dean wasn’t falling for any of it.

Dean remembered being very quiet when he was little. Then when he’d got a little bit older he’d been what Ellen referred to as ‘a handful’. He used to get into trouble for accidentally breaking stuff and being too rowdy and not paying attention.

Recently, he found himself feeling angry a lot. He’d just get mad about stuff all the time and he wasn’t sure why. It was like he was filling up with red rage, and sometimes he worried that it would spill out and he was going to hit something or someone. So he tried to keep it all in. He didn’t want to hurt anybody.

John came back every few months, and always with a few more wrinkles, a few more grey hairs and a few more scars. Dean was old enough to know that you don’t get scars scouting for country singers. You get scars from fights.

Dean was just finishing his dinner when the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Ellen called, from the kitchen.

Since no one except Sam was looking, Dean licked off the last bit of gravy from his plate, then he gathered up his crockery and took it all out to the kitchen. He didn’t look down the hall as he went. If he had, he might’ve seen his Father over Ellen’s shoulder.

As he dumped his stuff in the sink, he heard Ellen raise her voice, but he couldn’t make out any words. He went to the doorway, curious as to who she was talking to. He froze, and heard his own voice, though he couldn’t remember commanding it to work.

“Dad?”

The grown-ups stopped speaking, and turned to him.

John’s face softened into a smile.

“Hey, son,” he said.

“Dad!” came Sam’s excited voice as he fled out of the dining room.

John grunted with the force of the impact of a fast-moving seven year old. He laughed as he lifted Sam up.

“Hey, Sammy,” he said, and Dean noticed that his voice sounded deeper. “Have you been good?”
“He’s an angel,” said Ellen, voice soft but eyes sternly fixed on John. “Doesn’t let anything get to him.”

“Come on, Dad, come in,” Sam insisted. “I wanna show you the robot that Bill and me made! It has a wheel and it’s silver and Bill let me put the light on its head and it’s so cool!”

John chuckled, as he stepped inside and kicked the door closed behind him with the heel of his boot. He put Sam down, and looked at Dean.

“Sounds really good, Sammy,” he said. “You go get it, and I’ll be right there.”

Sam hurtled out into the garage, calling for Bill. Dean and John stood staring at each other, until Ellen finally broke the awkward silence.

“Dean’s been doin’ real good at school this year,” she told John. “Grades are up, and his teachers say he’s been focusin’ much better.”

John nodded and smiled. “Good for you, Dean.”

Dean didn’t know what to say. It was like there were so many words flying around his head, but he couldn’t grab hold of enough of them to make a sentence.

Ellen sighed.

“Well, you’d better come in and sit down,” she said. “I’ll make a pot of coffee.”

“Coffee?” John scoffed, as he followed her towards where Dean was standing in the kitchen doorway. “Could use a real drink, Ellen.”

Ellen stopped in her tracks and turned slowly back towards Dean’s father.

“No,” she said, quiet but in a tone that you wouldn’t dare argue with, no matter how old or big you were. “There’s no alcohol in this house, and there never will be.”

John shifted uncomfortably. Something unspoken passed between them, and Ellen seem satisfied. She walked into the kitchen, giving Dean’s shoulder a squeeze as she passed him.

That evening, Dean lay in bed, listening to the muted but heated discussion that was happening downstairs. Sam was asleep and blissfully unaware that anything was wrong.

Dean hadn’t managed to have an actual conversation with John. He’d worked out that since the fire, he’d seen him a total of ten times, and the longest his Dad had stayed at the house was three weeks. Every time Dean saw him, they were more and more like strangers. He had nothing to say to him.

Dean realised he’d balled his hands up into fists at his sides, and wondered how long they’d been like that. He shook them loose, rolled over and closed his eyes.

_____________________

Camden, London
Sunday, June 16th, 2013

By the time Dean and Cas got to Camden, the first jazz set was just coming to a close. Their delayed arrival may or may not have been because the two of them were so distracted by flirting with each other on the tube that they went one stop too far.
A silky, vibrato-laden voice drifted through the dry ice, as they came through the door.

“*Stars shining bright above you…*”

Dean looked over at the very thin, very petite woman on stage. Her long ginger hair was curled, and resting over one shoulder. She wore a sequined blue dress, which caught the light and set her all a-shimmer as she sang. She held the top of her mic stand with one hand, while the other gestured in the air like a snake charmer.

“*Night breezes seem to whisper - I love you…*”

“Well, hello again.”

Dean jumped a little as Bela put her hand on his forearm.

“Just couldn’t stay away?”

“What can I say?” Dean smiled, gently uncurling the landlady’s fingers from around his arm. “Sucker for some smooth jazz and competitive bar games.”

“I *could* be persuaded to give away some of the answers,” she purred, seductively.

“Ah-ah,” Dean tutted. “I was raised not to cheat, ma’am.”

“Pity.”

“Excuse us, Bela,” Cas cut in, thinly-veiled impatience in his voice. “Come on Dean, let’s go join our team.”

Bela eyed Dean like a vulture as they passed, Cas glaring at her through narrowed eyes until they were a safe distance away.

Dean exhaled a little amused sound.

“What?” Cas frowned.

“Nothing,” Dean grinned. “You’re cute when you’re possessive.”

Cas’ face relaxed. “Shut up…”

“Hey, bitches!” Charlie waved.

They reached her table and found it occupied by all of Dean's new friends.

“Deano!” Ash stood up and shook Dean’s hand. “How’s the ink, man?”

Dean turned so his upper arm was visible to Ash’s appraising gaze.

“Lookin’ good, bro!”

“Have you been creaming regularly?” came Meg’s lascivious voice.

Dean sighed and shook his head. “Do you ever have a day off?” he asked her, as he pulled out a chair.

Meg grinned, shark-like, at him.
“Relax, cowboy, I'm only yanking your chain. I know there's another dark haired hottie besides me that's marked your dance card.”

Dean looked up at the hottie to whom Meg was referring, who was still standing, watching the stage. Dean licked his lips, then turned back to Meg.

“You think I can get him to yank my chain?” he whispered.

Meg smirked. “Possibly. He’ll rattle it real good at the very least.”

Cas was about to take a seat next to Dean, when Charlie linked her arm through his, and steered him away so that they were out of earshot of the others.

“So how'd it go?” she asked, eagerly.

Cas’ shy smile answered the question for him.

“Ooh, that good, huh!”?

Cas bit his lip. “We had such a great time,” he confessed. “I really like him.”

“Oh my god!” Charlie gushed. “I'm so happy! I haven't seen you look like that over literally anyone!”

Cas sighed. “It's only a bit of fun, he's not going to be here very long.”

Charlie pouted a little, then brightened up again.

“So it won't last forever,” she recited. “But who made up the rule that the best loves do?”

Cas looked at her, bemused. “Did you just quote Ally McBeal at me?”

Charlie grinned. “I may have finally gotten around to watching the dvds you gave me.”

“Did you get to the Jon Bon Jovi season yet?”

“Two episodes in.”

“Do not watch any more without me.”

“Dream a little dream, oh dream a little dream, why don't you dream a little dream… of… me!”

Rowena finished her final riff, complimented by a flourish on the keys from Gavin, and the audience clapped and whistled.

“Why must she always bloody milk the endings like that?” Crowley asked from somewhere at Cas’ hip-height.

They looked down and there the landlord sat, alone at a table with only a bottle of Port and a large glass for company.

“This quiz bollocks had better work, Bradbury,” he grumbled, voice rough with too many cigars, too much hard alcohol and too much cynicism. “Or jazz night is over, and she's out on her arse.”

“I promise, Mr Crowley,” Charlie said, relentless optimism overriding her boss’ intimidating tone. “It’s gonna be a huge success, I just know it.”
Charlie unthreaded her arm from Cas’ and pushed her hair behind her ears.

“Okay,” she announced, adjusting her clothes and appearing to have a quick, silent word with herself. “Let's do this.”

Cas smiled, proud of his most precious friend.

She sped off towards the stage, as Dean approached Cas from behind and pressed his hand to the small of his back.

“Hey,” Dean said, proximity making Cas jump a little. “Ash has got us all drinks; you coming?”

Cas felt his pulse quicken and his face warm up by a couple of degrees. Damn this guy for being so gorgeous and having the sexiest voice on God’s green earth.

He swallowed. “Sure. Let's get quizzical.”

Dean pulled a horrified face. “No, you did not.”

Rowena sashayed over to them at that moment, saving Cas from having to defend his horrible pun.

“Good evening, Castiel,” she purred. “And who might this be?”

“Good evening, Ro,” Cas returned, warmly. “This is Dean Winchester. He's visiting from Texas, and I'm - looking after him.”

Rowena stuck out a delicate hand. “Well hello, Dean Winchester from Texas,” she said, vowels rolling with her lovely, lilting accent. “And aren't you a treat?”

“A pleasure, ma'am,” Dean smiled, shaking the tiny Scottish lady’s hand. “You have a very fine voice. I'm real sorry that I didn't get here in time to hear more of it.”

Rowena flushed, and let out a small giggle.

Cas shook his head, almost imperceptibly, amazed at Dean’s innate ability to charm anyone and everything around him.

“Such a well-mannered young man,” Rowena said, breathily. “I could just spread you on some toast and eat you whole.”

“Barking up the wrong tree, there, treasure,” came Crowley’s sardonic voice.

Rowena’s face pinched up with irritation, and she looked slowly down at him.

“Oh, I didn't see you there,” she said, mouth and jaw tight. “Are you planning to pay me on time this week?”

“Nice outfit,” Crowley responded, ignoring her question completely. “Drag night was last night, dear. Unless - is it Halloween already?”

Dean looked at Cas, and Cas shrugged. These two could never speak to each other in anything other than barbed insults.

Rowena smiled a thin, cold smile. “Oh, Fergus,” she sighed.

Dean mouthed to Cas; “Fergus?” and Cas nodded, with a wince.
“You're like the little boy in the playground who doesn't know how to talk to girls,” Rowena was saying, with a cruel tongue. “So he just pulls their hair.”

“No, cupcake,” Crowley sneered. “I was the little boy in the playground setting fire to ants with a magnifying glass. Girls are tedious. As is this conversation. And don’t call me Fergus.”

A brief squeal of feedback indicated that Charlie had switched her mic on. The quiz was about to begin.

“If you'll excuse me,” Crowley said, standing and taking his Port with him. “I'll be in my office, avoiding this farce.”


“He's getting me a drink,” Rowena answered, visibly relieved at Crowley's departure. “He's a good boy. He knows his mother’s post-set vodka needs.”

The three of them joined the assembled crew of quizzers, as Charlie ran through the rules.

“...and of course, there will be extra points for the most creative team name!”

One of the barmen handed out papers and pens, while they all debated what they should be called. In the end they settled on Quiz-Team-a Aguilera, much to the disappointment of Ash, who'd wanted them to be called Trivia Newton John.

Round one was pretty successful. It was general knowledge, and between them they managed to put a convincing answer for every question, though there had been some dispute about question nine.

“Capricorn, definitely,” Rowena had insisted.

“No way,” Ash had countered. “If you’re born on Christmas Eve, you’re an Aquarius.”

“I'm an Aquarius,” Dean had interjected. “And my birthday’s the end of January so I don’t think…”

“I'm writing Sagittarius…”

“Gavin, no!”

In the end Meg had commandeered the pen, and refused to let anyone see what she'd written.

Round two had been TV and film, and because Charlie had written them, every other question had a sci fi or fantasy bent, so Quiz-team-a Aguilera were very confident with their performance on that one. They’d also not been fooled by Charlie’s trick question...

“Who lives at 744 Evergreen Terrace?”

“I’m not falling for this again,” Tamara said, looking sideways at the quiz master. “She thinks she’s so clever - it’s Ned Flanders.”

Round three was a Name-That-Sport picture round.

“So, these are photographs of sportsmen and women going about their everyday lives,” Charlie explained. “You just have to write down the sport that they're famous for.”

“I'm out,” Tamara declared, heading to the bar. “The only sport I know is swimming, and none of those people are Michael Phelps.”
“I can recognise Bethanie Mattek-Sands at a hundred paces,” offered Ash. “But aside from that I ain’t got diddly squat.”

Dean pretty much did the round all on his own.

“It was chaos here last year,” Cas told him, during the ensuing sport-related discussion. “The Olympics generated an amazing atmosphere, but trying to get to work was a pain in the ass for months.”

“Okay guys - round four!”

“Someone else can take this one,” Dean said, sitting back and swigging his beer, triumphantly. “I nailed round three.”

“No disputing that,” Meg agreed, still eyeing Dean up shamelessly at every opportunity.

“This -” Charlie announced. “- is a special Musicals round!”

There was a ripple of dissatisfaction around the pub, as Cas cracked his knuckles dramatically.

“Stand back, guys!” he smiled, taking the pen from Dean. “This is my moment.”

Dean grinned at him as Charlie began.

“Question one. Who wrote the musicals ‘Nine’ and ‘Grand Hotel’?”

Cas was writing his answer before Charlie had even finished speaking.

“Question two. Name two of the Trains in Starlight Express.”

Cas closed his eyes for a second as the cogs of his brain turned, then he clicked his fingers and scribbled away furiously.

“Ever get that ‘surplus to requirements’ feeling?” Gavin asked the assembled group.

“Shhh!” hissed his mother. “Let the man work.”

“Question three…”

Dean looked at Cas, and couldn’t help the feeling of fondness that washed over him. Damn, the guy was so fucking cute when his eyes were all scrunched up and concentrating. Dean wondered whether Cas’ sex face looked a bit like that, then had to stop wondering that immediately, because his crotch perked up, and now was really not the time.

After Cas had filled in nine out of ten answers with no help from anyone, he had a decidedly smug look over his face, and was waiting confidently for the final question.

“Which Elton John musical features the songs ‘Strongest Suit’ and ‘Easy as Life’?”

Cas’ whole face tensed up.

“Shit.”

“What’s the matter, showbiz boy?” teased Meg. “Don’t know your Elton John?”

Cas’ brow furrowed. “This was the song I was thinking of earlier…” he muttered. “Fuck, what is
that show?"

He started chewing on the inside of his gums and tapping the pen on the table.

“Don’t panic, man,” Dean encouraged. “It’ll come to you; you got this.”

Ash arrived back at the table, two bottles of beer in each hand.

“How’s the angel of music faring?” he enquired.

“About to strike out,” Meg smirked.

“He’s doing a wonderful job, Ashley,” Rowena ignored Meg and addressed Ash. “He’s just a bit stuck.”

“Why, what’s the question?”

Dean answered on Cas’ behalf. “An Elton John musical…”

“Billy Elliot,” interrupted Ash.

Dean was impressed, and looked at Cas, expectantly.

Cas shook his head. “Nope.”

“The Lion King?”

“No, Ash, the one with ‘Strongest Suit’ and ‘Easy as Life’ in it,” Cas said, impatiently.

“Oh!” Ash swigged his beer and then declared; “Aida.”

“Oh my god, you’re right!” Cas hurriedly scribbled down the answer.

Everyone was staring incredulously at Ash, who continued to share his unexpected knowledge.

“Based on a Verdi opera. Opened in Atlanta in ninety-eight. Spice Girls recorded a cover of Strongest Suit. It was horse-shit.”

No one moved.

“What?” Ash looked at them all, and frowned.

Tamara was the first to crack up. “Oh my god Ash, you are full of surprises!”

Meg shook her head. “I thought working every day alongside a walking comic-book encyclopaedia was bad enough, but now it’s musicals too?”

Ash shrugged and focused back on his beer. “Aint easy being this pretty and a genius at the same time, sister. Disrespect me all you want; you know you adore me.”

Round five was history, and Gavin and Tamara led the troops on that one, then the final round was famous song intros. They were feeling very confident as they handed in their answer sheets, and while Charlie counted up the scores, Rowena and Gavin returned to the stage for two more numbers.

Ash and Meg went to get more drinks, and Cas found himself alone at the table with Dean. The kiss they had shared rushed to the front of his mind, and his body temperature raised a couple of degrees. He looked into Dean’s face, and Dean smiled at him.
“So,” Dean began. “Musicals, huh?”

Cas sighed. “I know, I know, I’m a giant gay stereotype.”

Dean grinned and put his arm round Cas’ shoulders. “’N’aw, don’t be so hard on yourself, Castiel,” he teased, and the sound of his full name in Dean’s mouth made Cas feel oddly special somehow.

“Own your quirks, man!” Dean continued, with a grin, giving Cas a squeeze and then letting him go. “So what do we get if we win?”

“I have no idea,” Cas answered, feeling slightly bereft at the loss of Dean’s touch. “Cold hard cash, maybe. Or, more likely, a bottle of Crowley’s awful cheap wine.”

“Crowley’s the owner, right?”

Cas nodded. “He pays for it and Bela manages it.”

“They seem… an interesting pair,” Dean said, thoughtfully.

“They certainly are that,” Cas agreed.

“Is he as much of a dick as I’ve assumed he is?” Dean asked.

“Mostly,” Cas answered. “But I guess he must have another side that we don’t see, or Bela would never have married him. She could easily be on the arm of some banker or property developer. Nothing exotic about the North London pub business.”

Cas wondered whether Dean would really be interested in someone like Bela, had Cas not got to him first, and if she weren’t married. She certainly was stunning, but Cas had a feeling that Dean wouldn’t put up with someone with such a shaky moral compass for long.

“Meg thinks she’s Lady Macbeth-ing him, trying to get him to buy a whole string of pubs and take over the city,” he added.

“Maybe he’s just really good in bed,” Dean suggested.

Cas pulled a face.

Dean laughed. “Or, there’s nothing sinister about her at all, and it’s just good old fashioned blind true love.”

Cas raised an eyebrow and pursed his lips. “We haven’t actually considered that possibility.”

Dean looked over at Rowena and Gavin. Rowena was halfway through the song ‘Misty.’

“She’s pretty good,” he observed.

Cas nodded. “Yeah, she is,” he agreed. “A little off the wall, but then I guess a lot of artists are.”

“You think singing is art?” Dean enquired.

“Of course,” Cas said.

Dean was silent for a short while, and Cas wondered whether he should justify his opinion or just let Dean mull it over as he seemed to be doing.
“What’s her day job?” Dean asked.

“She works in an organic health clinic,” Cas replied, voice flat.

Dean raised his eyebrows.

“For god’s sake, don’t ask her about it,” Cas advised. “Unless you want to hear the sales pitch for face cream made out of cedarwood, collagen and placenta.”

Dean pulled a face. “I’m sorry, did you say placenta?”

“Apparently it tightens your elasticity.”

“Super.”

Cas chuckled, as Rowena came to the end of the song. They applauded, and Gavin began the intro to ‘Nice Work if You Can Get It’.

“Quick - name that television theme!” Ash demanded, as he reappeared with the drinks.

“The quiz is over, Ash,” Cas protested.

“Cybil!” yelled Dean.

Cas rolled his eyes.

“Told you,” grinned Dean. “Can’t fuck with me when it comes to nineties TV, man.”

“Who can’t fuck with you when who comes?” Meg asked, sitting down.

Cas thanked Ash, took his drink, and listened to Meg and Dean trading weak double entendres. He wondered who would run out first. He also wished Meg would drop it. Cas had never dated a bisexual guy before, and he wasn’t used to seeing women as a threat. He did get the feeling that, given the choice, Dean would prefer him over her, but still - frankly, he could do without the competition.

He turned his attention to Rowena. He caught the words ‘holding hands at midnight ’neath a starry sky’, and couldn’t rein in his hopeless imagination.

Cas always felt there was something so wonderful about holding hands. The sense of protection, and the sense of being a team. Like, you can’t get us; we’re attached, we’re together, we come as a pair. Cas would so love to have Dean hold his hand. Just for a little while.

The song came to an end, and Charlie returned to the stage to hollers and cheers, the loudest of which came from Ash.

Much to Quiz-Team-a Aguilera’s horror, they did not win.

They were beaten to the punch by the team ‘E equals MC Hammer’, but they came a close second.

“I demand a recount!” shouted Ash, slamming his fist on the table as Charlie approached them.

Charlie shook her head. “Counted it twice, dude,” she told him. “Judge’s decision is final.”

“I’m crushed,” Ash declared, draining his bottle. “I’m also beat. Gonna head back to the shack.”
One by one they all agreed it was getting late, and that they should probably all get going.

“You here til close, honey?” Cas asked Charlie.

“Yeah,” Charlie pouted. “But Tammy’s gonna stay with me and drive me home.”

“Hope you find an appropriate way to thank her,” Cas whispered in Charlie’s ear as he hugged her goodnight.

Charlie gave him a playful push and a wink.

“Get home now, Castiel,” she instructed. “It’s a school night, after all.”

“Not for me,” Cas said, smugly. “I got the day off tomorrow.”

“Is that so?” queried Dean. “And what do you intend to do with it?”

Cas smiled at him and Dean expanded on his question as he zipped up his jacket. “You know, just in case it was something you wanted company for.”

Cas was thrilled that Dean was so refreshingly direct about wanting to spend time with him. It was very flattering. It also completely threw out all his worries about Meg and Bela.

*Dean wants to hang out with me. Dean likes me. Screw you, beautiful girls.*

“You’re not doing London tourist stuff tomorrow?” Cas asked.

Dean shrugged. “I had planned to go to the Natural History Museum, but it’ll still be there another day. Think I’d rather hang out with you, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course he doesn’t mind,” Ash interrupted, throwing his arms around both their shoulders. “Why mope the day away on his sad little lonesome, when he could spend it making heart eyes at you?”

“Heart eyes?” protested Cas, as Dean laughed. “I don’t…”

Ash cut him off by giving both of them a little shove towards the door. “Now move it before you miss your last train, cause you’re not sleeping on my couch.”

_____________________

July, 2011

Cas had technically been offered his job before he’d even graduated from his course.

He’d driven up from Winchester to North London, feeling a little unsettled about wearing a suit again for the first time in a long time.

Mr Tod and his Deputy Head Teacher, Miss Darshi, had conducted the interview. Miss Darshi was very lovely and seemed really impressed with Cas’ thoughts on adolescent development. They’d had a nice discussion, and he’d confidently answered all her questions.

Mr Tod, despite his not smiling or saying more than about eight words for the entirety of the interview, had apparently approved, and Cas was offered the position before he left the room.

People at the school had even helped him find his house. He was glad to be living in a town and not in the middle of London. He was going to save a fortune on rent, and the annual railcard was a pretty
good deal. Most importantly, though, he felt safe. Big cities made him feel uneasy, and the crime rates in the areas of London he would’ve been able to afford were chilling.

It wasn’t that Cas was timid by nature - he’d travelled round Malaysia and Thailand on his own with no fear. He worked out, and could more than hold his own if physically threatened. He just dreaded confrontation, and the older he got the more he craved security.

Despite his tendency to keep to himself, he had made a few friends at University, but they’d all dispersed following the end of the course and he hadn’t kept in touch with any of them. Having moved into his little Hertfordshire haven, he could hear Pamela’s voice in his head telling him to actively seek to make some friends. And who was he to defy his dead best friend? If anyone was going to come back to haunt him, it would be her.

So he’d gone online to see if there were any local societies or clubs he could get involved with. He’d been curious to see if there was an ex-pat American community around, and that was how he’d found the website of the LGBTQ American Immigrant Society of London. He’d emailed the membership secretary to see about attending a meeting.

He almost hadn’t gone. He’d been tempted to blow it off and just stay home and read, but he’d forced himself, and he was very glad he did.

Miss Charlie Bradbury was the first person to greet him as he came through the door, and she stayed with him until he felt at ease. She made Cas laugh - the first person to truly do so since Pamela died - and her warmth and honesty made him remember why one needs good friends. And of those friends, it’s quality not quantity that truly counts.
Masquerading as a Man With a Reason

A journey from Hertfordshire to Bedfordshire
Monday, June 17th, 2013

As it turned out, what Cas intended to do with his day off was go shopping for fish.

He explained to Dean that he had a small aquarium in his home, and he had a thing for tropical fish.

“They’re low maintenance and good company,” Cas had insisted.

“I’m sorry - fish are good company?”

“Absolutely! They’re extremely relaxing to watch, and they almost never criticise my television choices.”

And so it was that Dean found himself spending Monday morning accompanying his newest friend to an Aquatic superstore in Bedfordshire.

They were driving there in Cas’ car, which was a Nissan Micra in Pacific Blue.

“Dude,” Dean said, disapprovingly, as Cas unlocked it. “What the fuck is this?”

Cas looked offended. “Don’t be mean about Becky,” he said, sliding into the driver’s seat.

“Becky?” Dean questioned, getting in the passenger side. “You named your car Becky?”

“Yes,” Cas answered, buckling up. “She’s perky and fun and curvy. She’s definitely a Becky.”

Dean laughed and shook his head. “You’re weird,” he told Cas, affectionately.

Cas chuckled. “I am aware. And I know it’s kind of an old-lady car,” he conceded. “But she’s cheap to run, easy to steer and I got good insurance.”

“It take you long to get used to driving on the left?” Dean enquired, as they pulled away from the kerb.

“Oh god, yes,” said Cas, a pained expression on his face. “I left my driving instructor with several frayed nerves and the memories of a few near heart attacks.”

Dean hummed a laugh, and wondered how he’d deal with having to drive on the other side of the road. Must be weird. After all these years, driving was so instinctual; he wasn't sure he'd be able to unlearn then relearn everything.

He scanned the dash of this absurd toy car. Everything was kind of bubble-shaped, and obnoxiously plastic-looking. He fiddled with the radio, and turned his nose up at every station.

“Ugh - is there a local rock station or is it all this cheesy pop shit?”

“Just cheesy pop and rap for miles around, I’m afraid,” Cas said, apologetically. “The rock stations are all only digital. I do have a Queen CD in there, though.”

“Dude, yes!”
Dean changed the source to the CD player, and released a sigh of contentment as Freddie Mercury’s voice filled the car.

Cas laughed at him. “You’re like a smoker who just took his first drag of the day.”

“Hey, if you’re gonna be addicted to something, it might as well be classic rock,” Dean observed.

“You’re right,” Cas smiled. “I’m kind of eclectic with my music, but I do love an eighties rock band. I think the first album I ever bought was Houses of the Holy.”

“Vinyl?”

“Cassette.”

“Led Zeppelin on cassette,” Dean nodded, approvingly. “If you weren’t driving, we’d high-five right now.”

Cas smiled again. “You might take that back when I tell you what other CDs there are in the glove compartment.”

Dean raised an eyebrow. “Hairspray soundtrack?” he guessed.

Cas frowned, thoughtfully. “Actually, no,” he said. “Although that is on my iPod.”

“Jesus, Cas…”

They set off through Hatfield, northbound.

“So what does Dean Winchester drive when he’s at home?” Cas asked.

Dean hesitated. This could be a dealbreaker. If Cas wasn’t impressed by his car, this little fling was never going to work out.

“A 1967 Chevy Impala,” he announced, with all the appropriate gravitas that Baby deserved.

“Wow,” Cas said, briefly looking sideways at Dean before turning his attention back to the road. “That’s very cool. My friend Pamela used to drive a 77 Stingray.”

Dean exhaled a pleased, relieved breath. Thank god. Vintage car appreciation checked off the list of desirable attributes. Not that he needed Cas to have certain personality traits; he wasn’t gonna marry the guy. It was just nice to know that they had a lot in common.

“How long have you had it?” Cas asked.


“I beg her pardon,” Cas smiled. “I take it you haven’t named her anything as crass as ‘Becky’?”

“She’s just my Baby with a capital B,” Dean said, proudly. “She used to belong to my Dad, but she’s mine now. He never took proper care of her anyway.”

There was a short silence between them, filled only with the sound of ‘Breakthru’ coming from Becky’s speakers. Dean hadn’t really meant to mention John; it had just slipped out. He waited for the inevitable follow-up questions.

“What does he do, your father?” Cas asked, voice sounding a little hesitant.
Dean chewed on his bottom lip, then decided that he could trust Cas with some of the facts. Not all, but some.

“He used to help run the record company I work for,” he said, looking out the window. Then he turned his face towards Cas. “He’s currently incarcerated in a correctional facility in Kansas.”

Cas didn’t visibly react at all to that information. He just kept his eyes on the road and his hands on the wheel. After a few moments, he nodded his head, slowly.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he said, quietly.

Dean was glad that Cas didn’t push for any more details. It was hard for Dean to talk about John. He couldn’t do it without getting angry, and he didn’t like himself when he was angry. He also knew, deep down, that his father wasn’t at his core a bad person, which made Dean even angrier. It was all such a waste. A waste of John’s life, and a waste of the relationship they could have had.

“What color is Baby?” Cas’ voice broke Dean out of his thoughts, and he smiled gratefully at the return to safe ground.

“Black,” he replied. “Leather interior, and original tape deck.”

“Big back seat?” Cas asked, with a grin. He grazed Dean’s denim-clad thigh with his fist as he changed gear, and gave him a quick wink.

Dean squirmed a little and bit his lip. Okay - flirting. Excellent.

“You bet,” he smirked. “If those seats could talk…”

“They’d say, ‘Dean has a lot of sex on us’?”

Dean laughed. “Actually, it’s not that often. That fabric is a devil to get clean.”

Cas wrinkled his nose up in mild disgust.

“But,” Dean continued, with a misty-eyed expression. “I lost my oral virginity in that car.”

“Giving or receiving?” Cas asked.

“Both,” Dean chuckled. “But not on the same occasion.”

Cas smiled, and turned onto the motorway.

“How far is this store?” Dean enquired.

“About twenty miles,” Cas told him. “Usually takes me about twenty five minutes.”

Dean was silently overjoyed at the prospect of sharing this ridiculous car with Cas for a while, and then doing a little casual fish shopping. He was still looking forward to all his solo sightseeing, but he decided he could easily fit all of that in and still hang out with hot Mr Castiel Novak.

As if he were following Dean’s train of thought, Cas suddenly said; “I thought you would be wanting to spend this week with Benny.”

“Oh, he and B are both working until the middle of next week,” Dean explained. “I got my London tourist plans to keep me occupied. Plus, I gotta finalise plans for Benny’s bachelor party.”
“Are they having separate parties?”

“Yep,” Dean confirmed. “But they're guests at each other's. Balthazar’s is being organised by his best man, Leo. Apparently, he’s a chef. It's probably going to be something dignified, somewhere upper class.”

“And Benny’s will be…?”

Dean grinned. “Good old-fashioned debauchery.”

Cas chuckled and shook his head.

*Damn, he looks really good today,* thought Dean, suddenly noticing.

Cas was wearing a loose-fitting white button-down shirt, with the top button undone, and a pair of blue jeans. His hair was mostly kind of pushed over to one side, and messy in a cute way. The skin on his face was smooth and had a fresh, healthy glow. He had a citrusy shower-gel scent about him, combined with a cologne that was a little spicy, and also had a hint of something which was almost like coconut but not quite. It was a really good smell, and Dean very much wanted to bury his nose in the dip of Cas' neck, and inhale.

“And what are these London tourist plans?”

Cas’ question snapped Dean out of his aromatic reverie.

“Okay,” Dean shifted round in his seat towards Cas, and began, excitedly; “so the things I’ve booked are; London Eye, London Dungeons, London Zoo, and I’ve got a theater gift certificate thing, but I haven’t chosen a show yet.”

Dean left a deliberate gap after that information, in the hope that Cas would suggest one and offer to accompany him. Cas, however, just nodded and raised his eyebrows.

“I also wanna do Buckingham Palace, Harrods, the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, Tate Modern, Big Ben and a walk round Hyde Park.”

“Well, that’s quite the itinerary,” Cas smiled.

“Well, that’s quite the itinerary,” Cas smiled.

“Yes,” grinned Dean. “Never been here before man, and I might never come back again; gonna do it all.”

Sam had insisted on helping Dean plan and book all this stuff, and Dean had let him, mostly cause he knew it was a good distraction from his treatment. But he was really grateful that they’d done it, and now that Sam was all better, he felt like he could truly relax and enjoy his trip.

“Well, I would like a picture or a video everywhere you go, please,” Cas requested. “A little daily check-in. It’ll be more enjoyable if you share your experiences with someone.”

Dean looked at Cas and smiled. “I guess it would,” he agreed. “I’m quite good at enjoying experiences on my own, though.”

Cas turned his head to glance in Dean’s direction. “Is that innuendo or are you being sincere?”

Dean laughed. “Both, I guess.”

There was a short lull in the conversation. Dean hoped he hadn’t just come across like a weirdo loner, and that Cas wasn’t regretting spending the day with him.
“It that because you were well-known?” Cas suddenly asked.

“What?”

“The reason why you’re happy to do stuff by yourself,” Cas elaborated. “Too much attention in your late adolescence?”

Dean smiled a wry smile. “Are you going to charge me for this therapy session, Mr Novak?”

Cas smiled. “Sorry,” he said. “Natural behavioural analyst.”

“That’s okay,” Dean appeased. “You’re probably right. I like my own company, I guess. Also value my own autonomy after all that time spent being told what to do.”

“So you didn’t like being a star?”

Dean turned his face up at the word. “I liked some of it. But nothing’s ever what it’s cracked up to be.”

“All that glitters is not gold?”

Dean suddenly felt a little bit morose. He wasn’t really one for too much self-analysis, and frankly didn’t particularly want to pull at any psychological threads, for fear of what he might uncover about himself. He didn’t want to come across as ungrateful for his past success, but actually the platitude Cas had used was spot on.

“Something like that,” he said.

The CD changed to the song ‘I Want it All’, and Dean immediately brightened.

“Oh fuck me, this song is the fucking best,” he declared, dialling up the volume.

Cas obviously agreed, and they both sang along loudly until the song was done, and somehow managed to pick different harmony lines with no prior agreement or discussion.

“Well, we’re clearly made for each other, Cas,” Dean teased, impressed that Cas’ singing was actually pretty good. “Makin’ sweet music already.”

Ellen used to say that all Hunter’s prospective singers needed to have the three Ts - Tuning, Tone, and Temperament. Bobby insisted that they also had to be Not Crazy and Not a Jackass. Cas certainly seemed to have the T list down, judging by that little rendition, and so far he was winning on the other two as well, although it was still early days. Sanity and Jackassness were always subject to change, and Cas’ results were still pending.

Cas laughed. “Hey why don’t you go and see We Will Rock You?” he offered. “If you love Queen, it’s the perfect way to spend your theater voucher.”

“That’s a good idea,” Dean nodded. “You seen it?”

“Of course I have,” Cas said, with a mock-offended expression.

Dean chuckled. “Right. King of the Musicals.”

“I’d love to see it again, though,” Cas hinted.

Dean smiled, trying not to give away how thrilled he was. “Well, if I don’t get a better offer, Cas,
you may accompany me to the theater.”
Cas huffed a little laugh. “Why, thank you, I appreciate that.”
“You buy the ice creams, though.”
“Deal.”

Austin, Texas

Jan 24th, 2000

Dean sat in the chair, nervously bouncing his knee.

His twenty-second birthday present to himself was to get a tattoo on his chest. It had seemed like a great idea when he booked it, but now it was actually happening, he was - proverbially speaking - shitting himself.

He’d been determined that the tattoo must be unique. He couldn’t stand the thought of having the same thing as everyone else. So, that meant no tribal patterns, no dragons, no dreamcatchers, no skulls. He’d decided on the idea of the words while listening to the radio. He toyed with the idea of asking for some angel wings as well, as a nod to his mom, who always used to tell him that angels were watching over him. Then Sam had told him that there was this Angelic language called Enochian. Dean had called bullshit, but having researched online he discovered that it was in fact a real thing. He then enlisted Sam to help him with an approximate translation of what he wanted, and that was what he had presented to the tattoo artist.

The guy had accepted it with no judgement, and here Dean was. Another dumbass who pays other people to cause them pain.

“You ready, buddy?” the tattoo artist asked.

Dean nodded, trying to look tough. “Sure, man, go for it.”

The last five years of Dean’s life had been a rollercoaster. Retiring from his career at the age of twenty two - only in showbiz. Still, for all the shitty bits, it had been fun while it lasted, and this tattoo was a commemoration in a way. A reminder.

The needle buzzed and pressed into Dean’s left pectoral. His face tightened with the pain, but he managed to keep quiet.

Apparently his artist was a perceptive son of a bitch, though.

“Don’t worry man, it won’t take too long,” the guy said, not even looking up.

Hatfield, Hertfordshire

evening of Monday, 17th June 2013

Charlie: Did you have a good day off? ;)

Cas: yes thank you
Charlie: He still with you?

Cas: no i dropped him at his place, he has a skype date with his brother

Charlie: Aw that’s too bad. So how deep is the obsessive crush on a scale of 1-10?

Cas stared at his phone.

Probably about twelve and a half, he thought.

He’d had a really great day with Dean. They’d laughed a lot, though he couldn’t recall now what it was they’d been laughing at. He just knew he’d had fun. Dean was fun. Dean was also gorgeous and smart and talented and he liked Queen.

I'm screwed.

For all his telling himself that the casual nature of the arrangement was ideal, Cas’ stomach had dropped at Dean’s off-hand comment in the car earlier that he may never be back in England again. Cas wasn’t quite sure why it had upset him; it wasn’t like it was a surprise that he wouldn’t see Dean again after this month, but for some reason it had hurt to hear it out loud.

Dean had been like a kid at the zoo at the aquatic centre. He’d been really excited looking at all the various colorful fish in the tanks, and seemed genuinely interested when Cas was telling him about which breeds can’t be put together, and which plants you need in order to support certain types of tropical fish. He’d been beside himself when looking at the Clownfish, and had yelled “NEMO!” so loudly that it had made the old lady next to him nearly jump out of her skin.

Dean had persuaded Cas to get some Angelfish - “cause, you know, you’re an angel” - and Cas had relented on the proviso that Dean had to name them. The store assistant had advised that Angelfish should be kept in groups of four, and had engaged Cas in a long discussion about tank size and appropriate fish communities, while Dean bounced off to look at the turtles.

Sometime in the mid-afternoon, they had left the store with a new pump, three new plants, a couple of underwater ornaments, including a miniature replica of London Bridge, and four Angelfish named John, Brian, Roger and Freddie.

Cas had invited Dean to dinner, but Dean had declined due to having a pre-arranged call scheduled with Sam. He’d looked genuinely sad at having to turn Cas down, but Cas had assured him that he understood how important Dean’s relationship was with his brother.

Over their lunch in the aquatic center cafe, Dean had been telling Cas all about Sam’s illness, and how it had affected him. The thought of losing his brother had obviously terrified Dean; it still showed in his eyes. Cas loved his siblings, but he didn’t have anywhere near the relationship with them that the Winchesters seemed to enjoy. The things Sam and Dean had been through together had clearly brought them very close, and made them strong.

Conversely, the experience of losing their parents had made Cas and Gabriel draw into themselves more; become more introverted. Their older sisters had literally moved countries to get away from all the memories. Mirabel moved to Canada, and Anna migrated all the way to France for some guy she met. Cas had never been that close with the girls anyway, and since his Father’s funeral he’d only seen each of them twice. Once at his graduation, and again at Gabriel’s wedding.

Cas only communicated with his brother via email these days, though he was hoping to fly out for Christmas one year. It would be nice to meet his nieces and nephew. Maybe he could do it this year.
Gabe and his family lived in Colorado, which wasn’t that far from Texas, so maybe Cas could go visit Dean at the same time…

The chime of his cell phone broke Cas out of his daydreaming.

**Charlie:** I’m taking that silence as confirmation that you love him btw. Have a good night kitten, see you at P and P tomorrow?

Cas chewed on the inside of his cheek. He did love Poetry and Prose night; maybe he could get Dean to come down. He closed Charlie’s message and opened a new one.

**Cas:** appreciate that you are talking with your brother so no need to reply right away, just wondered if you wanted to come to the rabbit & hounds again tomorrow night after your first tourist day :) 6:45?

Cas changed message threads again to compose a reply to Charlie.

**Cas:** sure, will be there armed with a few rhyming couplets. or maybe a dirty limerick.

He set his phone down and went into the kitchen to put the kettle on. He’d have a hot fruit tea and watch his new fish settle in.

Cas was regretting not kissing Dean when they'd said goodbye. Kissing in a car is always kind of awkward; everyone's at the wrong angle. But, still, he wished he'd tried. Kissing and being kissed by Dean was wonderful, and something to be attempted at all opportunities.

He heard his phone, and dashed back to it in a highly undignified way. He felt a little guilty for feeling disappointed that it was Charlie.

**Charlie:** Awesome! Bring Dean. Bet he knows some dirty limericks.

Cas smirked. Just seeing Dean’s name written down in front of him made his skin fizz and his heart beat a bit faster.

_This is ridiculous._

He shook his head and headed back to his kettle.

* * *

“Fish shopping?” Sam asked, with a smirk and a quizzical eyebrow.

“We had a lot of fun,” Dean smiled. “He dropped me at my door like the perfect gentleman and didn’t even try to grab my ass.”

Jenna’s face appeared next to her husband. “Well, that’s disappointing,” she declared. “Maybe you should’ve tried to grab his.”

“Wait,” Sam said, holding his hand up. “So that was your second date and you still haven’t done any more than kiss?”

Dean nodded.

“Wow,” Sam laughed. “Being in England is making you very well behaved, Dean!”
Dean frowned. “Are you implying that ordinarily I’m a slut?”

“Yes,” Sam and Jenna answered, in chorus.

Beside him on the couch, Dean’s phone beeped. He looked down and picked it up.

“Ooh, is that him?” Jenna teased, excitedly.

“Actually, it is,” Dean answered, pleased, reading the message.

“What did he say?” asked Jenna. “Is it dirty? Is he sexting you?”

Dean gave her a withering glare.

“No, he is not sexting me,” he defended. “He’s inviting me out again tomorrow night.”

Jenna clapped her hands. “Yay!”

Dean laughed at her. “Why are you so excited?”

“Because you are,” she answered, delighted energy coloring her voice.

Sam looked at her, with an expression that Dean recognised as a silent warning for her to shut up.

“You’re trying to hide it,” Jenna went on. “But you’re gone on this guy, Dean, and I fucking love it.”

There was silence.

“What?” she asked, defensive. Then she addressed Sam. “It’s nice to see him like this, you agreed with me!”

Sam sighed.

“You’ve been talking about me?” Dean asked, suddenly feeling the need to be guarded.

“See?” Sam said to his wife, jabbing his hand at the screen.

“See what?” Jenna asked, confused.

“You can’t point out when Dean’s into someone,” Sam explained, exasperated. “As soon as you point it out, he gets self-conscious and panicked about his feelings, and hides away like a little hermit.”

Dean drew his face back, baffled.

“What the fuck?” he challenged his brother. “I don’t do that.”

“Uh, yeah you do,” Sam argued. “You were really into Lisa, but then as soon as Jo told you how refreshing it was to see you content in a relationship, you freaked out and stopped answering Lisa’s calls.”

Dean frowned. *Fuck. That’s actually fucking true.*

Dean hated other people commenting on his friendships. He remembered bristling at Jo’s remarks, and how it had put him off being with Lisa. That had been a shame, because she’d been very cool. And really good in bed.
It was the pressure that Dean couldn’t stand. As soon as other people know you’re seeing someone, it’s all questions. How’s it going? Is it serious? Is she coming for dinner? Have you told her you loved her yet? Does she want kids?

“Whatever,” Dean said to the faces in his laptop. “Why are you even worried about me being scared off, anyway, Sammy? You’re the one usually warning me not to get attached, and not to let people get attached to me.”

“I know,” Sam agreed. “And you shouldn’t. I just want you to enjoy your trip, and have fun with your little holiday fling.”

“Right,” Jenna agreed, with just a sprinkling of sarcasm. “Fling.”

Dean rolled him eyes at both of them.

“Okay, I’m going to go eat now,” he told them. “Talk to you in a couple days.”

“Love you!” Jenna called, waving a vocal white flag.

“You too,” Dean smiled at her, despite his annoyance at being called out. “And you, bitch.”

“Yeah, you too, jerk. Go get flung.”

Dean snorted, and closed his laptop.

He re-read Cas’ message, grinned to himself, then responded.

Dean: Sure, man! I’m doing the London Eye and Buck Palace tomorrow so I’ll meet you there.

Cas: have fun! don’t forget to check in ;)

Dean: Don’t worry, you’ll get your regular reports Mr Novak

Dean grinned to himself as he prepared his dinner. He was going to enjoy sending Cas goofy pictures and messages all day.

He’d have to make sure he looked extra hot.

_____________________

Langkawi, Malaysia
March 23rd, 2010

Cas sat in the chair, nervously bouncing his knee.

He still wasn’t sure what had compelled him to get a tattoo. There was just something about the sign above the door that had pulled him in. In his old life, he’d have demanded to see everyone’s licenses and certificates from the department of health, but he hadn’t even asked his artist’s name.

Through broken English and charades, Cas had successfully communicated to the young man that he would like some abstract eagle wings at the bottom of his ribcage.

Eagles were native to this beautiful county, and Cas enjoyed all that wings symbolised - being free, being high above, being adventurous. As he had discovered after consulting his dictionary, the Malay word for ‘eagle’ was ‘helang’. At first glance, he’d thought it said ‘healing’, so the whole
thing seemed very appropriate.

It was difficult to decide which hurt more; the needle, or his seemingly perpetual sunburn.

Cas realised, as he sat there, that he needed this permanent reminder that there is real beauty and true freedom to be had in this life. His wings would sit on his skin as a lifelong prompt for him to approach everything with hope.

This amazing trip that was now coming to an end was not about running away, it was about hitting the ‘re-set’ button on his life. Everything was going to be alright.
Dean was having a great day. He’d wholly embraced this tourist thing, and was making no attempts to hide the Texan-in-London vibe that he had going on. He had an unfolded street map in his hand at all times, a baseball cap with the Union Flag on it, and he was taking pictures constantly.

He’d got talking with a really sweet couple in the line to get on the London Eye, and he’d persuaded them to be in his first selfie to Cas.

**Dean: This is Amy and James and they have been married for five years today. They like my accent. Look how high up we are!**

**Cas: did you seriously crash some poor couple’s anniversary date? (ps you look very nice)**

**Dean: Yes. I did. (Excuse me - nice?? I did not wear my new favorite cap and freshly pressed shirt to be told that I look ‘nice’... No more pictures for you!!)**

**Cas: i’m sorry i’m sorry you look stunning and pulchritudinous :) :)**

**Dean: Well I don’t know what that last one means but damn right I do.**

After wishing James and Amy the very best, Dean had located the relevant bus stop, and taken a very satisfyingly red bus to Buckingham Palace. He wasn’t going to go inside it, having been unable to book a tour, but the exterior was a pretty impressive sight on its own. He’d sent Cas a picture of himself by the gates.

**Dean: Her Majesty ain’t in right now so I’ll come back later for a cup of tea and a chat about domestic policy.**

**Cas: have you eaten lunch?**

**Dean: Yes Mom I had a Burger King**

**Cas: ah, fine english cuisine, good choice.**

Following a slightly squashed journey on the underground, Dean made his way to Bela and Crowley’s pub around five. Cas had told him six forty five, but his feet were starting to ache and he could really do with a cold beer. Or the nearest English approximation.

Congratulating himself on finding the joint again all on his own, Dean pushed the door open. He nearly stepped on a small child, who was sitting on the floor about two feet from the entrance, brushing the hair of a green mermaid doll.

The little dark-haired girl looked up at him, appraisingly, as he quickly regained his balance. Then she smiled.

“Hello,” Dean said, gently, crouching down. “I think I’ve seen your face before.”

The girl tilted her head. “Where?” she enquired, in a high, clear, confident voice.
“Is your name Audrey?” Dean asked.

“Yes!” she said, excitedly. “How did you know that?”

“I saw your picture on your Daddy’s side,” Dean explained.

“Do you like my mermaid?” Audrey demanded, changing the subject with no warning, in the way that only kids can.

“Oh, hey!” Charlie called, as she appeared before them. “Hi, Dean!”

Dean looked up and grinned at her. Charlie crouched down in front of her daughter. “Probably not the best place to sit, piglet,” she told her. “You could trip someone over.”

“I did know that, yeah.”

“Your eyes are green,” Audrey told him. “But also a little bit gray.”

“Mommy?” Audrey chirped, pulling at the bottom of Charlie’s shirt.

“What’s up, baby?” Charlie asked, picking Audrey up and settling her against her hip.

“Can I have a beer?”

Charlie laughed. “Um, no… but I’ll get you an orange juice, how’s that?”

“Okay,” Audrey agreed.

“Why don’t you sit with Dean until Lindsey comes, okay?”

“Okay!”

Charlie put her daughter down on the floor again, and she ran over to sit at one of the tables.

“Lindsey?” Dean asked.

“One of my housemates,” Charlie explained. “She's picking Audrey up at six. I did the school run this morning so she’s doing bedtime. We’re kind of on a rota! We make it work.”

Dean nodded. He had a lot of respect for people who juggle the whole parenting and having a job
thing, while still retaining their sanity and personality. It sure seemed like hard work. The older Dean got, the more he appreciated it, and the more he wished he could thank his own Mom. He could thank Ellen, at least. She’d had to raise three kids, two of which weren’t even hers.

“You staying for some poetry?” Charlie asked.

“Uh, yeah,” Dean answered, rubbing the back of his neck. “Cas said to meet him in about an hour. Thought I’d get here early and chill for a while.”

Charlie nodded, slowly, and a small smile crept onto her face.

“What?” Dean asked.

“Nothing,” Charlie smirked, tucking her hair behind her ears. “He’s cute, right?”

Dean rolled his eyes. “Yes, he is.”

“He’ll be coming straight from work, so he’ll be in his suit,” Charlie added, clearly delighted. “You seen him in a suit yet? That boy sure knows how to work a three-piece.”

Dean paused. He actually had seen Cas in a suit, that first day on the train. But it had been all covered up by Cas' coat, and Dean hadn’t got the full effect. He’d been too focused on Cas' face.

He cleared his throat. “I’m sure it’s a wonderful sight,” he told Charlie, mock-haughtily. “But his outfit is of no interest to me.”

“Just what’s underneath it?”

Dean grinned. “Precisely.”

***

Cas came through the door at six thirty nine. He’d had a meeting with a new student and their parents after school, then he’d wrapped up the paperwork as fast as he could and dashed to the tube station.

The warm weather had made him decide to leave his trenchcoat at home today, so his well-tailored suit was clearly visible in all its navy blue glory. He was hoping he didn’t look too dishevelled from his journey.

Almost immediately after entering the pub, Cas caught sight of Dean, and he felt the post-workday tension in his face melt away into a relieved smile. Dean caught his eye and smiled back, and Cas’ stomach filled with butterflies.

He went over to the table, and put his bags down on one of the empty chairs.

“Hello, Dean,” he said, increasingly enjoying the feel of that name in his mouth.

He shrugged off his jacket, revealing a white shirt with dark blue stripes underneath the navy vest.

“Hey, Cas,” Dean returned, as Cas loosened his tie. “Good day?”

“Yes, thank you,” Cas said, deciding instantly that he could easily get used to being asked that question by this man. “Not as entertaining as yours, though.”

Dean’s regular little updates and messages had been the highlights of Cas’ day. He'd checked his
phone at alarmingly regular intervals. It had frankly been something of an effort to keep himself from getting completely distracted from his work.

Charlie came over to them, carrying a large glass of water with a big slice of lemon in it. She put it down in front of Cas, who looked up at her, quizzically.

“Lubrication,” she said, slight breathiness in her voice, like she'd just been running.

“Well, um, gee, thanks Charlie,” Cas began, “but I already have plenty.”

Dean coughed, and Cas looked at him.

“Good to know,” Dean muttered into his drink, and Cas grinned.

“For your throat,” Charlie clarified.

“Well…” Dean started.

“Don’t!” Charlie scolded, pointing a finger at him.

Cas chuckled, thrilled at the idea that Dean was thinking about such things. “Why do I need my throat lubricated right now, Charlie?” he asked, knowing full well what the reason was.

“So you can - speak more clearly when you participate tonight?” Charlie said, an expression on her face that made her look just like Audrey does when she wants a cookie.

Cas sighed. “Not enough sign-ups this week?”

“No, I have enough,” Charlie said, hurriedly. “Just could do with a veteran to kick us off! Get everyone going, you know?”

Cas bit his lip. He did know quite a few short poems off by heart. He could hardly refuse - he would always help Charlie when she needed it, and he wanted to impress Dean. If Dean could sing and play in front of the open mic audience; Cas could certainly talk in front of the modest Tuesday crowd.

“Okay, yes, I can do something,” he assured Charlie. “I don’t having anything too long prepared, though.”

“That’s okay,” Charlie assured him. “Short and sweet is good.”

With that, she zoomed off again.

Cas shook his head, affectionately, as he watched her. Lord knows he could never refuse that girl.

“Your turn to perform tonight, then, huh?” Dean smiled.

“Evidently,” Cas said, taking a sip of the water and mentally running through all his recital options.

“I gotta confess,” Dean added. “I’m kind of ignorant about poetry. I mean, I’m kind of ignorant about a lot of things, but…”

“Dean, don’t put yourself down like that,” Cas frowned.

“What?” Dean smiled. “It’s true, Cas. School bored the shit out of me. I was good at Math and Science, and I sucked at everything else. Too busy makin’ trouble, and goofing around.”
“If your school was boring, then that’s your teachers’ fault, not yours,” Cas insisted. “If you’d had an inspiring English teacher, I’m sure you’d enjoy poetry.”

“Maybe,” Dean shrugged. “It’s the same with Classical music. Like, when I hear some good shit, I can appreciate it, but I don’t know anything about it.”

“You don’t need to understand art to enjoy it,” Cas suggested. “I like watching people dance, but I couldn’t comment on their technique or their choreography.”

Dean quirked up one side of his mouth and nodded, but he was still looking down at the table.

Cas suspected that Dean’s self-deprecation was pretty deep-rooted. Maybe he felt like he missed out on a decent education because of his career. Cas hated the idea that Dean thought of himself as stupid.

“Poetry is just like music,” Cas went on. “You put together the bits that sound good, then layer it with a few emotions and a decent rhythm.”

Dean smiled. “Well, when you put it like that,” he said. “I guess I’m on board.”

He took a drink.

“So will tonight be all poems?”

“Sometimes people perform monologues,” Cas explained. “Last week this old guy did the whole of Atticus Finch’s closing speech from To Kill a Mockingbird.”

“Cheerful,” Dean said, sarcastic.

“Oh, so you did pay attention in some English classes, then?” Cas teased.

Dean laughed. “Nope - saw the movie!”

Cas suddenly gasped. “We never did favorite movies.”

“What?”

“On our dates,” Cas elaborated. “We've covered T.V. shows and music but we didn’t do movies yet.”

“Back to the Future one, Indiana Jones three, Star Wars six and Mallrats.”

Cas raised an eyebrow.

“One of these things is not like the others.”

“Shut up!” Dean laughed. “Mallrats is hilarious. Young Shannen Doherty, man, come on.”

Cas chuckled.

“So what highbrow films are on your list then?” pressed Dean.

Cas pursed his lips in contemplation. “Well, I like all the others that you said. I also have a real soft spot for mafia movies. But truthfully, my favorite ever movie is Remains of the Day.”

“I don’t know that one,” Dean frowned.
“It’s beautiful.”

“I assumed you’d say, like, The Wizard of Oz or Grease. You’re ruining your carefully-crafted stereotypical image,” Dean teased.

“Oh, shit, okay, um - I only liked Goodfellas cause young Ray Liotta’s ass looks great in suit pants?”

“That’s better.”

Dean drank some more of his beer, and Cas looked over at Charlie, who was busy fiddling with mic levels. It dawned on him that he had revealed more about himself to Dean in five days than he had in the first four months of his friendship with her.

He wondered what it was about Dean that made him feel so comfortable. He was fucking beautiful, but there was more to it than that. Cas hadn't felt such magnetism with anyone since his college boyfriend, who still held the title of Love of Cas’s Life. The Billy to his Ally. He used to hold on to the vague hope that one day they'd end up back together, but a brief facebook stalk before he moved countries had revealed a husband and two kids, so there ended that fantasy. Cas would never try to break up a family.

Charlie hopped down from the stage and came over to him. “Ready, sweetie?”

“Sure,” he smiled, and took a gulp of water.

“Good luck,” Dean winked.

“Thank you,” Cas smiled, as he headed for the stage.

Dean watched Cas step up and adjust the mic to his height. He’d never thought of himself as the kind of person to attend a poetry night. He’d switched off somewhere around the eighth grade when Shakespeare was thrown into the curriculum. From that point on, poetry to Dean had equalled a giant snoozefest. But Cas was into it, and Cas was awesome, so it had that on its side. Surely it couldn’t all be intelligible iambic. Rappers are basically poets, after all.

Cas introduced himself to the crowd, and Dean started paying attention. Cas had his hands in his pockets, and he was focusing somewhere above his own eyeline.

Damn, he’s so sexy. Who knew vests were so hot?

“Hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without the words, and never stops - at all.”

Dean’s glass had frozen on the way up to his mouth. Something about Cas’ voice hypnotised him. He was speaking slow and soft, and the tone of his voice was so warm and immersing. He had perfect enunciation, like a classical actor. Ignorant to poetry Dean may have been, but he knew good art when he experienced it. This was a good fucking poem. And Cas was reciting it by heart. It must be special to him.

“And sweetest in the Gale is heard, and sore must be the storm that could abash the little Bird that kept so many warm. I’ve heard it in the chilliest land and on the strangest Sea, yet - never - in Extremity, it asked a crumb - of me.”

There was a smattering of light applause and some appreciative hums. Cas gave a little nod and strolled off the stage, as a young girl with a nose ring and a velvet beret walked into the vacated spotlight.
Cas approached Dean’s table with a slightly shy smile.

“Dude,” Dean exclaimed, wide-eyed. “That - that was…”

Cas raised a curious eyebrow.

Dean scratched his jaw. “I could not tell you what the fuck you just said, but it was beautiful, man.”

Cas laughed as he sat down. “Thank you, Dean.”

“You have one hell of a voice,” Dean murmured, leaning in close. “It - does things to me.”

Cas took a shaky breath. “Oh yeah?” he asked, intentionally or unintentionally pitching his voice a few tones lower than normal. “What kind of things?”

“Good things.”

Cas bit his lip.

“Hello children!”

The two of them sprang apart as Ash appeared.

“What I miss?”

“Emily Dickinson,” replied Cas.

“Aw that’s too bad,” Ash said. “Hey, wanna do shots?”

Cas chuckled. “Sure, Ash.”

Dean’s eyes widened. “Fancy orators from fancy British Universities do shots now?”

Cas sighed. “Poorly constructed sentence - you used the word ‘fancy’ twice. Cee minus; see me after class.”

“Oh, a smartass, huh?” Dean snorted. “Tell you what, Shakespeare, why don’t you write me a sonnet while I help Ash with the drinks.”

“You think you've earned a whole sonnet?”

Dean paused. “Nah, you're right. Save that for our anniversary. I'll settle for a haiku.”

Cas laughed, as Dean sauntered off to the bar, beer in hand.

“So - I met Audrey,” Dean told Ash, as they both leaned against the bar. “Damn, that’s a sweet kid.”

“Yeah,” Ash smiled, proud. “Smart as hell, too.”

“She ever stay with you at the studio or is she at Charlie’s all the time?”

Dean found himself intrigued by how this unusual little family unit worked.

“She sleeps at mine Thursdays and Saturdays,” Ash told him. “We all hang out together in the daytime at the weekends. Tamara too, sometimes.”

Dean nodded. “Cool.”
“Sometimes even Meg comes with us on little trips,” Ash added. “Audrey loves Meg. They’re thick as thieves.”

“Really?” Dean was surprised. “Meg doesn’t seem the type to engage well with little kids.”

“Man, don’t fall for the icy bitch nonsense,” Ash insisted. “She and Audrey adore each other.”

“So where is Meg tonight?” Dean enquired.

“Lord knows,” Ash replied. “One can never tell with that chick. She could be head to toe in leather in a masochist dungeon, or tea-dancin’ with the elderly. Depends which way the wind’s blowin’.”

Ash waved the barman over as Dean's phone vibrated in his hand. He turned it over and unlocked it, then read the incoming message while he polished off his pint.

Cas: Smokin hot cowboy -

I wanna fuck you so bad.
Let me take you home.

Dean did an honest to god spit-take, and had to wipe the screen of his phone down with his sleeve.

Son of a bitch actually wrote me a dirty haiku.

“Whatcha chokin’ on, Deano?”

“Uh, nothin’,” Dean coughed, locking his phone.

Dean looked over at the table, and saw Cas looking like butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth; pure innocence as he sat listening to the poetry, and periodically chatting with Tamara, who was wiping down the table next to him, and Charlie, who had slid into the seat beside him.

“I think, actually, I might - take off,” Dean told Ash, eyes still on Cas.

Ash followed Dean’s gaze to the table and smirked, knowingly. “Got something better to do, huh?”

Dean smiled at him and winked.

“I ain’t even mad,” Ash said, with a shrug. “The code states that you are permitted to leave a social function and or companion, if there’s a chance you can get laid.”

“What code?”

“If -” Ash interrupted, with an emphatic finger. “- the person you’re gonna lay is a six or above.”

He stared hard at Cas.

“That man is a solid nine,” he confirmed, addressing Dean but still studying Cas. “I’m strictly chicks only, so I’ll never have the pleasure, but bro...”

Ash grabbed Dean’s shoulder and gave it a sincere squeeze. When he spoke again, it was in the impassioned tones of a man about to send his brother off to war.

“You hit that. You hit it like you mean it, and don’t come back til everyone’s satisfied.”
Dean pursed his lips and nodded. “Thanks, Ash.”

He clapped his strange but endearing new friend on the back and headed back to the table.

“Ladies,” he announced, with effortless charisma.

Charlie and Tamara looked up at him.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to deprive you of the charming company you’re currently keeping.”

Charlie frowned, confused.

“You see,” Dean continued. “Cas is taking me home now.”

Tamara raised an amused eyebrow. “He is?” she asked, turning to Cas, who was looking a little bit too pleased with himself.

“Yes ma’am,” Dean said, holding a hand out to the man in question. “He’s gonna keep me up real late, too, so we’ve gotta get going.”
The journey back to Hatfield was the longest forty-five minutes of Dean’s life.

He and Cas spent the entire time looking at each other with fire in their eyes, and they were both so excited that the merest brush of a hand against a knee as they sat down on the train seats, or a touch of fingertips on the ticket machine, sent a rush of blood to their respective groins.

Finally, finally, they were through Cas’ front door, and on each other the second it closed.

Cas pushed Dean up against the hallway wall, and eased his thin jacket off his shoulders as he kissed him. Dean grabbed Cas’ head as soon as his arms were free, and kneaded his fingers through that thick, soft hair.

Dean returned Cas’ kiss with more passion than he was comfortable acknowledging, and didn’t try to control the needy moans which were escaping his throat. Cas wriggled out of his suit jacket and pulled Dean into the living room. They half sat, half fell onto the soft blue couch, lips having barely disconnected.

They sat mirroring each other, one leg bent up underneath them on the couch, the other on the floor, hands everywhere.

Dean unbuttoned that figure-highlighting vest, and discarded it on the floor once Cas’s arms were free of it. Cas then slid his fingers under Dean’s shirt, and ran them along the waistband of his pants.

Dean released a gasp, and decided that he should probably give Cas a heads up about a certain byproduct of his sexual enjoyment.

“Cas, there’s something I kinda need to - warn you about.”

Cas pulled up.

“What?” he asked, frowning, presumably picturing a disfiguring scar or a giant mole.

Dean started to stutter as he hastily explained; “Um, well, when I get - uh, really… into it…”

He breathed out, hard, focused himself, looked right at Cas and declared; “I’m really fucking loud, man.”

Cas raised his eyebrows. “Oh, yeah?” he grinned.

“Yeah,” Dean nodded, embarrassed. “I’m a screamer.”

Cas pursed his lips, which were still tugged up into a smile at the edges.

Dean carried on; “Like, to the point where it puts some people off.”

Cas stared at Dean, considering.

Dean hurried to defend himself. “It’s not all the time, and it never happens with girls. I guess it’s just when I have, um…”

“A dick in your ass?” Cas smirked.
Dean stopped short, shocked at Cas’ bluntness. He laughed. “Uh, yeah!”

Cas nodded, slowly. His words when he spoke came slow too, and he trailed his fingers over Dean's leg.

“So, do you - scream words or do you just… scream?”

Cas’ voice was a little uneven and his eyes were sparkling. Dean chanced at interpreting that as renewed arousal, and his confidence began a comeback.

“Sometimes it's words,” he confirmed, licking his lips. “I kinda curse a lot… Lot of fucks, quite a lot of holy shits.”

“Mm-hmm,” Cas nodded again, seriously, as if pondering a hypothesis.

Then he moved closer to Dean, and resumed nosing and kissing at his neck. One of his hands supported his weight on the couch, and the other stroked up the inside of Dean's thigh. “What else?”

Dean's breath caught in the back of his throat as Cas starting kissing him again. Far from being put off by Dean's admission, Cas was getting turned on by the idea of him screaming, and Dean was going to use that information to his advantage. Operation dirty talk was a go.

“I guess I just - can't help but make noise when I'm getting fucked really good…”

Cas gasped into Dean's skin and kissed just under the side of his jaw.

“When I'm getting it hard,” Dean said, voice low and breathy. “Hard and - deep...”

Cas moaned and started basically making out with Dean's neck.

“...that's when the words stop,” Dean continued, Cas’ mouth sending a shiver up his spine. “And I just - fucking - scream.”

Cas emitted another small groan.

Dean got bold and trailed the back of his hand over the front of Cas’ pants. He was thrilled to register how enthusiastically Cas’ cock had responded to all this.

Cas shuddered a little at the touch, and Dean drew his hand away, round the small of Cas’ back, and up his spine to the back of his neck.

“Do you…” Cas murmured, lips still on Dean. “...ever scream the name of the person fucking you?”

“It's been known,” answered Dean in a gravelly voice, running his fingers through Cas’ hair and pulling at it gently.

Cas moved to straddle Dean's lap, gently shifting Dean’s body round so both of his feet were on the floor. Dean put his hands on Cas' hips and looked up at him, mouth open, chest heaving.

“So are you saying,” Cas asked, quietly, hands on Dean's waist, and unabashed lust all over his face. “that there's a possibility of me hearing you scream my name in the not too distant future?”

“Oh, there's a distinct possibility.”

Dean smiled a naughty smile with accompanying naughty eyebrows.
“Assuming you have the necessary skills,” he challenged.

Cas had a predatory look come over him, and he kissed Dean again, passionate and dominant. Dean hummed his enjoyment, and slid his hands round to grab Cas’ ass.

They ground against each other like that for a while, the kissing getting deeper and needier, Cas’ hands now up underneath Dean's shirt on his chest.

Dean broke away to whisper; “You wanna lie down with me?”

Cas nodded, dismounted and held out a hand to pull Dean up off the couch. Once standing, Dean put his hands on Cas’ face and kissed him again, nearly knocking him off balance.

“C’mon,” Cas breathed, and led Dean out of the living room.

They made it halfway up the stairs before Dean’s lips decided they couldn't take the separation any longer. He spun Cas around, pressed him against the wall and kissed him furiously, hands in his hair and thigh between his legs.

Cas gasped as Dean's mouth travelled down to his neck.

“Oh, Dean…”

“I want you, Cas,” Dean whispered, heat now totally taken over. “I want you so much.”

Dean ran his hands up inside Cas’ shirt, and Cas trembled at the touch.

“Come on, then,” he breathed, grasping Dean’s wrists. “Just a few more stairs and then you can have me however you want.”

Dean groaned; “Oh god, Cas…”

Cas gave him a cheeky smirk and pulled him up the remaining stairs and into his bedroom. They each tore off their own shirts, and Cas seemed momentarily distracted by the tattoo on Dean’s chest. Evidently deciding that he’d ask about it later, Cas pushed Dean up against the dresser and kissed him while he undid his belt.

“How do you want me, Dean?” he demanded, mouth barely leaving Dean’s. “Talk to me.”

A glottal exhale left Dean’s throat as Cas’ fingers slid down his flies. He gripped Cas’ shoulders.

“I - I want you inside me,” he murmured into Cas’ ear.

Cas moaned, sounding pained with the pleasure, as he pushed Dean’s jeans down and then did the same to his own pants.

Dean took advantage of Cas’ state of undress and started to grope his cock through his underwear.

“I want this - inside me,” he said, looking Cas straight in his dilated eyes. “Want you to screw me, Cas… Give it to me, hard.”

Cas pressed his whole body against Dean's, and kissed him with a sizzling intensity that made Dean’s head spin.

Hauling his conscious back to center, Dean turned them around so that Cas was the one against the dresser, and began to make his way down Cas’ body with his mouth.
Cas gasped and moaned as Dean traversed every inch of his torso, nibbling lightly at his nipples, and licking the sensitive skin over his rib cage.

The feel of Cas’ skin was so good on Dean’s tongue; Cas was strong and athletic, and his stomach was firmer than it had any right to be on a man pushing forty.

Dean was intrigued and enthralled to find an awesome tattoo at the bottom of Cas’ ribs - it looked like a pair of eagle wings, and it was really fucking sexy.

Cas’ hip bones felt like they could cut glass, and Dean sucked a hickey onto one of them just to be a little shit.

Dean slid Cas’ boxers down his legs and tossed them to one side, once Cas had stepped out of them. Then he kneeled up and tenderly licked at Cas’ balls.

“Oh my god,” Cas gripped the edge of the dresser and let his head fall back.

Dean held onto the outside of Cas’ thighs, and drew his tongue up to the base of Cas’ cock. He kissed and sucked his way up the shaft, then circled his tongue over the head, and pushed just the tiniest bit inside the small opening at the tip.

“Aaaahhh, fuck!” Cas bucked his hips and Dean took his length into his mouth. Cas put one hand in Dean’s hair, and Dean went to town.

It had been quite a while since he last gave anyone a blow job, but Dean was pleased to find it’s much like riding a bike, and judging from the noises above him, he hadn't lost the art.

He found himself imagining making Cas come in his mouth, but as appealing as that was, it wasn't really what Dean wanted tonight.

He stood up, massaging Cas’ heavy dick with one hand, so as not to leave him too bereft, and worked off his own underwear with the other. He kicked it away, then pulled Cas down on top of him onto the bed, desperately searching out his mouth again.

The frantic kissing gradually decelerated into something deep and slow, but no less passionate, and Cas pulled up to run his fingers through Dean's hair, and look into his eyes.

“Dean, do you - do you like being licked open?”

Dean's eyes widened and he felt like a firework had gone off in his brain. “You don't mind doin’ that?”

“Are you kidding?” Cas chuckled. “Anything that means I get to have my tongue either on or in you, works for me.”

“Fuck…” Dean's whole body started to twitch underneath Cas. “Yeah, yes - please…”

Cas gave a small smile and kissed Dean sweetly; too sweetly.

“Just…” Dean interrupted. “Let me go wash real quick, okay?”

As much as he was burning with desire, Dean just couldn’t subject Cas to his walking-around-in-jeans-all-day-then-sweated-on-the-train ass.

Never too horny for hygiene.
Cas smiled down at him again.

“Well, I kind of don’t wanna let you go, but…” he kissed Dean’s neck and collarbone in between his words. “…bathroom - is - the door - directly opposite - this one.”

Dean whimpered at Cas’ kisses, which were sending tingles through his whole body.

“Okay,” he whispered. “I’ll be right back.”

Dean slid out from underneath Cas, who rolled over on his back and watched Dean cross the room. Cas laid one of his arms up above his head on the pillow, and lazily stroked himself with his other hand.

Dean felt physically pained to leave that sight, and it must've shown in his face, because Cas chuckled at him.

“It’ll still be here when you get back,” he smirked.

Dean grinned and hurried out the room and across the hall.

He pulled the light on and had a quick scan of Cas’ bathroom. It was all white and bright and clean, with purple towels folded on the tank, and one hanging on the rail. There was a corresponding purple washcloth on the side of the sink, so Dean grabbed it, and some soap, and got down to business.

There’s nothing inherently sexy about cleaning your ass, but knowing the purpose behind it was making Dean really hot, and jittery. The thought of Cas waiting for him, and what he planned to do. Dean couldn’t remember being this turned on in a long time. The way he wanted Cas was insane. Just having to be in a different room from the guy for a few minutes was driving Dean crazy.

Fuck, that’ll do… he decided, and tossed the washcloth in the sink.

He dried himself off and practically ran back to Cas’ bedroom.

Cas was still in the same position he’d been in when Dean left him, but at Dean’s return, he propped himself up on his elbows. Dean paused at the end of the bed, and Cas smiled at him.

“Ready?”

Dean nodded, and crawled up to lie next to Cas. They kissed some more, stroking each other and moaning softly as the heat rebuilt.

“Roll over,” Cas whispered.

Dean obeyed, and spread himself comfortably out on the mattress, face down, as Cas kissed his way down his back and settled between his thighs.

The first flick of Cas’ tongue sent Dean halfway to the stars, and he utterly surrendered to the sensation. Very few people in Dean’s life had been willing to engage in a good long rimming session, and actually Dean hadn’t really trusted any of them to relax enough to truly enjoy it even when they had.

But, bizarrely, he found himself totally at ease with this man he’d only known for a few days, and having Cas’ face in the most intimate part of his body felt one-hundred percent absolutely fine.

A small cry escaped Dean’s lips as Cas pushed his cheeks a bit further apart and penetrated him with
the tip of his tongue.

Dean couldn't help himself humping his hips a little into the bed, craving friction for his unattended erection.

“Holy shit, Cas!”

Cas got into a steady rhythm of licking, and Dean lost all coherent brain function. After a few minutes, Cas replaced his tongue with his fingertip, and sucked gently at the skin on Dean’s perineum and balls.

Dean heard the click of a cap, and wondered where the hell Cas had got lube from back there. He didn't dwell on it for long, because the feel of the cold gel being drizzled over his ass made the anticipation and adrenaline inside him surge. When Cas reinserted his fingers, Dean had to grip the pillow to keep himself from losing it.

“Jesus, Cas… Oh my god, fuck me…”

Cas fucked his fingers in and out of Dean, pausing to circle and scissor them every now and then, stretching Dean out. Having seen and sucked Cas’ dick, Dean knew the dude was packing, and, despite his impatience, he was grateful for the prep.

Cas withdrew his fingers, and Dean watched over his shoulder as Cas rolled a condom on and coated himself with lube. Cas looked up, caught Dean’s eye and shot him a wink. Dean smiled, and turned his head back to the pillow. He felt Cas run his hands up his thighs, and push his thick cock between his cheeks. Dean spread his legs wider and pushed up on his knees a little. As Cas breached him, he let out a muted scream of pleasure, and Cas lay over him, chest to back.

Cas held on to Dean’s wrists above his head, effectively pinning him down onto the bed, and kissed his neck and shoulders. He stayed still for a while to let Dean adjust to the intrusion, then a small circle and push of Dean’s hips indicated that he was ready for Cas to start moving.

Dean was making noise with each one of Cas’ thrusts; whimpers and sobs and moans, and every now and then something more primal would escape, but Dean seemed to cut those sounds off before they got going.

Cas couldn't have that. He worked his hips deeper, fucking Dean a little harder.

“Scream for me, Dean,” Cas whispered. “Come on, baby… Let me hear it…”

“Oh, CaaaaAAAHHH!!”

Dean finally let loose and practically rattled the light fittings.

“Oh yes, Dean!” Cas encouraged, thrusting faster. “Yes!”

Now the floodgates had opened, there was no stopping Dean.

“Oh, OH, Cas, CAS! Aaaaaaaahhh…. Oh my god, ohmygod, Cas …. Aaaaaaaahhhhh!!!!!”

Cas had never in his whole life felt anything so thrilling as Dean trembling and screaming underneath him. He felt like there was lightning running through his veins, little starbursts at every nerve ending.

With some effort, he stopped his movements and released Dean’s wrists.

“Turn over,” he gasped. “I need to see you… god Dean, I need to see your face.”
He pulled out of Dean just long enough to let him roll onto his back, then he pushed Dean’s thighs up with his arms, and directed his throbbing cock back inside Dean’s body.

Dean held Cas round the back of his neck and cried out as he was re-filled.

“Ki-kiss me,” he breathed, voice hoarse.

Cas obliged immediately, and revelled in the amazing sensation of being so completely inside Dean, at both ends.

As Cas’ pace increased, Dean broke the kiss to loudly vocalize his pleasure again.

It was such an incredible sound; so free and so raw and so real. Cas was overwhelmed.

Cas looked down at the body beneath him - Dean really was fucking gorgeous. His neck and collarbone looked as though they’d been sculpted by a renaissance artist, and his chest and stomach were just the right side of beefy.

Dean was clearly a victim of the hit-my-mid-thirties-and-my-metabolism-gave-up syndrome, but he was still pretty muscly and defined. The light brown hair that covered his torso, and thickened at his crotch, was soft and sexy. Dean's thighs were thick and firm, and Cas was already looking forward to the next time he'd get to run his tongue up them.

But the best thing about Dean, without a doubt, was that face. The big eyes, complete with long lashes, full pouty lips, cute freckles, perfect nose, cheekbones you could cut your finger on… God damn, just looking at that face as it radiated ecstasy made Cas's orgasm start charging valiantly towards him over the horizon.

“I'm close,” he gasped, feeling sweat trickling down his temples.

“Oh f-fuck, yeah!” Dean cried. “Come - come inside me, Cas, FUCK!”

Cas let the caveman side of himself completely take the reins, and he just drilled Dean mercilessly until he could feel his climax teetering on the brink. Dean had now forsaken language, and was letting the sounds just fall from him.

“Aaaaahh! Uuhhhh… Oh, OH! Aaaaaahhhhh!”

Usually, Cas’ orgasm-face involved an open mouth and tightly closed eyes, but right now he found he couldn't tear his face away from Dean’s. He just couldn't shut his eyes, and the intensity was unreal.

“I'm - coming,” he stuttered. “Oh Dean, I'm coming!”

With their eyes locked, Cas came deep inside Dean with a long, juddering exhale.

Dean pulled Cas towards him and kissed him tenderly through the aftershocks. Cas’ eyelids finally waved the white flag, and he dropped his forehead onto Dean’s collarbone. A few composing breaths later, Cas slipped out of Dean and slid down his body.

He took Dean’s solid dick into his mouth, and rolled Dean's hips so that both of them were lying on their sides, Cas’ legs hanging over the end of the bed.

Cas then put a hand on Dean’s ass and gave it a little pull towards him. Dean got the idea, placed his hand on Cas’ head, and fucked his mouth for the fourteen seconds it took to make him come.
“Caaas!!” Dean gasped, cock pulsing as he emptied down Cas’s throat.

The angle they were at meant that some of it dribbled out the side of Cas’s mouth, but he got most of it.

Cas rolled off the bottom of the bed and grabbed a tissue from his dresser. He peeled the condom off, wrapped it in the tissue and threw it in the trash can by his door. Then he crawled back up the bed to lie beside Dean. They looked at each other, smiling and sweaty.

“Wow,” Cas grinned. “That was… intense.”

Dean bit his lip. “Yeah,” he agreed.

“You really weren't kidding about the screaming.”

Dean cringed. “Too much?”

“Oh god, no,” Cas hurriedly reassured him. “Dean - my god - the idea that I made you make those sounds… Fuck, it's - it’s a colossal ego boost!”

Dean smiled, looking relieved.

“You're incredible,” Cas told him, stroking a hand down Dean's face. “Truly.”

Dean smiled again, and when he spoke his voice was soft. “I don't usually do that, you know.”

“What?”

“All that eye-contact during sex.”

“Oh.”

*Me either,* Cas wanted to say, but something kept the words from coming out.

“Never really kiss that much either.”

“Because of the whole ‘can't get serious’ thing?”

Dean nodded. “Yup. Gotta try and stay detached. Think it might be too late though.”

“Too late?”

Dean slid his fingers through Cas’ hair. “I find myself - already pretty attached to you, Castiel.”

Cas beamed. “You are?”

“Yes, sir,” Dean confirmed, putting his hand on Cas’ waist. “And it sucks massive monkey balls, because you live five thousand miles away from me.”

Cas pouted. “I guess the weekend commute would be a bit much.”

Dean nodded. “Although the sexting would be off the charts!”

“Yeah,” Cas wriggled closer and tucked himself under Dean’s arm.

“Wouldn't have pegged you for a snuggler,” Dean grinned.
“Shhhh,” Cas threw a leg over Dean’s.

Dean shifted til they were both comfortably wrapped round each other, and pulled the covers up over them.

“Night, Cas.”

“Good night, Chester,” Cas replied, earning himself a slap on the ass.
Though My Eyes Could See

Boston, Massachusetts
July 15th, 1985

The pregnant lady from next door had been over for a really long time. And she kept crying. Cas had been told to go to his room, but he kept sneaking down the stairs to see if she’d gone yet. Eventually he just stayed on the top step with his book, so that he had a good view of the front door.

Finally she left, and his Mom closed the door behind her. Cas held his open book in his lap as he watched his mother lean her forehead against the door. Her shoulders went up and down slowly a couple of times as she breathed.

She turned around after a little while, clearly composing herself, and as she did she looked straight into Cas’ wide eyes.

“Oh!” she gasped, putting a hand on her chest. “Castiel, I didn’t know you were there.”

She smiled and walked up the stairs. He shuffled over towards the wall so that she could sit down next to him. He looked up at her face. It looked a little bit blotchy and her eyes were damp.

“Is Mrs Bayers alright?” Cas asked, quietly.

His mom inhaled shakily through her nose, and put her hand on his knee. “Sure, honey,” she assured. “She just had some bad news, that’s all.”

Cas looked towards the door. Suddenly he felt sick.

“About her baby?” he enquired.

His mom inhaled shakily through her nose, and put her hand on his knee. “Sure, honey,” she assured. “She just had some bad news, that’s all.”

Cas looked towards the door. Suddenly he felt sick.

“About her baby?” he enquired.

The hand around his knee tightened a fraction.

“Yes,” his mom confirmed.

Cas closed his book. “Did you tell her about my dream?”

Last week, Cas had had one of his weird dreams. They were hard to describe, but they felt more - well, he guessed 'three dimensional' was probably the best way to put it - than normal dreams. While he was having them, he understood exactly what they meant, but when he woke up he could never find the words, and the meaning would slip away from him. All that was left were emotions and vague details.

The only way he could describe having a dream like that, was that it was kind of like having a conversation with someone, but exchanging feelings instead of words.

His mom removed her hand from his leg and she started picking at her nails.

“No, I didn’t,” she said.

“Should I have told her?” Cas asked, panicky and guilty. “I could’ve warned her that something…”

His mom put her arm around him. “No, baby,” she interrupted. “It wouldn’t have made any difference. Horrible things just happen sometimes.”
And I can feel when they're coming, Cas thought.

His dreams never yielded any specifics. They just gave him abstract clues, and showed him how he was going to feel when it happened. Whatever ‘it’ was.

“Do you think I’m supposed to warn people if I think something bad is going to happen to them?” he asked, voice weak.

“I don’t think so,” his mother answered. “They wouldn’t be able to do anything about it, so you’d just be worrying them.”

Cas didn’t understand why he’d been given this ability if he wasn’t meant to do anything with it. Surely he should tell people if he has a dream about them, then maybe he could save them. Or at least give them the information so that they could save themselves. What was the point of him having the dumb dreams if not to help people?

But his Mom was probably right. It’s not like he could just go up to someone and say; “hey, my brain thinks you’re going to be in a car crash on Friday so make sure you walk to work, okay?” People would think he was crazy.

“What should I do with them, then?” he asked his mom, who was rubbing her hand up and down his upper arm and shoulder.

She sighed. “I don’t know, Castiel,” she confessed. “Try and learn from them if you can, I suppose. Maybe just think of them as signposts for the road ahead.”

She kissed him on his temple, and stood up.

“Don’t feel guilty,” she told him, as she started to make her way back down the stairs. “You’re a good boy. You haven’t done anything wrong, alright? Sometimes life does things we just can’t explain.”

Cas dropped his eyes and looked at the beige carpet on the stairs that descended in front of him. He felt very burdened by all this. It wasn’t fair. He didn’t ask to be psychic or whatever.

Stupid brain.

Hatfield, Hertfordshire
Wednesday, June 19th, 2013

Dean’s erection woke him up.

He slowly opened his eyes, and was greeted by the sight of Cas’ shoulder blades, neck and hairline. Dean found that his right arm was curled round Cas’ middle, his hand against Cas’ chest. And his cock… Oh, his cock was apparently nestled in the crease at the bottom of Cas’ butt cheeks. Evidently it liked it in there, because it was at full mast.

Dean lifted himself a little to look over Cas’ shoulder at the illuminated numbers on the bedside clock. 04:17. Plenty of time to squeeze in a quickie then go back to sleep.

Dean kissed Cas’ neck and rubbed his chest, trying to rouse him softly. Cas stirred a fraction, but was still very much asleep. Dean wondered whether Cas was the kind of person to react violently when woken against their will. He’d had partners who’d objected strongly to his dick’s occasional
need for early morning satisfaction, and been kicked in the shin more than once by grumpy half-asleep girls and boys.

He decided to risk it.

Dean ran his fingertips down Cas’ body and very lightly stroked his cock.

“Cas,” he whispered.

Cas wriggled.

“Ca-as,” Dean tried again, connecting to his vocal chords a bit more. He nibbled at Cas’ earlobe.

“Mmm?”

*It lives!*

“Cas, wake up…”

“Mmm.”

Cas’ second response sounded suspiciously like a protest.

“Cas,” Dean kissed his sleepy lover’s neck. “Come on, sweetheart, wake up, I want you.”

“Dean,” Cas croaked, and hot damn, that voice was even sexier first thing. “It's the middle of the night.”

“I know,” Dean soothed, between kisses. “But you're so sexy, and I want you so much… You can go back to sleep after…”

With a pointed effort, Cas rolled over to face Dean. His eyes were heavy, but something in them sparkled in the dim light when they met Dean’s. Dean smiled at the gorgeous tired mess in front of him, but didn't speak for fear of morning breath. He turned over and pressed his ass against Cas’ cock, which was evidently waking up faster than its owner.

There was some stretching and fumbling, and Dean heard the sound of the drawer in the nightstand opening and closing. Hot with anticipation, he began lazily stroking himself. Then he felt a finger tip penetrate him, and he moaned with relief. He was still pretty loose from last night, and didn't need much in the way of prep.

Before long, Dean felt the head of Cas’ latex-covered dick against him, and he pushed back. As Cas slid inside, Dean closed his eyes at the sheer bliss.

“Yes! Oh, Cas!”

Cas was holding onto Dean’s leg with his left hand, while his right was hooked over Dean’s shoulder.

Cas was moaning and humming softly, fucking Dean nice and easy in this sleepy spooning position.

“Mmm, Dean,” he murmured.

“Yes,” Dean said again, voice dark and gravelly. “Oh fuck, Cas, you're so good, baby… You feel so good.”
Dean started jacking himself faster; he couldn't help it. Cas’ pace was languid and relaxed, but Dean needed the friction. He wanted to yell out in pleasure, but it really was damn early and he didn't want to upset Cas’ neighbours.

Just as he thought that, Cas delivered a particularly deep thrust, and there was no policing the low scream that escaped Dean’s mouth.

“Aaaah!”

His dick jolted and his fingers were suddenly damp with pre-come.

“Holy shit, Cas! You're gonna make me come!”

There was a sound from Cas’ throat which was as close to a growl as Dean had ever heard from a human being. Cas gripped Dean tight and continued to fuck him hard, and slow, and deep.

“Oh god!” Dean clasped onto the pillow with the hand not on jerking-duty, and surrendered to the drowsy ecstasy.

Cas bit down slowly on Dean’s shoulder, and Dean’s orgasm tumbled through him.

He managed to keep his volume at a reasonably acceptable level.

“Aaaaaaaahhhhh….!”

Cas grunted against Dean's shoulder, then his breath and his movements stilled as he came.

Cas vocalised a satisfied sigh as he released Dean’s shoulder and extracted himself from Dean's body.

They both rolled onto their backs and Cas peeled off the condom. He wrapped it in a tissue and put it on the nightstand. He was slightly hindered in this task by Dean, who was trying to attach himself to Cas’ arm and hip like a little koala bear.

“Dean,” Cas chuckled, voice still gruff with lack of use. “What are you doing?”

“I like you,” came Dean’s explanation, from somewhere near Cas’ armpit.

Cas rescued his arm from Dean’s grasp, and put it round Dean's back. He wriggled so he was towards his bedmate, both arms round him, Dean's face buried in his chest.

“I like you too,” he said, and kissed Dean on the top of his head.

Dean had made a mess of the sheet, himself and consequently quite a lot of Cas’ arm and side. Neither of them gave a shit, however, and they were both asleep again within a minute and a half.

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Dean was nudged into consciousness by a gentle clicking sound, and the blessed smell of coffee.

He opened his eyes and immediately saw the source of the smell - a big white mug on the bedside table next to him, steam rising from the top. He rolled over, heavily, and discovered the source of the sound. Cas was sitting up in bed, on top of the covers, typing on his laptop. He was already dressed, leaning against the headboard.

He looked over and smiled, as Dean repositioned himself.
“Good morning,” he said, and if Dean had had the energy he would’ve sat up and kissed that gorgeous mouth til they were both breathless.

Instead, he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and yawned.

“What time is it?”

“Just after seven forty five,” answered Cas.

Dean hummed an acknowledgement and sat up, blearily reaching for his coffee.

He took a few personality-replenishing sips, then let his head fall back on the headboard.

“Mmmmm, thanks, Cas.”

“You’re welcome,” Cas smiled, returning to his typing. “I gotta head for the station in about fifteen minutes. You can stay here for a while after though, if you want? Make yourself some breakfast and have a shower.”

“And maybe change your sheets,” Dean added, noting the damp patch under his thigh.

Cas laughed. “We did make a bit of a mess.”

“Ah well, it was for a good cause.”

Cas stopped typing and looked at Dean. “A very good cause,” he agreed, and bit his lip.

Dean returned his lust-heavy gaze, and grinned. “Don’t look at me like that unless you wanna be late for work.”

Cas chuckled and closed down his computer.

“Next time you sleep over let’s make sure it’s a weekend,” he suggested. “I would love to spend all day in bed with you, Mr Winchester.”

Dean’s cock twitched at the very idea, and he got a peculiar kind of full feeling in his chest as well. He ignored it though, because for god’s sake this is not the kind of relationship that requires any feelings above the waist. It’s a simple, fun, short term, friends with benefits deal, nothing complicated.

“Next time, huh?” Dean repeated, licking his lips. “That’s kinda bold, Cas, I mean - what makes you think I wanna come back?”

Cas narrowed his eyes, then bent down to put his laptop on the floor, before crawling over to Dean, straddling him.

Dean set down his coffee mug, and put his hands on Cas’ hips, cursing the fact that they were covered by stupid clothes. Although, there was no denying Cas really did look super hot in a suit. Dean started imagining the things they could get up to in Cas’ office, the way he’d pull him in for a kiss by that tie…

“Oh, I think you’d come back, if I asked nicely,” Cas said, voice soft. “I mean, I made you come twice, and I brought you a really big cup of coffee.”

“Hmmm,” Dean chewed his lip a little as he stared into Cas’ face. “All true… Still might need a bit more convincing.”
Cas smirked. Then he leaned forward and started to kiss Dean’s neck.

Dean was caught a little off-guard, and the small gasp that left him was wholly involuntary. Damn, Cas’ mouth had some kind of magic in it. As the kissing moved to just underneath Dean’s jaw, Dean relented.

“Okay, you win,” he breathed. “I’ll come back... Jesus, I’ll live here if you keep doing that!”

Cas hummed a laugh into Dean’s skin, and rolled his hips. Even through a layer of clothing and a duvet, Dean’s dick responded extremely positively to the movement. How it had anything left after last night was a mystery to Dean; maybe he was having a second adolescence. Or maybe it was just Cas.

Cas finished his ministrations with a little nip to Dean’s earlobe, then dismounted Dean’s lap and got off the bed.

Dean made a disappointed sound, and pouted. The pout soon turned to a smug grin when he noticed what was going on in the front of Cas’ pants.

“You want me to take care of that?” he asked, with a wink.

“More than I could possibly put into words,” Cas replied, pained. “But I should probably get my stuff together and head to the station.”

Dean found himself completely consumed with the desire to have Cas’ erection in his mouth. A wicked expression fell upon his face, and he twisted himself round so he was sitting on the side of the bed. He grabbed Cas’ hips, and pulled him in. He looked up into Cas’ eyes as he deftly undid his flies.

“Dean,” Cas warned, but as protests go it was entirely unconvincing, and Dean pushed the smart suit pants down to Cas’ thighs. He hooked his fingers round the waistband of Cas’ boxers and down they went as well.

“Come on,” Dean whispered, wrapping his fingers round Cas’ cock. “You still got like twelve minutes; hell I can make you come twice in that time.”

“Shit,” Cas murmured, and stroked a hand through Dean’s hair. Dean took that as consent, and unceremoniously swallowed Cas down.

“Oh, Dean!” Cas gasped, and both of his hands were suddenly on Dean’s head.

One of the things Dean loved about being with guys was their strength. With girls, you gotta be careful; move them gently, watch your grip, make sure you don’t get too carried away and get too rough - unless they like that, obviously. With the guys Dean had been into over the years, there had generally been an even match of brawn, and he always felt like he could let go and lose control a bit more than when he was with girls. He was also able to tap into the part of himself that enjoyed being physically controlled every now and then.

It was clear already to Dean that Cas was a gentleman to his core, and probably wouldn’t push Dean around or brutally fuck his mouth unless given explicit permission, but just the guiding hands on the back of Dean’s skull were enough to give him that tiny thrill of submission.

He closed his eyes, moaned around Cas’ length and found a rhythm. He sucked his cheeks in each time his lips passed over the head of Cas’ cock, and it didn’t take very long for Cas’ breathing to become erratic. Dean opened his eyes and looked up at Cas’ face. Cas was staring at him, awed, his
mouth open, panting. Dean moved his hands round to squeeze Cas’ ass, and took Cas as deep as he could go without gagging.

Cas’ grip tightened in his hair, and Dean felt the warning pulse go through Cas’ dick a second before his mouth filled with come. Cas gave a small cry and a breathy moan as his cock throbbed and released all over the back of Dean’s tongue. Dean closed his eyes and swallowed it all, though to be fair there wasn’t that much to deal with, Cas having already emptied himself twice in the last few hours.

Dean licked and cleaned Cas’ cock with his tongue and lips, before tucking it away again and zipping Cas back up into his pants.

He sat back, smiling sweetly at Cas, who was leaning forward with his hands on Dean’s shoulders, breathing hard.

“Now you can go to work,” Dean grinned.

Cas straightened up, ran his hand through his hair, took another composing breath, and looked at his watch.

“Wish I had time to return the gesture,” he whispered, eyes full of genuine regret.

Dean shrugged. “That’s okay,” he said, with a small smirk. “I’ll take care of myself, and maybe send you a picture so you don’t feel like you’ve missed out.”

Cas bent down to kiss Dean on the cheek. “Thank you for a wonderful night and morning,” he said. “Call me later?”

“Oh course,” Cas said, like he couldn’t believe Dean even had to ask.

He stroked his fingers through Dean’s bangs and down his face, and sighed, happily. Then he went to retrieve his laptop and bag.

“The door will lock automatically behind you when you leave,” he told Dean. “Stay as long as you want. English daytime television is - a unique experience.”

Dean smiled, settled back into bed and picked up his now-rather-tepid coffee.

“Thanks Cas, have a good day!”

* * *

Cas wasn’t supposed to make personal calls from his office. But if he didn’t talk to Charlie about his night with Dean, he was going to explode.

He had no memory of getting to the school. He must have walked to the station, he must have got on a train, there must have been people. He clearly made the journey physically, because here he was. His mind had most definitely not been present, however.

Cas couldn’t remember ever being as turned on as he had been last night. He’d wanted Dean so much, and every touch of Dean’s skin and lips felt like it had been branded on.

Cas couldn’t believe he’d come three times inside Chester Dean in the last twelve hours. The thought sent a shiver right through him, and he highly doubted he’d be able to concentrate on anything today.
Dean had unlocked something in Cas; something that had been absent for a long time. They had connected emotionally and physically, and spiritually. Cas felt cheesy for even thinking it, but it was true. He felt so elated, and yet - a panic was starting to descend. He wasn’t supposed to be feeling real things for Dean; they had to keep it casual otherwise it would be a disaster.

He still had twenty minutes until his first session, and no one would come in before then. Charlie would have already taken Audrey to school and likely be either at home or the studio.

The call connected.

“You had better be about to hit me with some highly inappropriate details of some steamy guy-on-guy sex,” Charlie said, in lieu of something traditional like ‘hello’.

“Meet me after work?” Cas immediately requested. “I have - a lot to say.”


Charlie chuckled a little. “Because of the all-consuming love for the beautiful Texan man?”

“To be perfectly honest, yes, and it’s not funny!”

“I’m sorry, you’re right. But Cas - it is okay to feel this stuff.”

“No, it’s not,” Cas protested. “The one guy in years that I’ve actually clicked with, and he’s leaving two weeks from today. I cannot fall for him, Charlie, it’ll be carnage!”

“Look,” Charlie began, practised as she was in the fine art of calming Cas down. “Love is always better when it first starts, so enjoy your whirlwind two weeks, and be glad you won’t be with him long enough to ever have a fight, or get sick of the way he leaves his shoes in the doorway, or whatever.”

Cas rubbed a hand over his eyes.

“But when he goes…” he said, quietly.

Charlie finished his sentence for him; “It’ll sting like a mother fucker.”

There was a brief silence.

“But I bet it’ll be worth it,” Charlie added, the smile evident in her voice.

Cas exhaled through his nose, while chewing a little on his lip. He really hoped she was right.

“Coffee shop, four thirty?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Cas agreed, still worrying. “See you later.”

“Love you!” came Charlie’s cheery voice, and Cas couldn’t help his smile despite his Dean-related emotional turmoil.

“Love you, too.”

Cas ended the call, and saw as he looked at his phone screen that he had a text message from Dean. He opened it, and nearly dropped his phone in shock.
Dean had been serious when he said he would send Cas a picture. And what a picture it was.

Dean was lying on his back on Cas’ bed, holding his phone above his head with one hand. His other hand was round his dick, and both hand and dick were covered in come. Dean’s face was flushed, and he was smiling. He’d managed to get quite a lot of his body in the frame; from his head down to his balls.

Dean had captioned the picture with the words, ‘I may or may not have been imagining you coming all over my face.’

Cas swallowed, and blinked several times before he convinced himself this was real life. Screw the ‘what if’s and the angst that had reared their spiteful heads just now - he was going to focus on the here and now. The most beautiful man he’d ever laid eyes on had just masturbated in his bed. Thinking about him. Really. In actual real life. This was a thing that was actually happening.

He hit reply and began typing with unsteady fingers.

Cas: i don’t know how to respond to this

Dean: Sorry, too filthy?

Cas: no no i liked it! hands down sexiest thing i’ve ever been sent. i just don't think I'm very good at sexting

Dean: Haha it's easy you just say what it is you want ;)

Cas: maybe that's the part I'm not very good at

Cas didn’t want Dean to think he was boring, but he didn’t know how far he’d be able to push himself when it came to stuff like this. He’d participated in some fairly non-vanilla activities over the years, and he was certainly no prude. But yelling kinky shit in the heat of the moment was very different to having to state your preferences over a written conversation.

Dean: Ok I'll start you off. Yes or no questions. Would you like to come on my face?

Easy.

Cas: yes. do i get a point?

Dean: Oh you'll get something! Next question. Would you like to see your jizz dripping from my lips and eyelashes?

The speed at which Cas’ blood rushed to his crotch was pretty impressive.

Cas: omg dean!!! YES

Dean: have you ever spanked anyone?

Cas: no

Dean: Never?

Cas: never.
Dean: ever *been* spanked?

Cas: …

Dean: I'll take that as a yes! Did you like it?

Cas had liked it. A lot. He and his college boyfriend had broken down all sorts of experimental barriers, and the spanking thing had been one of his favorites.

Cas: i did. it felt naughty. is that a stupid word?

Dean: No. Say it again.

Cas: *naughty*

Dean: you wanna get naughty with me Castiel?

Cas: yes

Dean: Wanna fuck me again?

Cas: oh god yes

Dean: Tell me how you wanna fuck me

*Don’t be embarrassed,* thought Cas. *He wants to know. Just write it.*

Cas: i want you on your hands and knees

Dean: Yes baby go on

Cas: i want to make you scream again dean, i want you to scream my name, gonna fuck you so hard

Dean: Yes Cas, fuck me, want you to pull my hair, give it to me rough

Visions of Dean on all fours as he pounded him into the mattress filled Cas’ head. *God,* imagine leaving finger marks in his hips and teeth marks on his shoulders…

Cas: shit

Dean: Don't stop! You're doing great

Cas: dean i work in a school i need to not have an erection

Dean: Stay behind your desk!

Cas: you're a very bad influence

Dean: But one hell of a good time ;)

Cas grinned at his phone. This was good, this was fun… forget the panic, just calm down and enjoy it.

Cas: true true :) i’ve got a student due in a minute, i'll message you later ok?
Dean: Ok angel face, talk to you later x x x

Cas chuckled at the ridiculous term of endearment, then put his phone away in a drawer, and resolved to not let himself be distracted.

*Focus on the kids. They need you.*

Cas shook his head at the irony of him being a counsellor. He who, in the last fifteen minutes, had had about twenty three opposing emotions. That he had been appointed a position from which to guide these young people was slightly comical when you thought about it.

But he was good at this. He cared, genuinely. He knew he could make a positive difference and that’s what it was all about.
Back in his apartment, Dean made himself some breakfast and ate, standing up at the kitchen counter. He’d showered and had a coffee at Cas’, after treating Cas to his little picture message, then he’d cleaned up a little and headed back to his own place. He’d briefly considered staying in Cas’ house all day, and having a surprise dinner waiting for when he got back from work, but decided that would be slightly over-keen and rather inappropriate. Plus, he had his ticket for London Zoo today.

The walk back to his building had given Dean time to contemplate the previous night, and he was mad at himself. He chewed his lip, remembering his little confession;

“I find myself already pretty attached to you, Castiel.”

Of all the stupid things to say to a guy that he’d known for five minutes, and will never see again after a couple of weeks.

He cursed his stupid brain for allowing his equally stupid mouth to say stuff like that. Fair enough, it was true, but announcing it like that was only going to lead to trouble. Cas had looked so pleased and cute, but damn it, no good could come of either of them getting feelings for each other. Then Dean had compounded it by getting clingy after round two, and sleeping all snuggled together.

Shit.

He’d have to do some damage control.

Dean could blame the endorphins to an extent; the sex had been freaking unreal. But there was no denying the fact that Cas had made him feel some deeper things; things that had been dormant for a long time. If Dean was being totally honest with himself - a rarity - it had started before the sex. Probably halfway through Charlie’s quiz, or even before. Cas looked at him in a way that not many other people ever had. Like he was really important.

Every time their eyes connected, it was as if they were having a whole silent conversation in mere seconds. Locking eyes with Cas as the dude came in him was a really fucking weird but oddly profound experience. Dean couldn’t shake it. And damn, Cas could really fucking kiss.

Dean’s emotional ambivalence was all of a sudden smothered by the resurgence of his libido. Time to re-read this morning’s sexting conversation before heading out…

Austin, Texas
Friday, April 27th, 2007

Dean wasn’t sure whether he was relieved or annoyed to learn that Jenna had already discussed his sexuality with Sam.

He’d shared with her his intention to tell his brother, and she’d hinted that Sam may already be aware. Dean wondered if Sam only knew because Jenna had mentioned it, or whether he’d actually picked up on it some time in their shared history.
Dean remembered Benny telling him the story of coming out to his parents, and the reaction being; ‘well, duh!’, because apparently Moms and Dads have this sixth sense about their kids or whatever. Dean wondered when the penny would’ve dropped for his own mother. He then began to wonder whether Ellen, Bill and Bobby would be surprised at the news when he got round to telling them.

One family member at a time. Sam first.

Jenna was out with friends tonight, and so Dean was on his way to his brother’s house, armed with beer and Chinese food. He parked up, and let himself in.

“Hey, man!” Sam came out of the kitchen as the front door closed. He flipped his bottle opener in the air and caught it again, one-handed. He grinned at his big brother.

“Winchester boys’ night!” he declared.

Dean rolled his eyes but smiled back. “Yeah, we sure know how to let loose,” he said, sarcastic. “In the prime of our twenties, and spending Friday night drinking on the couch.”

“I’m in the prime of my twenties,” Sam countered, as they went into the kitchen and started to unpack the food. “You’re literally thirty next year.”

Dean shuddered. “We don’t talk about that,” he said, reaching for the bottle opener.

“Although,” Sam began. “Men hit their physical peak in their early thirties, so there’s still hope.”

“My peak has come and gone, man,” Dean insisted. “In all aspects, physical or otherwise.”

Sam paused, and frowned at his brother. “That’s not true,” he told him, plating out the noodles.

Dean raised his eyebrows, cracked open his beer and took a swig. “Whatever you say…”

Dean wasn’t trying to feel sorry for himself, he was just stating facts. His career was over, his youth was circling the drain, and the time spent hanging around having a great time with friends and lovers was now virtually non-existent.

It wasn’t that he didn’t enjoy his life. It was just that he suspected that the best parts had already gone by.

They took their dinner and drinks, and went into the little den at the back of the house. The room contained a big-screen T.V., state of the art sound system and a couple of games consoles. There were four tall shelves all filled with D.V.D.s and games, and a huge L-shaped leather couch that ran along two walls, with an ebony coffee table at shin-height in front of it. Everything in this room was shiny and expensive.

Each time Dean came over, he felt a tiny bite of jealousy over Sam’s income. Dean had saved a little from his minor-celebrity days, but it wasn’t that much. Certainly not compared to Mister Hot Shot Lawyer over here. Dean couldn’t find it in himself to resent his little brother’s success, though. Not when he’d worked so hard to earn it. The fraternal pride always trounced the envy, in the end.

“So,” Sam said, as he sat down, mouth already half full of king prawn chow mein. “What’s going on?”

Dean swallowed, setting down his plate and bottle on the black table. He’d pre-warned Sam that he had something to tell him, and Sam was never one to beat around the bush. Always asked direct questions, even when he was a kid.
“Well,” Dean said, clapping his palms together, then rubbing them in circles and looking at the floor. “I guess Jenna’s already told you, but…”

He hadn’t been certain how he would phrase it. He’d tried a few ways out loud to himself in the shower, like some kind of total douche. I like guys as well as girls. I’m not totally straight. Remember how much I used to like Patrick Swayze movies?

In this moment of truth, however, Dean found simple honesty to be the way forward.

“…I’m bisexual.”

Dean met his brother’s eyes, and Sam was looking inordinately happy, but he didn’t say anything.

“And maybe it doesn’t need saying; maybe you guessed or whatever but, I - I just wanted to tell you.”

Silence remained the only response, and Dean was compelled to fill it.

“So, there you go.”

Dean reached to retrieve his beer bottle, so that he could wet his suddenly-dry mouth. Before he could grab it, however, Sam lurched forward from his position on Dean’s right, and gripped him in a bone-crushing assault hug.

“Okay....” Dean choked out, arms pinned and shoulders forced up into a shrug by Sam’s tight embrace.

Sam finally eased up, and patted Dean affectionately on the side of his face with one hand.

“Any particular reason why you just boa constrictor’d me?” Dean asked, feeling amused and relieved.

Sam chuckled and took a swig of his drink. “Just proud of you,” he replied.

Dean shook his head. “I’m sexually attracted to two genders as opposed to one, Sammy, I didn’t just win an olympic medal. Pride has nothing to do with it.”

Dean put his food on his lap and dived in with abandon, glad that that was over.

“Aw, does that mean we’re not going to any parades?” Sam asked.

Dean huffed a laugh, and tore off some spare rib with his teeth.

“I don’t care what you say,” Sam said, decisively. “I’m proud of you for owning this part of yourself. And yeah, I did kinda suspect long before Jenna ever said anything.”

Dean was curious. He swallowed his pork and asked; “What gave me away?”

Sam smiled. “You remember coming to visit me at Stanford in my first year?”

Dean frowned. “Uh, yeah…?”

“We went out to a few bars with my buddies, and we all got totally trashed.”

Dean remembered most of the evening to which Sam was referring, but Tequila had claimed a high proportion of his memories. That had been the year after his career officially ended, and he’d been a
little bit all over the place.

“There was dancing,” Dean mused, flashbacks beginning to float to the surface of his mind.

“There was topless dancing,” Sam smirked.

Dean cringed. *Oh, yes. There was.*

“And you screwed one of my friends in the club bathroom,” Sam added, with an expression of distaste.

Recollection dawned. “Oh, my god, that’s right!” Dean grinned. “Fuck, what was her name?”

“Ruby,” Sam answered.

“Ruby,” Dean repeated, nodding. “Yes. Wavy blonde hair and a big mouth.”

He winked at his brother, who rolled his eyes.

“And do you remember my other friend, Aaron?” Sam asked.

Dean wracked his brains.

“Quite short, dark hair,” Sam prompted.

“Oh, yeah!”

Dean did remember the boy Sam was talking about. He’d talked to him a lot that night, as he recalled.

“Man, did I have to deal with *that* fallout,” Sam said, shaking his head.

“What?” said Dean, perplexed. “Fallout of what?”

Sam swallowed and looked hard at his brother. “He was very much under the impression that you were into him, Dean. He told me halfway through the night that he thought you were flirting with him.”

“Why did he think that?”

“That’s exactly what I wondered, at first,” Sam said. “I told him I highly doubted it, cause you were straight. But then I watched you, and damn, dude, he was right.”

“I was probably just being drunk and friendly.”

Sam shook his head. “Nope,” he confirmed. “You were doing it all, man - the leaning in, the laughing too hard at his jokes, the winking, the licking your lips, the arm squeeze… and it hit me.”

Dean sucked on his lips, feeling guilty that he’d unintentionally led the poor guy on because he’d been so deep in the closet.

“I used to think that kind of stuff was just cheeky, tactile Dean being cheeky and tactile,” Sam continued. “But after that night, I replayed a lot of memories in my head to see if I could find the blatantly-bi ones that I’d missed.”

Dean winced a little. “Were there a lot?”
Sam snorted. “Uh, yeah!”

Dean rubbed a hand over his eyes. “Poor Aaron.”

Sam pursed his lips. “Yeah. He was really crushed when you and Ruby came out of that stall looking so pleased with yourselves.”

Dean sat, pensive for a moment, wishing he hadn’t been in such denial all that time. His teens could’ve been a lot more fun with both boys and girls to experiment with.

“Why didn’t you ever ask me about it?” he questioned Sam, being careful not to sound accusatory. Lord knows none of this was Sam’s fault.

“I didn’t want to push you, and run the risk of inducing a freakout,” Sam answered, without hesitation. “I’m just glad you’re finally happy with who you are, Dean. I love you, man.”

Dean hoped, for his own reputation, that he wasn’t visibly glowing on the outside as much as he was on the inside.

He cleared his throat and refocused on his Chinese. This bonding with his brother was nice, but it should probably end now before it got too saccharine.

“And, hey,” Sam concluded. “Now you have twice as many people to sleep with once and never call again.”

“Man, shut your face and turn the movie on.”

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Bounds Green, London
back to Wednesday, June 19th, 2013

Charlie was always early for everything.

She used to panic so much about being late, or being unprepared for stuff, so now she always overcompensated to the point where she was consistently at least twenty minutes early for everything she was scheduled to do, and always overly ready for each and every eventuality.

She had agreed to meet Cas at their favorite coffee place at four thirty. It was currently four twenty-five, and she’d already been here almost a half hour. She had a large hot chocolate in front of her, and Paramore on her iPod. She was gazing out of the window, chin resting on her hand, when she saw Cas approaching.

She smiled. There was something so comforting about the guy. He was almost as neurotic as she was, and just as much of a closet nerd. She really did love him very much. She wished for him to find a decent man who would look after him and make him happy, but honestly she feared that Cas couldn’t let anyone in that far.

She removed her earphones as he came through the door. She waved at him as he went to order his drink.

Charlie didn’t know all of the details of what had prompted Cas’ move across the world, but she knew it had to do with his old job. She knew it had been bad, she knew he’d been let down by someone he trusted, and she knew that the very mention of it made Cas tense up and shut down. She also knew that he had brothers and sisters out there, but that he wasn’t close with them, and so the
dysfunctional little community that had sprung up around Crowley’s bar had become Castiel’s surrogate family. Charlie knew exactly how that felt. Family certainly doesn’t end with blood.

Cas came over, and they had a quick half-a-hug and kiss on the cheek before he sat down and took off his coat.

After a short exchange about how their days were, Charlie broached the subject that she’d been summoned to discuss.

“So, come on,” she said, eagerly. “Spill. Dish the Dean details.”

Charlie listened intently as Cas described his night. He didn’t go into too much graphic detail, because Cas wasn’t really a kiss and tell kind of guy; he was first and foremost a gentleman. Behind closed doors and all that. But he included enough to let Charlie know that it was the best night he’d had in a long while. He’d never enthused like this about a hook-up before.

There was something new in his eyes, too.

Charlie couldn’t put her finger on it, but talking about Dean was changing something in her friend’s face. Like something had been untethered or unlocked.

Cas suddenly stopped talking, and challenged her. “What?”

“What, what?” she asked, taken aback.

Cas narrowed his eyes. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Like what?” Charlie asked, wondering how much of her inner monologue had been showing in her face. “I’m just listening.”

“You were staring at me like… I don’t know,” Cas frowned.

Charlie smiled, softly. “I was just trying to work out what’s different,” she said.

That clearly did nothing by way of an explanation, because Cas looked even more confused.

Charlie sighed, frustrated at the limitations of her vocabulary. “It’s like,” she started. “When you talk about Dean, you totally light up, and I’ve never seen you like this before.”

Cas sat back in his chair. He seemed worried, and looked tired all of a sudden. “Really?”

“Yeah, really,” Charlie confirmed, with a wry smile.

There was a pause, and trouble crossed Cas’ face.

Charlie leaned forward on the table. “Why does that scare you so much?” she asked, quietly and sincerely.

Cas looked right into her eyes for a little while before answering.

“I told you, this morning,” he said, carefully. “There is no good outcome of me falling for Dean. Even putting aside the fact that he doesn’t actually live in this country, I’m a disaster, and I shouldn’t be in a relationship.”

“What the fuck?” Charlie exclaimed.
She’d heard Cas be self-deprecating, and decry his failed relationships, but she never knew he genuinely believed that he should be alone.

“You really think that?” she said, horrified.

“Yes, Charlie, I do,” Cas said, seemingly surprised that she was even questioning it. “I - I accidentally hurt people. I don’t mean to. I just have a lot of crap inside me, and I wouldn’t want to contaminate Dean, or anyone else, with any of it.”

Charlie felt so sad at the thought of Cas being alone, simply because he thought he couldn’t share his baggage with another person.

“So,” she started, with a frown. “Even if Dean was local, you still wouldn't try to have a relationship with him?”

Cas sighed. “It's hard to explain,” he said. “I mean, I've definitely connected with him more than I have with any other man since college, and maybe a few years ago I would've tried, but…”

He trailed off and stared out the window.

“It's weird,” he said, after a pause. “I mean, I’ve been on this earth a pretty long time, and yet I still feel like I’m only just beginning to get a grasp of my own emotions. I just - I think I’m safer on my own.”

Charlie shook her head. “Cas, we’re all a mess of emotions,” she argued. “The idea is to find someone whose nonsense syncs up with yours.”

Cas sipped his tea, and didn’t respond.

“Your emotions are what make you special,” Charlie tried. “That’s why you’re so good with the kids you work with. You understand how to navigate the crazy, unpredictably changeable web of feelings inside all of us!”

Cas raised an eyebrow at Charlie’s flowery choice of words.

“It’s all academic with Dean anyway,” he said, with a shrug. “He's said himself that he doesn't really do long-term commitment. And, crucially, he's *leaving* on July third.”

“Great!” Charlie declared, and Cas’ face filled with confusion at her positivity. “So you can put all this relationship shit away and live in the freakin’ moment for once!”

Cas opened his mouth, but, fearing it would be a protest, Charlie cut him off before her could get going.

“Look, what’s the worst that can happen? You like him, he likes you, you have a great time for a few weeks,” she told him. “Okay, it hurts like a bitch when he leaves, but you’re left with some renewed self-confidence and a hot overseas penpal.”

Cas contemplated her advice, then allowed a smile to form on his face.

“You’re right,” he reasoned. “You’re right. I will just - stop overthinking, and enjoy Dean while he’s here.”

Charlie grinned as she took the opportunity to insert a musical theatre reference. “In whatever time we have…!” she sang loudly, causing the other coffee shop patrons to stare at her.
“Stop that!” Cas hissed, embarrassed.

“For as long as we are living - only if you promise to chill! - we will face whatever comes…”

“Alright, I promise, I promise,” Cas said, hurriedly, swatting at Charlie to try and make her stop singing.

She did, and smiled at him. Then she put on a mock-stern expression.

“Now, are you going to have fun with the beautiful man?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Are you going to let your anxiety ruin what will be a cute squidgy memory for you in your old age?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Are you going to buy me a panettone?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Cas got up from the table and headed to the counter. Charlie gave him a thumbs up as he went.

She hoped she was giving him the right advice. Perhaps Cas would prefer to stop seeing Dean, and save himself the potential heartbreak of falling for a guy he couldn’t possibly be with. Maybe a better friend would tell him to be careful and keep his heart guarded.

But there was something niggling at Charlie about this. She just felt that these boys should be together for as long as they were able. She felt like it was going to prove to be really important for Cas, somehow. Maybe allowing himself to have this temporary thing with Dean would mean he’d be willing to open himself up to something long-term in the future.

She would make it her business to oversee their romance, and make sure Cas was keeping sane.

* * *

Dean: Please find attached a picture of me and my new best friend.

Cas: dean that is a lemur

Dean. Yes. Her name is Kelly.

Cas: i thought the penguin from this morning was your new best friend

Dean: Dude stop living in the past. I’m all about Kelly now.

Cas: haha so good time at the zoo then

Dean: Oh god I loved it. I brought you a gift back from the shop :)

Cas: really?! that's so sweet. are you home now?

Dean: Almost. Still on train. About ten minutes away I think. Where are you?

Cas: still in the city. going to funk and soul night at the bar. there’s a band playing that i really
like.

Dean: Cool. I would come down but I’m beat. Watcha doin tomorrow night?

Cas: nothing at all

Dean: Ok I’m gonna make you dinner! Come to mine after work. Bring your pyjamas ;)

Cas: ok :) :) why don’t you come to the school when you finish your tourist stuff and we can travel back together

Dean: You’re on, Hot Stuff

Cas: hot stuff??

Dean: Um - Cutie Pants? Treacle Pie?

Cas: there is no emoji that adequately captures my current expression

Dean: Haha! Ok, you can choose your own pet name

Cas: i like the ones you used last night…

Dean: Remind me

Cas: baby. and sweetheart. they both sound really sexy in your voice.

Dean: You got it baby :) I like that one too. nothing wrong with a simple classic! Hey you like italian food?

Cas: yes

Dean: Awesome. We’re gonna have a good time!

Cas: can i call you later maybe when the band take a break?

Dean: Sure, I look forward to it!

Dean: ...sweetheart x x x
I Hear the Voices When I'm Dreaming

Chapter Notes

**in the second section of this chapter Dean has a flashback of a mild non-con moment. Nothing too horrendous or graphic, but if you need to know what it is to decide if you're comfortable with it, see end notes**

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wood Green, London
Thursday, June 20th, 2013

Cas spent another day being joyfully diverted by Dean’s texts and selfies. He’d taken Charlie’s advice, and forced himself to stop worrying about the future. He’d accepted as an inevitability that there would be some pain involved for him when Dean left, but he could handle it. And Dean was worth it.

The idea of Dean getting hurt because of him was just as, if not more, painful to think about.

However, Cas told himself that Dean was a big boy who had gone into this with no more expectation of longevity than Cas had. There was no reason for Cas to think that he would hurt Dean. In fact, there was no real reason to suspect that Dean’s affection for Cas wouldn’t fade with his jet lag once he got back to the states.

The memory on Cas’ phone was almost full of Dean pulling faces in front of various London landmarks. Today’s offering included Dean outside Harrods giving a police officer a high-five, Dean in the Science Museum gleefully playing with the interactive exhibits, and Dean in a black cab, pouting and giving the peace sign. That one had been accompanied by the message; On my way to school Mr Novak!

Cas briefly considered that perhaps he should delete some of these pictures, but he just couldn’t bring himself to do it. He so enjoyed his little album of Dean.

He waited outside the school gates, glad of the opportunity to enjoy the warm afternoon sun. He caught sight of his date approaching, and immediately became giddy as a teenager. Dean was wearing three-quarter-length khaki shorts, his tan boots and an Iron Maiden t-shirt. He also had on a pair of sunglasses, and a small black backpack slung over one shoulder.

Dean threw an arm round Cas and gave him an affectionate kiss on the temple, and Cas was so thrilled. He’d had some boyfriends in the past who’d been quite coy, and played it cool with their physical affection in public, and Dean’s contrasting don’t-give-a-shit abandon was so wonderful. Not that Dean was his boyfriend, of course.

The kiss wasn't missed by a few students, who were still hanging around near the school. One boy wolf-whistled, and three girls, who were not being very discreet about smoking, definitely preened a little bit as Dean passed them.

The journey back to Dean’s apartment mostly consisted of the two of them cracking up laughing, and Cas once again blessed the odd twist of fate that had brought this man into his life, however
briefly. Proper belly laughs were so good for the soul.

Dean forbade Cas from helping him cook dinner, so Cas stood in the kitchen, drinking his glass of wine and watching Dean work.

“Ellen taught me how to cook,” Dean told him.

“Your foster mother?”

“Yep. Before she started full time at Hunter, she worked in a bar and restaurant called the Roadhouse, and she made the most awesome food. Burgers, chillis, wraps, lasagnes… and this, which is her recipe, but with a Winchester twist.”

Dean winked at Cas, as he reached past him to grab some jars from the spice rack.

“You know, there was something about that word,” Cas said, trying to ignore the way his heart sped up when Dean brushed his arm.

“What word?” Dean asked.

“Winchester,” Cas explained. “When I was trying to pick a university to do my course. I knew I wanted to come to the U.K., but I didn't know where to choose. I was drawn to Winchester because something about it felt, I don’t know, comforting, I guess.”

It was true. Cas hadn't known where to start with all the different options of being an international Psychology student. But then that city had popped up on his Google search, and he kept coming back to it like a magnet. Winchester.

“I remember sitting at my computer,” he continued. “And I kept saying it out loud to myself. I liked the way it…”

Cas trailed off and started laughing.

“Liked the way it what?” Dean asked, with a confused smile.

Cas vocalised a sigh. “I was about to say, I liked the way it felt in my mouth. Then I remembered who I was talking to.”

He smirked and took another gulp of white wine.

Dean released a loud chuckle. “Damn, I'm real predictable, huh?”

Cas nodded. “I'm afraid so.”

“I can resist an innuendo, if I really try,” Dean defended himself, making a show of concentrating on his chopping.

“Go on,” Cas teased. “You know you want to.”

“Nope,” Dean insisted. “Not gonna do it.”

Dean clamped his mouth shut, and for a while the only sound was of sharp metal connecting with the wooden chopping board, as he carved up his courgette. Cas watched him intently, and could practically hear the cogs in Dean's brain turning, churning up all the different jokes he could make.

“Oh, go on,” Cas laughed. “Get it out of your system.”
Dean set down his knife and looked right at Cas.

“If you like the way *that* Winchester feels in your mouth, just you wait til after dessert.”

Cas licked his lips. “Feel better?”

Dean nodded. “Much better! Thanks!”

The dish that Dean prepared was one of the nicest home-cooked meals Cas had ever eaten. It was a seafood and vegetable linguine, with the most amazing creamy garlic sauce. Cas had questioned the wisdom of the garlic, if there was to be kissing later, but Dean had assured him that if they both had it, they wouldn’t notice. Then he’d made some rude but funny allusions to Cas swallowing his sauce.

Cas referenced it as they were doing the washing up, having concluded their meal with a store-bought apple pie. The pie had been accompanied by something that Cas had brought with him, called Angel Delight. It was something of a British staple, apparently, and Cas had first had it a few months ago at Charlie’s and never looked back. Dean had eyed it suspiciously, but been won over after his first bite.

“Is this playlist like the twenty-first century equivalent of making me a mix tape?”

“I guess it is,” Dean answered, smiling.

Cas smiled back as he dried up his dish. “Well, I'm honored,” he said, voice low. “A mix tape from a renowned country artist.”

Dean snorted. “Renowned, my ass.”

“Do what to your ass?”

“Don't you start.”

Cas chuckled and put away the plate he'd been drying, as Dean pulled out the plug and drained the sink.

“All clean,” he declared, as he dried his hands on a dish towel.

Cas closed the cabinet, and turned around to face Dean. Dean slowed his movements and regarded Cas’ face, carefully. A small smile tugged at his lips, and both of them tossed their respective dish towels down on the table.

Dean walked towards Cas, crowding him against the counter. He put his hands on Cas’ hips, and stared into his face.

Cas breathed in, deeply, and stared back.

“I really like this suit,” Dean said, voice suddenly a little deeper than normal.

“Well,” Cas replied, pushing some stray hair away from Dean’s forehead. “I heard this restaurant was pretty fancy, so I figured I should dress up.”

“Yeah,” Dean grinned, pressing his body into Cas’ a bit more. “The Winchester diner is *really* fancy.
The wine comes from a corked bottle, not a screw-top."

Cas gasped in faux-amazement. “Well, shit, maybe I should’ve kept my tie on,” he said, putting his hands on Dean’s ass.

“Oh, no,” Dean frowned. “The Winchester diner encourages as little clothing as possible.”

Dean leaned down and started to kiss Cas’s neck. Cas hummed with relief and pleasure.

“Does - does the Winchester diner also do breakfasts?” he asked, already getting a little breathless. *Fuck, Dean could kiss.* “Because I was thinking of booking a room for the night…”

Dean lifted his head and started to undo the buttons on Cas’ shirt.

“We sure do,” he murmured, and nipped playfully at Cas’ bottom lip. “Guests can have whatever they’re hungry for.”

Cas slid his hands round to the front of Dean’s shorts and unzipped them.

“I know what I’m hungry for,” he said, knowing full well how cheesy he sounded, but not giving a single fuck. “Time to feel a Winchester in my mouth again.”

Cas dropped to his knees on the laminate floor, and tugged Dean’s shorts down his legs. He was pleased to find that Dean’s dick had got ahead of the game and was already starting to stiffen. He cupped Dean through his underwear and kissed up the inside of one his thighs.

Dean released a satisfied hum from above Cas’ head, and danced the fingers of one hand through Cas’ hair.

Cas laid kisses and hot breaths on Dean’s cock through the gray fabric of his boxers, then pulled the waistband up and over the nearly-completely-erect flesh. He slid the boxers down Dean’s thighs, and licked at his balls as soon as they were exposed. He held onto the back of Dean’s leg with one hand, and used the other to stroke him to full hardness.

“Cas…” Dean whispered, as his left hand joined his right on Cas’ head. “Oh, *fuck,* that’s good.”

The praise spurring him on, Cas licked up from Dean’s balls to the tip of his cock, then took him into his mouth. He noted, with a thrill, Dean’s surprised gasp as his Dick disappeared further and further into Cas’ mouth. Cas’ deepthroating ability wasn’t something he advertised, but he always loved the reaction he got when it was revealed.

“*Jesus,* ” Dean breathed.

Cas pulled back and suckled at the head of Dean’s dick, while fondling the base with his long fingers. He sat back on his knees and looked up into Dean’s eyes.

Dean gazed down at him with a soft smile, and Cas promptly lost all authority over his insides. Against his will, his stomach lurched, his groin swelled, and the less he acknowledged what his heart did, the better.

He sealed his lips round Dean’s shaft, and moved his head back and forth in an unhurried rhythm.

“Oh god, baby,” Dean breathed. “*Fuck, yes... Oh, please don’t stop...*”

One of Dean’s hands remained in Cas’ hair, and the other was now holding on to the countertop over Cas’ head. Dean was matching Cas’ rhythm with a shallow and unforced thrusting of his hips.
He was now also moaning, and gasping in the back of his throat, and Cas’ own pleasure heightened with every sound.

Cas had his eyes closed, and was chanting; *come for me, come for me*, over and over in his head. Dean’s telepathy was apparently on point, because before too long, he did precisely that. His knees buckled a little, and he leaned forward above Cas’ head to prop himself up on the counter. His grip tightened in Cas’ hair, and he came in one long, thick stream.

“Uuuuuuhhh… Cas, Cas! Oohhh…”

Cas remembered how he’d gagged and spluttered the first time his teenage boyfriend came in his mouth. But practice makes perfect, and he hadn’t so much as flinched at the sensation in years. There was an extra enjoyment in tasting *Dean*, though. Having Dean’s come on his tongue was not just to be endured; it was genuinely pleasant because of who it belonged to. As well as the fact that the presence of it meant that Cas had pleased Dean, and that was apparently Cas’ current life purpose.

The need to reach his own release throbbing in every single one of his veins, Cas stood up and kissed Dean’s neck. Dean was still kind of slumped forward, and Cas nudged him to sit down on the breakfast-bar stool behind him.

As he sat, Dean pulled Cas into his lap and kissed him, evidently not deterred by the taste of his own spunk.

Cas sighed with relief into Dean’s mouth, as Dean put his hand inside Cas’ pants and wrapped his hand round his cock.

It took Cas less than two minutes to reach orgasm, his mouth not leaving Dean’s until the very last moment. He buried his face in the crook of Dean’s neck and moaned loudly as Dean stroked him through his climax. They sat wrapped in each other for a little while, their breathing levelling out and their heart rates returning to normal.

“Great way to thank me for dinner,” Dean murmured in Cas’ ear. “I had no idea I was dating a porn star.”

Cas sat up and grinned, his arms still round Dean’s neck.

“I have a very well-trained gag reflex,” he admitted.

“That you do,” Dean agreed, rubbing his hands up and down Cas’ legs. “Puts me to shame.”

“It took a bit of extra effort,” Cas added. “You’re - somewhat blessed.”

Dean guffawed, and both their bodies shook with the vibrations of his beautiful laugh.

“Things are bigger in Texas, baby,” Dean jibed, and wiggled his pelvis underneath Cas’ ass.

Cas rolled his eyes but smiled as he got off Dean’s lap and did his pants up.

“I need more wine,” he declared. “You know - to wash down the sperm.”

Dean wrinkled his nose up, but chuckled. He headed over to the fridge and got out the nearly-empty bottle.

“Might need to open another,” he said, topping up both their glasses.

“Or switch to an after-dinner coffee,” Cas suggested, his responsible side reminding him that it was a
school night.

Mid-swallow, Dean made a noise of realisation.

“What?” Cas asked.

“I haven’t given you your zoo gift!” Dean said, hurrying over to where his backpack was leaning against the couch.

Cas watched him rummage around until he triumphantly pulled out a small bag.

“Ta-da!”

He handed it over to Cas, with all the glee of a little kid giving his Mom a handmade birthday gift.

Cas put his hand inside the paper bag and pulled out two non-descript solid somethings, each wrapped in purple tissue paper.

Dean’s grin widened as Cas unwrapped his presents.

As the first one was revealed, Dean blurted out, excitedly; “It’s a polar bear cub!”

Cas smiled, and chuckled. “Why, yes, yes it is.”

“Open the other one! She has a friend.”

Cas tucked his polar bear cub figurine under his armpit and unwrapped its companion, which turned out to be a little hippopotamus.

“Cute, right?” Dean said, proudly.

Cas nodded, smiling. “Very cute. Thank you, Dean. You didn’t have to get anything for me.”

“Well, technically they’re actually for your fish,” Dean told him, happily. “You can put them in the tank, and your rock and roll angelfish can swim all round them and be their friends!”

Cas laughed down his nose and smiled at Dean, affectionately. “I’m sure they’ll love that.”

He wrapped his new little friends up again and went over to the chair on which he’d slung his bag. He tucked them delicately into the front pocket, zipped it up, then started a little when he turned to find Dean practically on top of him.

Dean grabbed Cas by the waist and pulled him in for a kiss. It was earnest, and tongue-heavy, and filled with filthy promise, like they hadn’t both just come barely four minutes ago.

Cas moaned as he reciprocated, putting his hands in Dean’s hair. Dean moved down to Cas’ neck, and Cas’ whole body completely surrendered.

“Dean,” he gasped. Then, with a smirk and in a whisper; “Miniature zoo animals really turn you on, huh?”

Dean nipped at Cas’ skin as punishment for his sass, then pulled up to look into his face. He had one hand round the back of Cas’ neck, holding him still. It was kind of possessive, but Cas found he didn’t really mind.

“You turn me on,” Dean said, voice a low rumble. “I usually have better control over myself.”
Proving his point, Dean interrupted his own train of thought by kissing Cas’ lips again. Repetitive, pouty pecks; teasing, and each one hotter than the last.

“Come to bed?” Dean breathed.

“With pleasure,” Cas sighed.

***

“What makes you think I like guys?” Dean asked, throat stinging a little from the shot he’d just downed.

“I can just tell,” Zach answered, looking pleased with himself.

He put his hand on Dean’s knee. “I know it’s difficult,” he said, in a low, conspiratorial voice. “Your management want you to be the all-American apple pie boy, right? I get it.”

Dean frowned, and looked around him. He couldn’t see where Bobby had got to.

They were at some after party of the Country Music Awards, but Dean couldn’t have remembered the name of the hotel they were in if he’d been given a million dollars to do so. He just went where he was instructed. Bobby had told him to sit, so he’d sat. Then this guy had come up to him, introduced himself, bought Dean a drink and been really nice to him. Until now. Now he was getting kind of sleazy.

“I can help you, Dean,” Zach insisted. “Sign with me, and I’ll set you up with some very discreet boys. You can be who you are, and no one will be any the wiser.”

Dean’s head felt fuzzy. Whatever Zach had bought him must have been a double.

“I can’t sign with you,” he told the older man, confused at why it was suddenly hard to make words come out. “I’m with Hunter. They’re my family.”

Zach changed seats, so instead of being opposite Dean, he was now beside him.

“Right,” he nodded, the hand that had been on Dean’s knee now high up on his inner thigh. “Do they know you’re gay?”

“I’m not gay…”

“Sure, sure. Do they know?”

Dean blinked his eyes several times. His vision was going weird.

“They, um, they don’t…”

“I won’t tell them,” Zach whispered in Dean’s ear. “That’s not something you want getting out. Could ruin your career, Dean. If someone told the papers…”

Dean frowned.

“But there’s nothing, um, there isn’t anything to tell. I don’t, I haven’t…”

Suddenly Dean wasn’t in the hotel bar any more. He was lying down on his back on something soft. He tried to open his eyes, but they were so heavy. He could hear noise. Someone was - grunting.
'What the fuck is happening?' he thought, and attempted to move his arm.

"Just stay still," someone was saying. No, not saying - panting. "Don't move, don't move..."

"No, no, no! Fuck off! FUCK OFF!"

"Dean! Dean, it's alright, Dean - Dean, it's a dream... You're just dreaming, baby... Dean?"

Dean opened his eyes, focused, and found Cas looking down at him, with concern. He breathed heavily a few times and centred himself.

*Right.*

*Cas. England. Safe.*

*Fuck.*

He rubbed his face, and found that he was sweating. He laid his palm over his eyes.

"Are you okay?" Cas' worried voice came through the dark.

Dean sat himself up a little, and glanced over at the clock. It was barely midnight. They hadn’t been asleep long.

"Yeah," he said, voice cracking. "Sorry."

"Don’t apologise," Cas said, hurriedly. "You were having a nightmare, that’s not your fault. Here -"

Cas handed him a glass of water.

Dean took it, gladly, and gulped down a few mouthfuls. "Thanks," he said, putting the glass on the nightstand.

He let his head fall back on the headboard. His heart still felt like it was in his mouth.

"Come here," Cas offered, softly.

Dean looked over, and, yeah, topless Cas with his arms open was not something he was going to turn down.

There were very few people in life from whom Dean took comfort without being embarrassed by it, and it was nice to be able to add Cas to that list. He cuddled into the warm chest being offered, and closed his eyes.

"You wanna tell me about it?" Cas asked, stroking Dean’s hair.

"Flashback," Dean muttered. "Not a big deal."

There was a short silence, then Cas, presumably realising he’d have to prompt for any elaboration, did just that. "Flashback to what?"

Dean sighed. He hadn’t thought about Zach in a long time, and hadn’t spoken about him in even longer.

"I kind of... had a - stalker," he said, quietly. "This creepy old guy used to follow me around, come to all the shows and stuff. I never met him at the gigs; Ellen used to keep everyone at arm’s length,
but they told me I had an obsessed fan. I thought it was funny. Thought he was harmless. Used to make jokes about him.”

Dean paused. It was odd. Sometimes he felt like his younger self still existed; like that poor clueless boy was still present, and Dean wanted to protect him. He swallowed hard and finished his story, grateful for the soothing movement of Cas’ hand in his hair, and Cas’ chest going up and down under his cheek.

“One time he crashed a party I was at, and pretended to be a record producer. He roofied my drink.”

Cas’ hand froze.

“He stripped me naked, laid me on his hotel bed and jerked off all over my feet,” Dean said, detaching himself from the memory and just reciting the facts, like he’d done in court. Training himself to say it robotically was the only way he could testify without wanting to puke.

“He finished just as the hotel security broke down the door.”

Cas wrapped both his arms around Dean, and squeezed him tightly.

“Oh god, Dean, that’s abhorrent, I’m so sorry,” he said.

Dean squeezed back. “It’s okay,” he told Cas. “It fucked me up for a while, but I’m okay. He got sent down for a few months. To this day, if he ever comes within fifty feet of me, he’s toast.”

After Zach’s trial, Dean had felt kind of vulnerable, though he didn’t want anyone to know. He’d gone to stay with Benny for a week. He’d pretended that the visit had been planned months in advance, but in truth it was a last-minute trip born out of Dean’s need to be with his friend. Benny was probably the only person in Dean’s life whom he didn’t feel like he had to protect. With Benny, he felt protected.

“When did it happen?” Cas asked.

“Ninety eight,” Dean said. “I was twenty.”

“Oh, Dean,” Cas sounded angry.

“It was all kept really quiet. As much as Bobby and Ellen wanted to make me more famous, that really wasn’t the way any of us wanted to get into the national press.”

Cas didn’t say anything, just held Dean close. Dean registered that his heart had gone back to its normal pace.

“It could have been a lot worse,” he said, quietly. “I mean, he could have actually…”

“Please don’t!” Cas snapped.

Dean sat up a little and looked into Cas’ face, curious at that reaction.

“I’m sorry,” Cas said, almost instantly. “I didn’t mean to bark that out like that. I just… the thought of someone doing that to you makes me really mad.”

Dean let a smirk form at the side of his mouth. “Told you you were possessive,” he teased.

Cas didn’t look amused. “Dean,” he began, curling a hand round Dean’s arm. “If you’re still having nightmares about this, fifteen years later, then maybe it’s a bigger deal than you think.”
Dean dropped his eyes. “I guess,” he said, quietly. “It’s not like I have them all the time though, Cas. It’s been a good few years since my subconscious threw up that shit.”

Cas huffed a slightly bitter laugh. “Yeah, my subconscious can be a real dick, too,” he said.

“Bad dreams?” Dean frowned, wriggling down the bed, and lying on his side.

Cas arranged himself in an almost mirroring position, propped up on one arm, looking at Dean.

“Kind of,” he said. “More like premonitions.”

“No shit!” Dean was impressed. “So you’re psychic?”

“Maybe,” Cas frowned. “‘Hyper-intuitive’ I think is more accurate.”

Dean grinned. “Did you know I was coming, then?”

Cas grinned back. “Actually, yes.”

“Dude, what?”

Cas licked his lips and looked up at the ceiling. “It’s difficult to explain,” he told Dean. “I didn’t dream about you, I just dreamed of symbols and metaphors and stuff. My mind conjures up visual representations for me that mean different things, and I have to interpret. I don’t know, it’s not really an exact science.”

Dean was fascinated. He wasn’t a religious man, but he loved anything spiritual and other-worldly. He’d watched an awesome set of documentaries about the occult, and people who called themselves Wiccans. He found it all very cool, and always thought it was a real shame that there were so many fraudulent ‘psychics’ making a mockery of the whole culture. He’d always genuinely believed that there were people who could access another side, or tap into a deeper part of their mind or whatever.

It was pretty cool that Cas had this gift. There had been a lady called Missouri who was friends with Ellen back in the day. According to Ellen, Missouri was a medium, and could connect with Dean’s mother, but Dean had been too weirded out by the idea to try it at the time. Maybe one day.

“Do you ever predict major stuff, like, world events?”

Cas shook his head. “No, just things that directly affect me, personally. It’s like my mind gives me a heads up about an emotion I’m going to be experiencing.”

“You have any recently?”

Cas went quiet. Dean suddenly felt bad for prying; maybe Cas didn’t like to talk about it. Maybe flashes of the future weren’t to be shared.

“A week ago, actually,” Cas said, finally. “It wasn’t good. I hate that I kind of know but not really, so I can’t do anything.”

A yawn escaped from Dean before he could even try to hold it back.

Cas smiled at Dean and stroked his hair. “You okay, now?”

Dean smiled back, eyelids drooping now that the adrenaline had left him. “Yeah. Thanks.”
Cas leaned forward to close the short gap between them, and kissed Dean softly on the lips.

“Let's go back to sleep, then,” Cas whispered.

Chapter End Notes

**if you need a warning for the non-con element, it’s a flashback of creepy stalker Zachariah who spikes Dean’s drink, takes him to a hotel room and jerks off onto his feet. That's all that happens before they're discovered and Dean is rescued. If you don't want to read that part, avoid the Italic section after they eat dinner**
Don't Live Too Fast

Outside the London Dungeons
Friday, June 21st, 2013

Dean: I definitely didn't jump or scream or get scared in any way.

Benny: I believe you brother. So are we ready for the weekend?

Dean: Oh we are READY baby ;)

Dean had enlisted Charlie and Ash’s help in finding the perfect Bachelor Party venue for Benny on Sunday. He’d also called B’s best man, Leo, to synchronise plans for their respective grooms. Balthazar was to have a crazily expensive lunch on the Saturday, and then they were all going to head to the Rabbit and Hounds for Drag night.

Benny had told Dean to bring Cas, who had predictably tried to decline, citing that it was bad manners to attend a party for someone you don't know. But, once Dean had activated the patented Winchester ‘Sad Puppy Dog Expression’, Cas had agreed to come.

Benny and Balthazar were allowed at each other’s parties, since they had a lot of the same friends, but they each got to be the center of attention for their day - something which B was living for, and Benny was dreading.

Dean: I'll see you at La Cafe de Rich Fucker at noon tomorrow right?

Benny: Remember to wear a suit brother or you won’t be allowed in. Try not to look like the white trash you are.

Dean: How dare you - the correct term is caucasian garbage.

Dean pocketed his cell as he headed to the station. He had another dinner date with Cas tonight, and he was really excited. His holiday romance was adding a wonderful and very unexpected layer to his trip. His tourist stuff was so fun, too - London was awesome.

As a kid, he never had any vacations like this. Ellen and Bill mostly took them all to activity camps and stuff, where he did horseback-riding and rock climbing and outdoorsy stuff like that. He loved it, but the older he got, the more Dean felt drawn to cities and cultural environments. He had a deep desire to learn about places. He loved museums, and things with tour guides or recorded voices to teach you about what you were looking at. He’d love to see more of Europe; ruined castles and ancient shit. Sam would be the best person for all that, but he had Jenna to go on vacation with. Dean doubted Sam would want to travel with his big dumb brother.

He knew that Cas had done some travelling. Maybe he could get him to be his vacation-buddy, and they could meet up somewhere in the world in summer time, and just go places together. As a potential relationship, it was pretty appealing to Dean. A friend to talk with long-distance, then once every few months you have an awesome trip together and a lot of hot sex.

A Vacationship! he thought, triumphantly. Oh, yeah, I’m definitely suggesting this later.

_____________________________
“And what if someone sees me going in there and takes a picture?” Dean asked. “‘Country Star seen at jail’ - you want that?”

Bobby sighed. “You ain’t that famous, princess,” he said, snide. “Just pull your cap low over your eyes and zip your coat up past your chin. No one’ll give two flyin’ shits.”

Dean looked out of the window at the imposing building that they’d just pulled up next to.

Somewhere inside there was his father, partway through an eighteen week stretch for aggravated assault. Dean hadn’t seen him since last year, when he’d turned up at the Hunter offices without warning, armed with a bottle of Champagne to congratulate Dean on his album. He’d vanished a few hours later. They’d heard nothing from him up until January just gone, when he’d called Bobby, asking for bail money.

“I don’t know why I’m here,” Dean said, quietly.

Bobby patted him affectionately on the leg. “Family is a pain the ass, Dean, but it’s all we have, in the end.”

Dean pulled a face and released his seat belt.

“Let’s get this over with,” he grumbled, pushing his door open.

They went through the indignity of being searched and scanned and checked, then they went and sat at one of the tables in the sterile visiting area. There was minimum security; no call for the phones-through-plastic-windows here. There were just two big guards stationed at each doorway, in case anyone tried to make a run for it or started any trouble.

The various gentlemen being held at the mercy of the state were brought in, and Dean stiffened as he caught sight of John. He looked older and thinner than he had the previous year.

“Hey, guys,” John said, mouth quirking as he sat down opposite them. “How’s it going, Dean?”

“Good,” Dean answered, blandly.

“Climbin’ the charts?” John smiled.

Dean didn’t smile back.

“He’s doin’ great,” Bobby offered. “Both your boys are turnin’ into real fine men.”

John eyeballed Bobby and nodded, slowly. “Unlike me, you mean.”

Bobby put his hands up. “That’s not what I said…”

“But, yeah,” Dean interrupted. “We’re not like you.”

A tight silence descended over the table.

Then John scrubbed his hands over his face.

“Dean, I - I need to apologise,” he said, gruffly.
Dean looked at Bobby, seeing his own surprise mirrored in his surrogate Uncle’s face. He looked back at his father.

“You need to do what?”

“I’ve been having, uh, therapy, I guess,” John said, a little sheepish. “Been talking to this guy, and he thinks I should make a clean slate with you and Sam.”

Dean raised an eyebrow. “So, what is it you’re apologising for, exactly?”

John didn’t respond.

“Oh, are you saying you just need to do it cause your therapist told you to? Am I your homework?”

John shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

“Dean, being an adult - being a father - it doesn’t automatically mean you can handle everything and you won’t fuck up,” he began.

Dean laughed, bitterly. “Here we go,” he said, sitting back in his chair. “Back on the defense.”

Beside him, Bobby folded his arms. “Come on, Dean. Let him finish,” he said.

“Oh sure, yes, please,” Dean sneered. “Let’s hear the rest of this awesome apology.”

John turned his face away and shook his head. That always used to be the precursor to a mean insult or outburst - usually alcohol-induced. He and Bobby had both been on the receiving end of a fair few.

In this instance, though, John just took a deep breath and turned back to his son.

“When your Mom died, I couldn’t face... I blamed myself, I blamed you, I blamed fucking God!”

Dean’s face tightened at the words ‘I blamed you.’, but he didn’t interrupt.

John carried on; “But there was no one to blame, and that’s what fucked me up. It was an accident. Just an accident, but I couldn’t accept it.”

Dean frowned. He wasn’t sure if his father deserved this chance to explain himself, but he guessed he could at least hear the guy out.

“I’d been raised,” John said, wringing his hands a little, “to believe that everything happens for a reason. Fate or whatever, right? Believed that I was destined to meet your mom and have you kids. Then she gets taken away from me. And I was meant to believe there was a reason for that?”

Dean said nothing.

“To suddenly be faced with the idea that maybe there isn’t some grand plan, and that shitty things just happen, and good people just die for no reason…”

John stopped, and looked down at the table.

“I let you down,” he stated. “I know I let you down. And Sammy.”

Dean waited for the “I’m so sorry” to be added, but it wasn’t.
“I know I’ve got a lot of missed birthdays to make up for…”

Dean suddenly lost his shit.

“Birthdays?!” he yelled, quickly lowering his voice when the prison guards looked over at him. “It’s not about birthdays. You missed everything.”

John opened his mouth to speak, but Dean didn’t give him the chance. He put his forearms on the table and leaned forward.

“Do you know what my first girlfriend was called?” he asked, knowing he wasn’t going to wait for an attempt at an answer. “Do you remember the first home run I got in Little League? Did you teach me how to shave? Talk to me about fucking wet dreams?!”

John lowered his eyes.

Dean could sense Bobby looking at him, probably assessing when to jump in and tell him to calm down. But fuck that, Dean had some home truths for his Dad, and they were coming out right now.

“I lost my Mom at five years old,” Dean said, trying his best to keep his voice level and calm. “And instead of sticking around to comfort me, you fucking took off!”

John winced.

“You fucking ran away, and you fucked yourself up trying to stop yourself from actually dealing with your responsibilities. So you don’t get to sit there telling me your fucking therapist gave you an out because you were raised to believe in predestiny.”

“Dean…” John started.

“No,” Dean snapped. “You said you want to apologise but you can’t even do that. This is all just a self-serving crock of shit to try and make yourself feel better. You want to make a clean slate? Translation - you want us to forgive and forget the fact that you didn’t give a shit, and that we saw you a maximum of three times a year.”

Dean shook his head, still incredulous at what the fuck his Dad had been thinking all these years. If and when he has kids, he’ll move mountains to be with them and protect them, whatever happens.

“When Bobby said you wanted to see me, I almost told him to shove it, but he and Bill convinced me to come,” he told John. “And you know why I agreed?”

John shook his head, looking defeated.

“Because I respect them, and I’m happy to take their advice,” Dean shot, hoping that would fucking sting.

“Sam and I ended up with two pretty good fathers in the end, and neither of them were you,” he added, noting the hurt in John’s eyes, and thinking he fucking deserved it. “And, yeah, I miss Mom
like hell, but Ellen did a fucking fantastic job.”

John nodded, slowly and sadly.

“If it weren’t for them,” Dean pressed, anger rising again. “Sam and I would’ve ended up in care. And god knows, without them all showing me love and encouragement, I probably would’ve ended up in here right along with you.”

Dean stood up, the legs of his chair scraping the floor as he pushed it back. He softened his body language as much as he could, aware that if he looked like he was about to start a fight, he’d be forcibly removed.

He looked down at his father.

“So fuck your apology,” he hissed. “Not only is it insincere as fuck; turns out I don’t fucking need it. And I don’t need you.”

Dean grabbed his jacket and stormed out of the room towards the security gate, not bothering to look back.

Hatfield, Hertfordshire
Friday, June 21st, 2013

Cas had spent all day worrying about Dean.

More accurately, Cas had spent all day trying to dispel from his mind images of young Dean being molested by creepy old guys, and feeling increasingly protective and possessive.

Given Cas’ job, he was naturally good at empathising with vulnerable people, and even though he cared about his charges very much, he always retained an appropriate level of professional detachment. When he thought about Dean and the horrible man he’d been dreaming about, however, Cas felt positively murderous.

Dean had apparently had another good tourist day in the London Dungeons, and now the two of them were sitting in Dean’s apartment, having partaken of the classic English takeout; ‘Fish and Chips’. It was early evening, and they were sitting on the floor, watching reruns of Miami Ink, discussing the relative bangability of Chris Garver and Ami James.

“He looks like a short, bald Jon Bon Jovi,” Dean decided.

Cas laughed. “Oh my god, he does!”

Dean was leaning against the couch, and Cas was in between Dean’s legs, resting back against his chest. Dean was lazily running his hands up and down Cas’ legs and sides.

“But I guess I still would,” Dean said, thoughtfully.

“Charlie has often spoken of the unholy things she would do to Kat Von D,” Cas mused, hopelessly comfortable, arms relaxed over Dean’s legs.

“Unholy, huh?,” Dean asked, with a little chuckle. “I’m sure Miss Von D would be down for it; she seems the adventurous type.”

They watched quietly for a few minutes, as the subject of their discussion expertly drew the portrait
of a recently-deceased Bulldog onto a man’s arm.

Then Dean asked; “Who did your tattoo?”

Cas had been wondering if and when Dean would ask about it - the things they’d done, there was no way he wouldn’t have seen it by now.

“This guy in Malaysia,” Cas told him.

“It’s very cool,” Dean praised.

“Thank you,” Cas said, snuggling in a bit more into Dean, like he wasn’t already as close as he could get. “My wings mean a lot to me.”

Dean kissed Cas just underneath his ear. “They’re gorgeous,” he whispered. “Really suit you.”

Cas closed his eyes, silently mocking himself for being so easily turned on.

“What does yours mean?” he asked the perpetrator of his increased libido. “I know a few languages, but that’s not one of them.”

One of Dean’s hands had made its way to Cas’ zipper, and was up to mischief.

“It’s Enochian,” Dean said, mouth all over Cas’ neck and shoulder. “Ancient language of the Angels, so you should really learn it.”

Cas laughed, and bucked a little at Dean’s touch. “I really should…”

Dean’s fingers had made short work of Cas’ fly, and had crept inside. Cas gasped.

“It means ‘stay simple’,” Dean murmured.

“Good advice,” Cas whispered, turning his head to catch Dean’s lips.

They kissed for a little while, unhurried, while Dean stroked Cas’ cock, knuckles pushing against the inside of Cas’ underwear.

Cas could feel Dean getting hard against his lower back, and he was inexplicably flooded with the desire to do something he hadn’t done since the previous millennium. He turned himself around, and stood up. He beckoned down to Dean to stand up with him.

Dean did, but he took his time with the journey, stopping en route to kiss various parts of Cas’ legs and torso.

By the time he got up to Cas’ face, Cas was a bit breathless, and more set on his new plan than ever.

He kissed Dean’s neck, and softly told him; “I wanna ride you.”

Dean pulled his face back, and looked at Cas, curiously.

“You want me to - top?”

Cas smiled. “From the bottom, yes.”

Dean grinned. “Wait here…”

Dean disappeared to the bathroom, and Cas made the proactive decision to get naked. He tossed his
clothes wherever, and moved one of Dean’s dining chairs into the middle of the room. He hoped the owners of this apartment didn’t mind the level of defiling that their furniture was being subjected to lately.

Dean returned, also in a state of glorious nudity, armed with a condom and a bottle of lube.

“Have a seat,” Cas smiled, tapping the back of his chosen chair.

Dean did as he was told, and Cas helped himself to the products in Dean’s hands.

He knelt down in front of Dean, and lavished his balls and cock with some serious oral attention. Dean moaned, and Cas wondered how loud his lover was going to get when they did it this way round. He would certainly miss Dean’s screams if they weren't delivered; he found them so fucking hot. Maybe Dean would make him scream, instead...

Releasing Dean for a moment, Cas liberally applied some lube to his own fingers. He knelt up, took Dean back into his mouth again, and reached behind his lower back to work himself open.

“Jesus, Cas,” Dean breathed, and Cas felt him shift a little, presumably to get a better view of what Cas was doing.

Once he was satisfied that he was as ready as he’d ever be, Cas pulled his fingers out of himself, slid his lips off Dean's smooth and sexy dick, and got out the condom. As he rolled it onto Dean, a brief wish that they could be together long enough to get to the No Protection Necessary stage crossed his mind, but he banished it pretty quickly.

He coated Dean in lube, then straddled his lap.

Dean was looking up at him, eyes wide, and mouth slack. Cas could not fucking resist that mouth, and he leaned forward for a kiss.

Dean put a hand behind Cas’ head, and kissed him back, passionate and forceful.

Cas reached under himself to hold Dean’s cock steady while he lowered himself onto it, and gasped into Dean’s mouth as he was breached.

Dean put his hands on Cas’ hips, and broke the kiss to ask; “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Cas breathed. “Just let me….”

Cas circled his hips, and took his time sinking all the way down. Once he had, he stayed still for a while to let his body get used to the idea. It didn’t take too long, and soon he was raising and lowering himself in a steady rhythm.

“You feel really good,” Dean whispered.

Cas smiled. He was a little overwhelmed - it had been a really long time since he’d taken anyone like this, and the need to have Dean inside him had come over him with no warning. And it really had been a need more than a want. He’d needed Dean; needed so badly to feel this.

Cas had his hands on Dean’s shoulders, and occasionally moved his fingers to stroke Dean’s neck.

“You're so fucking gorgeous, Dean,” he told him. “And - I really like the way you fuck.”

Dean closed his eyes and and let out a soft vocalised sigh.
“Your cock...” Cas went on. “Feels so good inside me.”

“Fuck, I love how you talk during sex,” Dean smiled, breathing hard. “You're so fuckin’ sexy… Talk to me some more, Cas.”

Cas smiled back.

“Love feeling your hands on my waist,” he said, leaning to kiss Dean’s neck in between sentences. “You're strong… I love the fact that you could lift me up if you wanted…”

Dean gripped Cas’ waist a little tighter, and bounced him on his cock a little harder.

Cas made a surprised yelping sound. “Shit, that feels so good,” he said, letting his head fall forward.

“Tell me when your legs get tired, okay?” Dean said, starting to get a bit breathless. “We can change position.”

Cas bit down on Dean’s shoulder, and Dean groaned in pleasure.

“Fuck, baby,” he said, head dropping back.

“Let's move,” Cas whispered.

Dean held Cas down on his dick, keeping him still. He put a hand on Cas’ ass and heaved them both up, using his other hand to push off the chair. Cas wrapped his legs and arms around Dean and kissed his neck as they went.

Dean almost stayed inside Cas for the duration of the journey, but the movement as he walked knocked him out, and Cas made a disappointed sound as Dean slipped free of him.

“Miss me already?” Dean quipped, voice strained with his exertion.

“Mm-hmm,” Cas said, into his neck. “Get back in me soon.”

Dean sat Cas down on the dining table and they kissed with romance-movie fervour.

Dean had his hands tight in Cas’ hair, and was completely on board with the way their cocks were kind of gently knocking together while they kissed.

He truly hadn't expected Cas to want it like this; assumed he was exclusively a top. In truth, Dean preferred it the other way around, but penetration feels fucking good from either side, and he was happy to give Cas anything he wanted.

He repositioned them, manhandling Cas so he was standing in front of the table with his back to Dean.

Dean kissed the back of Cas’ neck, inducing a full body shiver, and he traced his fingertips all over Cas’ chest and down to his cock. Dean stroked his lover slowly, and gently pushed him forward so he was bent over the table. Then Dean reasserted himself inside Cas’ ass, and Cas cried out softly.

“You okay, sweetheart?” Dean asked, voice low and cracked.

He would have kind of loved to take his time with Cas, get real romantic with him and make him feel special, but that wasn't what this was right now.

“Yeah,” Cas breathed. “Oh god, Dean, fuck me…”
“Yes, sir.”

Dean let go of Cas’ cock and held on to his hips. He pounded into Cas roughly, and the loud response he got spurred him to go even harder.

“Dean, Dean, yes, yes!”

Not forgetting Cas’ little admission the other morning that he enjoyed being spanked, Dean chanced a little slap to one butt cheek.

The noise Cas made was halfway between a sob and a scream, and Dean smiled to himself as he put his hand back on Cas’ perfect hip bone.

He channelled all his energy into his pistoning hips, and felt his climax surging.

“I’m… gonna come,” Dean gasped, and about two seconds later that’s exactly what he did.

The orgasm tore out of him, taking a shaky scream with it, and he stilled inside Cas, fingers still digging into his sides.

Dean pulled out slowly, holding on to the end of the condom - because he’d accidentally left one inside a girl once when he was a teenager and had to retrieve it, which was all kinds of awkward, so he never risked that again - then he turned Cas around with the intention of sucking him off to his own completion.

Dean knelt down, tugging off the condom as he went, and found that Cas was wet and softening in front of his face. He looked up in surprise. Cas was red-faced, panting slightly and chewing his lip.

“Dude, did you - ?”

Cas smiled out the side of his mouth. “I've only ever done that once before,” he said.

Dean stood up and looked at Cas in amazement. “You can come without anyone touching your dick? I thought that shit was a myth!”

Cas laughed. “Well, like I say, that's only the second time it's happened to me.”

“Fuck,” Dean smiled, tying-off and tossing the condom over into the trash can, then pulling Cas in for a tight hug. “I made you come just from my cock… I'm gonna fucking milk that forever!”

“Nice choice of words,” Cas observed, rubbing his hands over Dean’s back and resting his forehead on his shoulder.

The two men stood there for a while, both of them glowing with post-coital satisfaction, sharing body heat and breathing in sync, hands gently caressing and squeezing.

“You wanna take a shower?” Dean rumbled in Cas’ ear.

“Mm-hm,” came the tired response.

Dean pulled back so he could look at Cas’ face. He smiled when their eyes met, and kissed Cas once on the lips.

“You're hot,” he told him.

Cas hummed a laugh. “Ditto.”
“I'll go get you a towel,” Dean said, and turned to walk out of the room, putting an extra little swagger into his walk cause he assumed - correctly - that Cas would be watching his ass.

When Dean came back into the room, having laid out a nice clean towel on top of the tank ready for Cas, he found the man in question on all fours, half under the dining table.

“Well, there's a view,” Dean said.

Cas laughed and stood up, holding some damp kitchen paper in his hand.

“Good house guests never leave spunk drying on a laminate floor,” he declared.

“Hmmm,” Dean mused. “He talks dirty, comes untouched, cleans up after himself… Maybe I should keep you.”

“If only,” Cas said, then he froze, and awkwardness crossed his face.

“Anyway,” he said. “I am going to throw this away and take my shower.”

He walked passed Dean without looking at him.

Dean started to say something but stopped himself. Instead, he watched Cas go, then went to his bedroom to retrieve his sweat pants.

*Stupid thing to fuckin say,* he admonished himself. ‘*keep you!’ Way to make everything weird, Winchester.*

He came back into the living area and sat down on his couch. He threw the TV on, but was only half-watching it. He was listening to the sound of the shower, and imagining Cas all soapy in there. It didn’t seem to matter how much time they spent together or how much sex they had, Dean was insatiable when it came to that blue-eyed, raven-haired, fine-ass…

A cheap ringtone started playing, and Dean went over to the source of the sound. Cas’ cellphone was in the pocket of his jeans, which were still lying where they’d been haphazardly strewn on the floor. Dean fished it out and looked at the caller I.D. The shower shut off.

“Cas!” Dean called. “Charlie’s calling you!”
Once I Rose Above the Noise and Confusion

The Rabbit and Hounds, Camden
Sunday, September 18th, 2011

Cas had never met a Scottish person before. He kept having to ask Rowena to repeat herself, cause her accent was pretty thick, and he was having trouble following her.

“Gavin’s father is English,” she was telling him. “I moved here for him, but he fucked off years ago.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Cas said, readjusting his position on his bar stool, and taking a sip of his drink.

“Oh, don’t be,” Rowena assured him, waving her immaculately manicured hand in the air. “Absolute waste of space…”

Crowley walked past them at that moment, and Cas presumed Rowena’s next words were specifically for him.

“…like most English men.”

Crowley stopped, and turned slowly to face them, a dry smile on his face, and nothing good in his eyes. Cas swallowed, and looked sideways at Rowena. Charlie had warned him about these two.

“My dear darling Rowena,” Crowley said, in that husky and rather threatening tone. “Don’t tar us all with the same brush as the poor unfortunate sap from whom you stole reproductive seed at the age of sixteen.”

Cas smirked at the bar owner’s choice of words, then frowned when it dawned on him that Rowena had had Gavin at sixteen.

Rowena rolled her eyes and pressed her thin, red lips together.

“Most Englishmen are an utter delight,” Crowley deadpanned.

Rowena snorted with derision. “Are you including yourself in that generalisation?” she demanded. “Because you are many things, Fergus, but a ‘delight’ is not one of them.”

“I’ve told you before,” Crowley sneered, through his teeth, eyes narrowing. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why?” Rowena protested. “It’s the only good thing about you - strong Scottish name like that.”

“What can I say? I’m multicultural,” Crowley shrugged.

“Look,” he continued, indicating Cas. “I even allow people from the colonies in the pub now.”

Cas raised an eyebrow, but didn’t take offense. He’d got the impression that as surly and rude as Crowley was, it was all to be taken with a pinch of salt.

“And very lovely they are, too,” Rowena said, laying a hand protectively on Cas’ wrist.

“Oh, so you’re going to try your luck with American men, are you?” Crowley said, amused. “Run out of British ones?”
Rowena plastered a sugary sweet smile on her face. “Fuck off, Fergus,” she said, in a sing-song voice.

Crowley narrowed his eyes. “You can’t talk to your employer like that.”

“You didn’t employ me. Bela did,” Rowena told him, demurely. “And I’m not working at the moment.”

“I can still fire your celtic arse all the way back across the border, sweetheart!” Crowley asserted, the volume of his voice ascending parallel to his blood pressure.

There was a short silence, as the other patrons of the pub stopped talking to look over at the noise. Crowley glanced at them, then cleared his throat and calmed himself down.

“Stop slagging off English boys,” he concluded. “And - a piece of advice…”

He leaned close to Rowena’s face, but Cas caught every word.

“This one wouldn’t be interested, even if he did like girls.”

With that, Crowley swaggered off to his office.

Rowena released Cas’ wrist, and smiled at him, awkwardly.

“I wasn’t suggesting…” she began, but Cas cut her off with a raised hand.

“I know, it’s fine,” he assured her.

“I wasn’t hitting on you - I know you’re gay,” she told him. “I’ve seen you at Charlie’s meetings.”

Cas smiled, and nodded. “Well, don’t listen to Crowley,” he said, nudging her with his upper arm. “I’d totally be interested if I liked girls.”

Rowena’s heavily made-up eyes sparkled, and she beamed. Cas suddenly felt a little bit sorry for her. She must not be used to getting compliments, if that was her reaction.

“You mean that?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” Cas told her, sincerely. “You’re very pretty and you’re into jazz - what’s not to like?”

“The fact that I’m a thirty-five year old single mother?” she said, curling her lip.

“Hey,” Cas said. “You raised a kid all by yourself. You were young, and that's hard. You're a superhero.”

Rowena’s eyes widened and she blushed, then buried herself in her glass of wine.

“I’ve met Gavin,” Cas added. “You did a great job; he’s a really nice guy.”


 Charlie’s House, Finchley, London
 Friday, June 21st, 2013
Tamara came out of Charlie’s kitchen with a coffee each for Dean and Cas. She handed them over, then stood leaning against the door frame.

Cas was on the couch next to Dean, who had his hand resting supportively on Cas’ knee. They’d driven down to North London in Cas’ car as soon as the phone call had ended. The journey had only taken about thirty minutes, the traffic gods evidently on their side, and they’d pretty much been silent the entire time.

Charlie was sitting down cross-legged on the rug in front of the television. Ash and Meg were in the armchairs, little Audrey asleep on Meg’s lap. Bailey, the Spaniel that belonged to Charlie’s housemate, padded over to put her head on Charlie’s leg, and Charlie absentmindedly scratched her ears.

No one really knew what to say to each other. It was late, and they’d all had a terrible shock.

Rowena had suffered a brain aneurysm that afternoon. Apparently there had been no symptoms or warning signs, and she’d been dead before she hit the floor. Gavin had called Charlie, and Charlie had been given the awful task of spreading the news to the others.

Cas had really felt that he needed to be with his friends. He’d told Dean that he didn’t have to come with him, but Dean had insisted, and Cas found that he was grateful for that.

“So where’s Gavin, now?” Ash asked, breaking the silence.

“He just left the hospital,” Charlie said. “I told him he could sleep here if he didn’t wanna be alone, but he said he wants to go home. I think his Grandmother’s coming down in the morning.”

“This sucks,” Meg declared. “I liked that crazy Scottish cougar.”

Charlie smiled, sadly, and Cas noticed that Meg cuddled Audrey a little bit tighter. He felt his eyes fill up again. He’d already cried once at Dean’s house when Charlie had told him what had happened, and fucking hell he needed to get a grip.

“Excuse me,” he said, with a sniff, standing up and putting his mug of coffee down. “I just need to get some air.”

“You okay, honey?” Charlie asked.

“I’m fine,” Cas muttered. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

He walked through the living room out to the back garden. He took a deep, shaky breath, and sat down on the raised decking, feet dangling just above the grass beneath.

He sat there with his eyes closed for a few minutes, face turned skyward, then he heard the sound of the sliding door behind him. He opened his eyes, just as Dean sat down next to him on the wooden deck.

“Hey,” Dean said, softly.

“Hey,” Cas echoed, feeling a tiny bit better just from Dean’s proximity.

Cas gazed up at the stars for a little while, glad that Dean didn’t try to press him to share his thoughts.

Cas liked the sky. It reminded him how insignificant he was, which was a great relief, sometimes. As much as he wanted to make a difference in people’s lives, and try and leave the world better than he
found it, it was occasionally nice to remember that, in the great scheme of things, he was really very unimportant. Everything he’d ever done or said would be entirely forgotten, eventually.

He sighed, feeling an almost tangible pain rising up inside him. The giant ball of regret which had settled in his gut ever since he heard Charlie’s sad voice on the phone. Cas didn’t know if he was strong enough to deal with all this. Not again.

“I knew it,” he said, mostly to himself. “The saxophone.”

“What?”

Cas breathed out, hard, and stared at Dean. He’d buried his dream to the point where he’d very nearly forgotten about it, but he’d known this was coming.

“You know how I said my mind sometimes generates things for me to interpret? Visual representations?”

“Yeah,” Dean replied, with a frown.

“I dreamed about a saxophone last week. A saxophone, for me, means jazz,” Cas explained. “Sax equals jazz, jazz equals Rowena.”

“Okay, so you had a dream about jazz,” Dean said, putting his hand on Cas’ thigh. “Doesn’t mean you knew Rowena was going to die.”

Cas huffed out a bitter laugh. "I did, though,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“In the dream I also stepped on a lily, and lilies mean death.”

“Why do lilies mean death?”

“I don’t know!” Cas snapped.

Dean drew his hand away, and Cas hated himself for making Dean do that.

“I’m sorry,” he said, and rubbed his hands over his face.

He heard Dean take a deep breath, which he released as a heavy sigh. Cas didn’t want Dean to leave him out here, so he started to talk.

“After my mom died, my friend Pamela and I looked up all these symbols,” he said, the mention of Pamela adding another thread to his existing emotional tangle. “We found that lilies are associated with death. I must have read that somewhere, or been told it, and that’s why my subconscious gives it to me.”

There was no reply. Cas wondered whether Dean thought he was nuts. Poor guy didn't sign up for all this shit.

“But I had no idea how it would happen,” Cas said, frustrated. “With my mom, or with Pamela, and they were the closest people to me. Rowena… she - I don’t know, she could have been about to be attacked by a rabid dog for all I knew, or fall down the stairs. I didn’t - I never really know.”

Dean still didn’t say anything. Cas didn’t blame him. He wasn’t sure what he would’ve said, if the situation was reversed. This was all so weird and messed up.
“I just pushed it away,” Cas confessed, feeling so unbearably guilty. “I was so distracted by you, and us, and I literally forgot all about it. I’m so selfish, I can’t believe I did that, I could have told her.”

“Come on, Cas, don’t do that,” Dean said, hurriedly. “What were you supposed to do? Go up to her and be like, ‘hey I think you might die soon, so watch out for that’?”

Cas shook his head. Maybe that’s exactly what he should have done.

“I could’ve told her to go see the doctor,” he suggested, quietly. “Maybe a doctor would’ve been able to catch it.”

Dean threaded his fingers through Cas’, holding his hand. It was firm and comforting, and Cas hadn’t realised he needed it until Dean did it.

“And she would’ve said what to her doctor?” Dean asked, gently. “‘My friend had a dream about a saxophone and a lily, so could I get a quick once-over?’”

Cas closed his eyes and let his head fall forward. He felt Dean’s hand close tighter around his own. He knew Dean was right. Even if Rowena had gone to the doctor, chances are there wouldn’t have been any sign of the impending anuerysm. A lot of the time they’re undetectable until it’s too late.

“You couldn’t have stopped this, baby,” Dean said, quietly. “Please don’t punish yourself.”

Dean put his other arm around Cas’ shoulders. “Were you good friends?” he asked.

“Not especially,” Cas admitted, heart a bit warmer from the ‘baby’ Dean had uttered. “I just - I really liked her a lot. She had a hard life. And Charlie adored her. I feel so sad for Gavin, too.”

“Yeah,” said Dean. “Sucks that we both know how he feels.”

They sat quietly together for a little while, and Dean rubbed Cas’ back while Cas contemplated the horrible loss that he and Dean, and now Gavin, had in common.

“Will you stay at my house tonight, please?” he asked Dean, surprisingly himself by saying it out loud.

“Sure,” Dean said. “Of course I will, Cas, whatever you need.”

Dean put his arm all the way round Cas’ shoulders, and pulled him in, to lean against his arm. Cas closed his eyes again, and let his body relax at Dean’s side. They stayed like that for a short time, Cas enjoying the sensation of just being held.

“Want me to drive us back?” Dean asked, softly.

Cas looked up at him. “You would be happy to drive my car?” he enquired, unconvinced.

"Hey, now,” Dean scolded. “She has a name, you know.”

* * *

Outside Madame Jojo’s club, Soho, London
Saturday, June 22nd, 2013

“I’ve gotta hand it to you, Leo,” Dean laughed. “That was not what I was expecting you to organise!”
The daytime portion of Balthazar’s bachelor party had been in a legendary London nightclub, which Leo had hired for a Burlesque-themed slap-up lunch. It wasn’t anywhere close to the stiff and stuffy luncheon that Dean had feared he was in for. The entertainment had been top-notch, and the food and drink were definitely worth the money.

They wasn’t a single straight dude or woman in sight, except for the dancers, and Dean had been hit on more in the last three hours than he had in his whole life. He’d also had his ass grabbed a few times by a few of the guys, including the groom of honor himself, who was already five Manhattans deep.

Dean felt kind of bad about spending the day drinking straight after hearing about Rowena’s death. Okay, she hadn’t exactly been a friend of his, but he cared about her by association, and it just felt a bit disrespectful. Cas had told him not to be stupid, and that this was the whole point of Dean’s trip - to celebrate with his best friend. Dean couldn’t argue with that, but had subtly been checking up on his increasingly-not-so-casual-holiday-romance all day.

Dean: You okay angel butt?

Cas: This is Charlie on Cas’ phone! We’re not too bad hon, you’re sweet to check :) Also - angel butt?! The only way that’s acceptable is if you’re already drunk Dean lol

Dean: I have no regrets. That ass comes straight from Heaven.

Cas: thank you Dean ;) i now have my phone back

Dean: Hey baby how you feeling?

Cas: sad but okay. charlie’s teary but fighting it. we’ve just got to bar, i’m helping her set up.

Dean had seen for the first time last night just how much Cas’ group of friends meant to him. There was a strong bond between all of them, based on a lot more than just being strangers in a foreign land. When Cas had gone outside at Charlie’s, they’d all communicated to Dean how worried they were about him, and the love was evident. Even from stone-cold Meg, who hugged Cas the hardest before the boys had left for Hatfield.

Dean had sucked it up and driven that ridiculous car back down the motorway, and had requested total silence so he could concentrate on driving on the wrong side of the road. Fortunately there hadn’t been many other cars out, and he only went the wrong way round one Hertfordshire roundabout. And it was only a really small one.

Back in Cas’ bed, there had been a lot of kissing and some lazy hand jobs. Dean had been ready for Cas to totally not be in the mood, but apparently he’d needed the physical distraction, and Dean wasn’t complaining. He had no words of comfort to offer, but sexual gratification was something he could dish out by the bucket load.

Dean: I’ll see you there later then, got a big hug for you both x x x

“Time for stage two, Dean,” came Leo’s voice. “Let’s crack on!”

Dean smiled at him, and put his phone away in his back pocket.

Everyone was pretty merry, and they were all now headed to Crowley’s bar, for the weekly drag night. Coincidentally, Leo had been there a couple times before, and had booked the place long before Dean ever set foot inside it.
Correction, they were all now headed there except for Balthazar, who was going home first for a costume change. He planned to make a very dramatic entrance once everyone else was already there and waiting for him.

“Don’t keep us in suspense too long, your highness,” Benny teased, kissing his tall fiance on the cheek just before they parted ways.

“It’ll be worth it!” B waved as he climbed into a cab, off back to Kensington.

“Let’s go, then, brother,” Benny said, clapping Dean on the back.

They joined the throng of happy, drunken Bachelors walking towards the tube station. It was fair to say that B’s friends were on the slightly theatrical side, and had no qualms at all about pushing the boundaries of volume and flamboyance as they made their way joyfully down the busy street. Dean and Benny had decided that the only way to make it through the day was to get steaming.

“I love these guys,” Benny murmured, affectionately. “But, damn, some days I’m too country for all this.”

Dean smiled. “I’d rather this, than a bunch of uptight snooty English douchebags, which is what I thought we were gonna get today,” he said. “They’re fun! Loud, and kinda grabby… but fun.”

Benny chuckled as he lit a cigarette.

“Your boyfriend gonna be there tonight?” he asked, and Dean rolled his eyes.

“Not my boyfriend, but yes, he is.”

Dean’s insides were apparently being controlled by a horny teenager today, because at the merest suggestion of Cas, he was tingly and hot, and smiling involuntarily.

Benny exhaled, and laughed at him. “Damn, look at that face!”

Dean tried to control his features, and failed.

“You are gone, brother!” Benny declared. “Game over. Tell all the boys and girls to stand down!”

Dean shook his head. “Please get fucked,” he requested, dryly. “I’m allowed to enjoy a little vacation tail.”

“Tail, my ass,” Benny scoffed. “I know you, and I know that look, and this is someone you like a whole lot, so man up and admit it.”

They reached the steps of the station, and paused at the top so Benny could finish his cigarette. Dean put his hands in his pockets and sighed.

“Yes, okay, he’s awesome,” he conceded, resisting the urge to slap the smug off of Benny’s face. “But people don’t stay that awesome for long, and no one’s interested in some fucking long-distance cry your heart out over Skype every day relationship.”

Benny shook his head.

“But,” Dean began, before his friend could give him a hard time. “I do have a plan.”

“A plan?”
“Yeah,” Dean said. “A proposal.”

Benny eyebrows shot up.

“Obviously not that kind of proposal.”

Benny flicked his cigarette away and they started down the steps, voices getting a little more echoey the further they descended.

“So, what then?” Benny asked. “What are you proposing?”

“I’m gonna see if he wants to be, like, my travelling buddy,” Dean said. “You know, see if he wants to meet up once or twice a year and see the world together.”

Benny didn’t respond, just looked sideways at Dean. Dean knew this was a winning idea, so he elaborated further to get Benny on board.

“It’s perfect,” he insisted. “We’re independent, doin’ our thing, then every few months we pick a destination, go on a little adventure, and have a whole bunch of hotel-shaking sex.”

Dean mentally made a quick list of all the places he thought Cas would love.

“Then we go our separate ways again til next time,” he smiled. “No getting bored of each other, no fights, no rules.”

They reached the platform, and found the rest of their party, who had burst into spontaneous song while waiting for the train, and evidently were being a source of entertainment for the assorted other travellers.

Dean and Benny elected to stay a respectable distance from them, but watched and applauded along with the rest of the platform when the nutty bunch were done. The underground train roared toward them out of the nearby tunnel shortly after, came to a somewhat squeaky stop, and they all squeezed on.

“It’s a great plan, Dean,” Benny told him, as the sliding doors closed just behind them.

Dean brightened. “You think?”

The train sped off into the dark.

“Sure,” Benny said. “However, it does kinda rely on one assumption.”

“What assumption?” Dean frowned.

“The assumption that he’s just gonna wait around til the next trip.”

The train clanked and squealed a little round a curve, and Dean held onto the handrail to keep himself balanced.

Fuck. Good point.

Why in the world would Cas just wait around? Why would Cas take him up on this stupid offer, when another man might offer him real stuff like security and a family? Cas is amazing, and would definitely meet someone else. Even if they did do one or two trips, eventually he’d have to turn Dean down cause he’d want to go on vacation with his actual boyfriend.
“Sorry, brother,” Benny said, clearly noting the dejected look on Dean’s face.

“No, no, you’re right,” Dean agreed. “Dumb plan.”

“S’not _dumb_…”

“Yeah, it is.”

They looked at each other for a few seconds, before one of B’s friends swung himself into Dean’s personal space.

“You’re _so_ gorgeous, Dean,” the guy - _Adam? Andrew?_ - told him. “Will you marry me?”

“Not today,” Dean grinned.

“Leave the man alone,” Benny scolded. “You don’t want his boyfriend to see you all over him like that when we get to the bar.”

Adam or Andrew, or maybe even Aidan, looked devastated. “Boyfriend?” he cried, and pantomimed the fainting maiden, landing heavily in Dean’s arms. “I may never recover.”

Dean shook his head and rolled his eyes at Benny, who was laughing affectionately at the pair of them.
Nashville, Tennessee  
June 12th, 1997

Dean put his arm around his date, and smiled his much-practiced Red Carpet smile. Not that he was on a red carpet. He was on a dark gray carpet, headed up to the foyer of a three star hotel to attend the album launch of another of Hunter’s acts: the lady currently on his arm. Her name was Lisa Braeden, and she sang, and played a pretty badass electric violin, though not at the same time.

Ellen had set the two of them up some weeks ago, mostly just for both their images, but also cause she genuinely thought they’d hit it off. Which they did.

Dean liked Lisa a lot. She was funny and talented, and very pretty. She was also kind of kinky in bed, and excelled in blowing Dean’s mind with moves and acts he hadn’t considered outside his dirtier fantasies.

As well as her physical prowess, Dean digged Lisa’s ambition and ballsiness. She was Canadian, and had a lifelong love of country music, so moved down to Nashville as soon as she turned eighteen, and had plagued Bobby with demo tapes until he agreed to sign her.

Dean was currently more well-known than Lisa in the industry, so he was here to raise her profile, a fact that he kept teasing her about all evening.

“You’re just using me for my charm and fame,” he muttered out the side of his mouth as they grinned for another magazine photographer.

“I’ll be using you for your thick dick later,” she returned, waving innocently and shooting a cute wink at the nearest lens.

Dean coughed, and tried desperately to make his body reroute the blood currently bound for his cock.

Once inside, Dean gave Lisa a kiss as she headed backstage to tune up before her performance.

“Go get ‘em, princess,” he murmured in her ear. “You got this.”

She took a deep breath. “Thanks,” she said, with a genuinely grateful smile. “And, you know, thanks for being my hot and famous arm candy.”

Dean winked. “You’d be nothin’ without me, sugar, ain’t no shame in admitting it!”

Lisa slapped his ass, before being scooted away by Ellen.

Dean went to pose for a few more pictures, then he grabbed a drink and went to sit with Bobby and Garth.

“Hey!” greeted Garth, excitedly. “Ready for the big show?”

“Sure,” Dean said, sitting down. “Love it when that girl does her fiddling.”

“There’ll be no fiddlin’ talk at my table, boy,” Bobby warned.

“C’mon, Bobby, I was talking about her instrument!”
“Uh-huh,” Bobby nodded. “Just make sure you’re treating her with respect, or she won’t wanna feature on this new album you keep harrassin’ me about.”

“Oh, she’ll be on it,” Dean assured. “We’ve already started practicing.”

“I don’t wanna know what you’ve been practicin’…”

“I do!” interjected Garth. “Is she gonna play and sing with you, or just play with you while you sing?”

Dean stared at Garth until he was convinced that Garth really didn’t know what he’d just said. Poor Garth. Poor, innocent, clueless, virginal Garth.

“Well,” Dean began, slowly. “I’m not sure I could stay in key if she was playing with me while I sang, Garth, but I’ll sure as hell try my hardest.”

The Rabbit and Hounds, Camden
Saturday, June 22nd, 2013

Cas was still feeling a little all over the place. He was alternating steadily between sad, guilty, mad, and numb. He was grateful to be spending the day with Charlie; no one was more of a comforting presence in his life. He was enjoying helping her get the bar ready as well. It meant he was able to switch his brain off for a while.

Everything looked as camp and colorful as Charlie had planned, and now Cas was just waiting for the drag disco to start. He couldn’t really think of anything he wanted to do less right now than party, but if he went home now he wouldn’t get to see Dean, and that was just an awful thought.

Cas was so relieved when Dean came through the door, that he practically leapt into his arms. Much to the enjoyment of Balthazar’s bachelors, who all seemed to be three sheets to the wind already, in spite of the fact that it was barely five thirty. They whistled and cheered and gasped, as Cas planted an unashamedly steamy kiss on Dean’s luscious lips.

“Dean!” one of them yelled. “Is this your boyfriend?”

“Oh my god, he’s gorgeous!”

“What’s his name? I want one!”

“Are you guys into threesomes?”

Cas ignored them all, in favor of just staring at Dean’s face. Losing Rowena had made Cas really appreciate the people in his life, and he was determined to fully enjoy Dean for as long as he was able.

Dean smirked at the comments they were getting.

“Well, hey, Cas,” he said. “You miss me? Or are you just marking your territory?”

Cas slid his hands onto Dean’s ass. “You taste like cocktails,” he informed him.

“Well, maybe later we can lose the tails and I’ll taste like your…”

“Hi, Dean!” Charlie chirruped, bouncing up to them. “Are you having fun?”
“I sure am, ma’am,” Dean confirmed, smiling first at her, then back at Cas, who was still clinging to him. “Can’t wait for the rest of the night.”

“Come on, Cas,” Charlie said, hitting him on the arm. “Put him down and help me finish focusing these lights.”

Cas reluctantly released Dean from his grip.

“Organising B’s pyrotechnics and glitter cannons?” Dean asked.

“You joke, but that’s not far off from what he and Leo requested,” Charlie said. “Where are they, anyway?”

“Leo’s right there,” Dean said, pointing over at the bar. “And B’s gone home to change.”

“Into what?” Cas asked.

“Well,” Dean ventured. “It being drag night here tonight, and Balthazar being the world’s most over-the-top human being, my money’s on either Madonna or Grace Kelly.”

“Nah, I’m bettin’ on Shirley Bassey,” came a deep, scratchy voice from Dean’s side.

Cas looked up, and instantly knew that this was Benny. He was a few inches shorter than Cas, but much broader. He was blessed with very attractive light blue eyes, and he had a kind, warm smile on his face. He had a closely trimmed beard and moustache; light brown but flecked with a little bit of gray. His hair was starting to recede, but what he did have was thick and neat.

“So, this must be Cas,” Benny said, sticking out his hand.

Cas shook it, and smiled, suddenly feeling like he did when he was fifteen, and he met his boyfriend’s big brother.

“Nice to meet you,” he told Dean’s best buddy. “Congratulations.”

“Oh, thank you,” replied Benny, none of his Louisianian accent lost after all his years over here. “Thanks for helpin’ with the festivities.”

“My pleasure,” answered Cas. “You want a drink?”

“I like you already,” Benny smiled. “What’s the whiskey like in here?”

***

A few hours and a lot of drinks later, Cas was sitting at the bar, gin in hand, watching the assembled revellers get merry and messy.

Balthazar had proven both Dean and Benny wrong by turning up as Cher. And not just Cher - Cher from the Turn Back Time video.

Charlie had been proud to reveal that she’d helped style him by sending him links to online stores, and she’d even lent him the wig. The finished result was remarkably accurate, even down to the makeup and the fishnet body suit. B must have done some serious manscaping, cause there wasn’t a pubic hair in sight, and how he could walk in those boots without breaking both ankles was a mystery to Cas.

B had arrived flanked by two unbelievably hot models dressed in nothing but black leather shorts
and studded caps, and the crowd had lost their collective mind. He’d then taken to the stage to perform the song which matched his outfit, then he’d busted out Proud Mary, and Declaration of Love by Celine Dion. Cas had quietly but accurately sung along with each one, while Dean and the rest of the official party danced like lunatics.

Several of the drag regulars had also arrived, and there was now a veritable sea of fabulous all over the pub. Benny and Dean had disappeared into the throng a while ago, as had Charlie, after she’d been pulled up on stage to take a bow for her contributions to the evening.

Cas’ shift as Charlie’s unofficial manservant was over, and he was relieved to be able to knock back a couple of glasses of his favorite drink. As ever, he was more than happy to enjoy a social event in an observational capacity, and was glad of the distraction from thoughts of Rowena. He suspected that Charlie was, as well.

He took a mouthful of his blessed gin, and suddenly a welcome figure came into view, swaying unsteadily towards him from the dance floor.

“Cas!” Dean cheered, putting his hands on Cas’ stool, either side of his hips. “There’s my little angel delight!”

“Hello, Dean,” Cas said, smiling.

“Did you watch me dance, Cas?” Dean slurred.

“Yes, I did,” Cas nodded. “You looked fantastic.”

“Cas,” Dean said, suddenly looking extremely serious. “You need to know this. I have to tell you. You’re really, really, really hot.”

Cas laughed. “Thank you, Dean.”

“Hey, hey, Cas, Cas… guess what…” Dean whispered, leaning in further, and looking around like he was about to impart state secrets.

“What is it?” Cas whispered back, humoring him.

“In Britain, a bachelor party is called a Stag Night,” Dean told him, learnedly. “So I’ve decided that this night shall everforth be known as Balthazar’s Stag ‘n’ Drag party!”

Cas laughed. “Wonderful idea,” he agreed. “Go dance, Dean.”

“Right away, sir!” Dean saluted, and weaved haphazardly back to the dance floor, whereupon he was immediately grabbed by a six foot two queen in silver heels and an orange mini dress.

Benny came up to Cas, looking a lot more sober than the rest of the squad, and leaned against the bar next to him. Cas acknowledged him with a friendly nod.

“He’s a slutty drunk,” Benny said, looking at Dean. “Always has been.”

Cas smiled, and watched Dean sway and grind and shimmy and, for goodness sake, was he trying to twerk?! Cas chuckled, and shook his head, fondly. Then he became aware that Benny was staring at him. He turned to face Dean’s charming best friend.

“You like him, huh?” Benny smiled.

Cas felt self-conscious. Damn his heart-eyes for betraying him again.
“Yes. I do.”

Benny nodded, slowly, and drank some of his drink. He licked his lips, set his glass down and looked right at Cas.

“Mind if I tell you something?”

“Go ahead,” Cas said, preparing himself for an extended lecture on the topic of ‘Dean-doesn’t-do-relationships-you're-wasting-your-time’.

But, that's not what he got. Instead, a simple, slightly cryptic sentence was drawled kindly in Benny’s low tone. “I can see it.”

Cas frowned. “See what?”

“The two of you,” Benny explained. “I can really see it. More than anyone he's ever been with.”

Cas felt weird and warm, and his skin tingled a little bit. Big seal of approval from the best friend.

“Really?”

Benny nodded. “He's a hard fish to reel in,” he said, looking over at Dean. “Doesn’t like to get tied down. Even when he’s happy, he ends up doin’ some self-destructive bullshit. Never could settle with any of his girlfriends.”

Cas followed Benny’s eyeline to where Dean was now happily Tango-ing with Balthazar.

“Or boyfriends?” Cas enquired.

Benny looked at him, and smiled. “He's never had one before.”

Cas frowned. “He's…?”

“Only ever had relationships with girls,” Benny confirmed.

Cas wasn't sure how he felt about that information.

“Don't get me wrong,” Benny added. “There’s been plenty of casual dating, and more one-nighters than he'd probably want me telling you… But never any boyfriends.”

Cas frowned. He wondered whether that meant this was all just a novelty for Dean. Maybe that's why he was into it - he knew there was no chance of it going anywhere; it was just a pleasant diversion. Maybe he'd get over his fear of commitment one day and marry a beautiful Texan girl and have beautiful Texan babies.

“What?” Benny asked, presumably reading Cas’ expression. “What's the matter?”

“Do you think I'm just an experiment, then?”

Benny smiled. “Absolutely not,” he reassured him. “I think you're Dean's perfect man.”

Cas definitely blushed.

“And I think he knows that too,” Benny went on. “And I think he's going to get home and realise he misses you a hell of a lot, and then I think he's going to call me and be all sad, and I'm going to have to explain to him that it must've been love.”
As if one cue, the lights all of a sudden dimmed, and Cas looked over to see that Balthazar had once again taken the stage. The crowd cheered as he strutted dramatically towards the mic, then hushed obediently when he put his finger to his lips.

“Mother o’ Jesus, what’s he doin’ now?” Benny muttered.

Cas smiled; he hoped he would keep in touch with Benny after Dean went home. He liked him a lot.

“My friends,” B announced, sultry and very inebriated. “Please take your partners for the final slowdance of the evening.”

Couples began to form on the dance floor, and Cas looked down into his drink. He was trying not to be possessive, and he truly didn’t care that Dean was having fun, but he didn’t think he could actually watch Dean slow-dance with someone else without puking all over the floor.

*Jealousy?* he thought to himself, with some degree of scorn. *That's new.*

A short, ascending bassline intro of a piano track rang out through the P.A. system, then Balthazar began…

“*Nobody does it better,*"

Cas heard Benny chuckle beside him.

“Oh Lord, she’s Carly Simon,” he said, shaking his head.

Cas looked up at him. “Great song,” he smiled. “Great movie.”

Benny grinned; “I can’t tell you how many James Bond roleplays I’ve indulged.”

He winked, and set his drink down. He stuck his fingers in his mouth and wolf-whistled at his fiance, who looked out towards the sound and grinned. Benny laughed and headed towards the stage.

Cas felt a momentary yearning for a relationship such as that, but his thought process was abruptly cut off when Dean appeared in front of him.

“Hi,” Dean said, smiling broadly at him.

Cas returned Dean’s smile, and without a word, put down his drink and grabbed Dean’s hand. He pulled him over to a space at the edge of the dance floor, and turned to face him.

Cas looked into Dean’s eyes, which were still so lovely despite the alcohol making them slightly unfocused and a little glazed, then put his arms around him.

Dean followed Cas’ lead, not questioning the sudden romantic gear change. He wrapped his arms round his partner, and they started a slow circle in time with B’s Bond theme.

Over Dean’s shoulder, Cas watched as Benny climbed up onto the stage and cuddled into Balthazar from behind. B laid one of his hands over Benny’s, and they swayed together while he sang.

Cas let himself close his eyes, and just feel Dean’s hands and his heartbeat. He allowed himself a small contented sigh, and listened to the words of the song.

“I wasn’t looking, *but somehow you found me*…”

As the song went on, Cas got totally lost in Dean’s arms, and frankly could think of nowhere else
he’d prefer to be. One of Dean’s hands had come up to stroke lightly through Cas’ hair, and if he hadn’t been standing up, he could well have fallen asleep.

He felt a kiss on his temple, and lifted his head from Dean’s shoulder. Their faces were so close, there was nothing to be done but kiss, so they did.

“...nobody does it half as good as you, baby you’re the best...”

* * *

Kensington, London
Sunday, June 23rd, 2013

Dean woke up feeling like there was a particularly loud parade going on in his head, complete with a marching band and several heavy-set tumblers.

He groaned, and sat up, rubbing his forehead. He blinked open his pained eyes, and blearily took in his surroundings. He was on a pull-out bed, in a living room that was not his own. Cranial cogs turned, cerebral circuits connected, and he realised that he was in Benny’s apartment. He had absolutely no memory of how he got there. The last thing he remembered was slow-dancing to Carly Simon with Cas…

There was a soft hum beside him, and a hand was suddenly on his lower back. Dean looked down at the blue eyes gazing up at him. He snuggled back down under the silky covers, and pulled Cas into his chest.

“Morning,” Cas mumbled.

“Hey,” answered Dean, voice sounding as rough as he felt.

“How are you feeling?” Cas asked, tone revealing that he probably already knew the answer.

“Like someone died in my mouth, and Tommy Lee’s solo-ing in my head.”

Cas chuckled lightly, and curled into Dean a bit more.

“How the fuck did we get back here?” Dean asked, stroking his fingers up Cas’ back.

“Cab,” Cas said, through a yawn. “I was gonna go home, but Cher wouldn’t let me.”

Dean made a mental note to thank Balthazar for that when he saw him. Waking up with Cas was the only thing making this hangover even vaguely bearable.

“I take it I was too drunk for any, um, shenanigans?”

Cas laughed. “Come on, Dean, you’re telling me you wouldn’t remember it if we’d shenanigan’d?”

“You’re right,” Dean nodded. “I’m sorry, you’re a total sex bomb and I didn’t mean to imply that I would forget a night of passion with you.”

Cas squeezed Dean's upper thigh, affectionately.

“It wouldn’t have been polite to abuse our welcome by soiling the sofa-bed,” he told Dean. “And besides, drunk consent is not consent. I’d never do that.”

Dean fell just a little bit more for Cas at that, and he would have definitely gone in for a kiss, if he
didn’t think his current morning breath could kill a man.

Knowing that he and Cas just slept together, literally slept and nothing more, was something that Dean found kind of sweet.

The first time you climb into bed with someone, and forego sex in favor of actual sleep, had always felt significant to Dean. It’s the part of the relationship where you want them for more than just their body. Unfortunately, that part usually signals the oncoming boredom that Dean so feared, but there was no sign of that right now with Cas. It was still so - so fucking nice.

“Mornin’, little treasures!”

Dean looked up to see Benny coming into the room with two mugs of coffee. Cas and Dean sat up, gratefully accepting Benny’s caffinated offerings.

“Why aren’t you in pain?” Dean demanded of his best friend.

“I’m a big boy, and I’ve learned not to mix my drinks,” came the explanation.

Dean shook his head in bitter jealousy, and drank his coffee.

“B looks like shit,” Benny added, gleefully. “Mascara all over his face, and a real sorry-lookin’ expression!”

“Can I smell bacon?” Cas asked, and Dean sniffed the air, expectantly.


Dean didn’t know whether the thought of breakfast made him feel better or made him wanna throw up.

“By the way, Dean,” Benny added. “Now that Cas is officially mine and B’s new best friend, we’re insisting that he crash the reception on Saturday.”

Dean raised his eyebrows, pleased. “Awesome,” he said, smiling.

He looked at Cas, who gave him a small smile back.

Benny slapped Dean’s calf through the covers. “Head out whenever you’re ready, boys,” he instructed, and went back into the kitchen.

Dean leaned his very heavy head on Cas’ shoulder.

“Poor Dean,” Cas cooed, sympathetically. “And you’ve got another bachelor party to deal with in a few hours, too.”

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” Dean groaned. “At least that one will be slightly less of a mess.”

Dean had booked a table for a late lunch in a soul-food restaurant in Soho, as there was nothing Benny loved more than deep south cooking. They were getting there in style however, on a boat ride along the Thames. Dean needed to seriously sober up before getting on the water, to avoid an unwanted evacuation of his stomach contents.

“Your’re still coming, right?” he asked.
“If there’s room for me, I’d love to,” Cas replied. “I have to be back at the bar ready for jazz night, though.”

Dean frowned, worried that Cas was in denial, or had temporarily forgotten there was no headline jazz act any more. “Cas…”

“I know,” Cas stopped him. “Charlie and Gavin decided to do an impromptu tribute night. I told them I’d contribute a song or two.”

“You sing jazz?”

Cas shrugged. “Sometimes.”

“Well, I look forward to checking you out, Sinatra.”

Dean wriggled under the sheet, and registered his lack of clothing.

“I can’t help but notice that I’m naked,” he observed. “Please tell me you stripped me, and it wasn’t one of the grooms?”

“Actually you stripped yourself,” Cas told him. “It was a tricky task, but you got there in the end.”

Dean cringed. “Was I embarrassing?” he asked, not sure if he really wanted the answer.

“You were adorable,” Cas said, sipping some coffee. “You told me four times that you liked my hip bones.”

Dean lifted his head and rubbed a hand over his face.

“Super,” he said, cursing the sunlight which was streaking in through Benny’s blinds, and aiming directly into his frontal lobe.

“And,” Cas added. “In the cab, you were very excitedly telling me that we should have a - what did you call it, now - a vacationship?”

Dean turned his face towards Cas.

“I mentioned that, huh?” he said, chewing his lip.

Cas nodded. “Mm-hmm.”

Dean pursed his lips. “Did you - did you like that idea?”

Cas smiled at him, and inclined his head. “Did I like the idea of going to exotic places with you and fucking our way through the continents?”

Dean smirked. “If only money and time were no object, huh?” he said, pre-empting Cas’ objections.

Cas just shrugged, though. “It could work, in theory,” he said. “To be honest, I wasn’t sure if it was just drunken ramblings.”

“Well, I was definitely drunk and rambling,” Dean chuckled. “But I thought of it while one hundred percent sober.”

Cas leaned his head back and looked at Dean, with that strangely comforting intensity. Apparently there was enough lingering alcohol in Dean’s system for a burst of honesty.
“Why do you look at me like that?”

Cas frowned. “Like what?”

“Like - I don’t know. It’s like you’re reading my mind, and also like you totally adore me, and also like you’re gonna…”

“Like I’m gonna…?”

Dean licked his lips, and pondered the right words. “...save me,” he concluded.

Cas tilted his head again. “Save you from what?” he asked, quietly.

Dean frowned. He didn’t know why he said that, and he couldn’t explain it. It was true, though. He elected to make the bullshit cowardly choice of deflecting with humor.

“Fuck knows,” he shrugged. “Think that might have been Jim Beam talking!”

He concentrated on his coffee again, but could feel Cas’ eyes boring into the side of his face.
Cas pushed the door open to the bar. At least, he tried to. Then he tried again. He frowned, and
looked at his watch.

Nope, not early.

He dug out his cell and called Charlie.

“Hey!”

“Hey, why is the door locked? Let me in!”

“I’m not there yet,” Charlie answered, sounding out of breath. “Audrey’s having a drama queen
day. Only just got her to calm down. Ash is in for a long-ass night.”

Cas tried the door again, and peered through the glass.

“Isn’t Crowley there?” Charlie asked.

“I don’t know,” Cas replied. “It looks pretty dark in there.”

“That’s weird,” Charlie said. “Hold up, I’m like three minutes away.”

“Okay, see you in a sec.”

Cas ended the call, and tried a different approach. He banged on the door.

“Mr Crowley?” he called, and then; “Bela?”

He turned away from the door to see if could see Charlie in the distance. Not long after he’d turned
his back on it, he heard a noise from the pub behind him. The sound of rattling and a sliding lock,
then Crowley was standing in the doorway.

Cas took in the sight of the landlord, looking even grouchier than usual.

“Can I help you?” Crowley asked, dryly.

“Uh, it’s six o’clock,” Cas said.

There was no reply other than a frown.

“Charlie and Gavin need to set up,” Cas elaborated. “For Rowena’s tribute night?”

Crowley rocked his jaw forward inside his closed mouth, then inhaled deeply through his nose. He
released the air in a short, sharp burst, then moved back to push the door open all the way.

He walked away from Cas, and headed behind the bar, flicking on the lights as he went. Cas
watched as he strode straight to the Port and poured himself a large glass.

“Are you… alright?” Cas asked, tentatively.
“Peachy,” Crowley answered, swilling his Port around the glass before downing a big gulp.

Cas looked over to the stage, and an unwelcome lump formed in his throat when he saw the standard jazz night set-up. The electric piano for Gavin, and the microphone on its stand in front of Rowena’s black stool. There was also a drum kit, which wasn’t standard. Charlie must have booked a drummer for the occasion.

This kind of shit was why Cas liked television and film so much. He’d much rather cry over fictional characters than have to deal with his actual life. Whenever he had some negative emotions collecting inside him, he just watched the episode of Ally McBeal where Billy died, and that got it all out. It was very cathartic. Possibly not the healthiest method of processing one’s feelings, but it did the job.

This was all a bit too real.

“Hey!”

He turned to see Charlie and Gavin coming through the door. It was the first time he’d seen Gavin since they lost Rowena. He’d spoken to him on the phone, but he hadn’t seen him until now. He looked - pretty good, actually. He seemed like he was keeping it together.

There was hugging and an exchange of sympathies, then the three of them focused on the evening at hand. Gavin was going to play some of his mother’s signature tunes, interspersed with Cas and Charlie’s vocal offerings. There would be a collection at the end of the night for a charitable foundation that researched into the detection and prevention of brain aneurysms.

Cas didn’t know what had possessed him to tell Charlie he would sing. Doing the musical theatre duets at the end of the night when everyone’s drunk and non-judgemental was one thing, but being a featured singer for a whole evening was a bit more limelight than Cas ever really wanted.

It didn’t help that Dean was going to be in the crowd. Bad enough letting the guy you’re dating hear you sing, but when the guy also just happens to be a fucking pro singer and you own his damn records…

Cas rubbed his forehead.

“Don’t fret it, kitten,” Charlie said, with a smile, reading his mind. “You’ll do great.”

“And if you go wrong,” Gavin added. “Just channel my mother. Smile, bat your eyelashes and pretend you meant to do it.”

The Sunday bar staff arrived, and Bela’s jukebox played as the standard modest Sunday crowd filtered in. Including Meg, who was there for moral support - though she’d never admit it.

“Thanks for coming,” Charlie told her.

They were sitting at their usual table, having succumbed to Gavin’s insistence that they all partake of some liquid courage, in the form of Crowley’s most expensive whiskey.

“Oh, honey, I’m just here to drink liquor and heckle,” Meg said, dismissively, before swanning off to the bar to fetch something strong of her own.

Cas shook his head, knowing that for all Meg’s faults, she was here because she cared about Charlie. He wondered why she still felt the need to layer on that bullshit exterior.

“Stop that,” Charlie told Cas, suddenly, putting a hand on his knee to stop him bouncing it up and
down. “You’re making me nervous.”

“Sorry.”

Cas hadn’t realised he was even moving.

“I need another drink,” he declared.

He caught Tamara’s eye as he walked towards the bar, and she winked at him and headed straight for the gin optic behind her.

Cas leaned on the bar as he waited, repeatedly flicking a beer mat over between his fingers.

“That’s a serious face,” came a voice beside him.

Cas looked up, and there was a guy smiling at him; a guy he hadn’t seen before. He was pretty cute, with a stubbled jaw, and kind eyes. He was in a dark suit, but his shirt was open at the top, like he’d just had time to take off his tie before he got here.

“I’m a serious person,” Cas replied, proving himself a liar immediately with a little smirk.

“Here you go, babe,” Tamara said, putting a large gin and tonic in front of him. “With an extra big lemon - good for your throat.”

“Oh dear, are you ill?” the guy asked, moving closer to Cas, even though he hadn’t been invited to do so.

“No,” Cas answered, swigging some of the blessed alcohol.

“So how come you get an extra big lemon?”

Cas looked at this man, and frowned a little. There was definitely a flirty tone to his cockney voice.

“He needs his voice healthy so he can sing to us tonight,” Tamara interjected, with a cheeky smile.

New guy raised his eyebrows. “A singer?” he questioned. “No way.”

Cas was a bit taken aback by the dismissive tone.

“You don’t believe I can sing?” he asked.

“Nope,” the guy said. “You’re far too handsome. No one gets to be that good looking and talented.”

Tamara gave Cas a surprised but amused look, and wandered off to the other end of the bar to talk to Meg. Cas wished she hadn’t gone. This was going to get awkward.

He coughed, and gave the man a small smile.

The smile was returned and magnified, and the guy stuck out his hand. “I’m Mick.”

“Hello, Mick,” Cas said, shaking the hand that was offered. “I’m Cas.”

“Well, Cas,” Mick said, with a smile. “I’m looking forward to hearing you sing. And I really like your t-shirt.”

Cas looked down. He hadn’t been home since yesterday, having stayed at Benny’s last night and then accompanying Dean for the boat trip and lunch.
He’d gone with Dean to his rented apartment after their full English breakfast, so Dean could collect some of his essential Bachelor Party supplies. Mainly hip flasks and plastic penises. Cas had showered and changed there. The shirt Mick had just complimented was one of Dean’s. It was a dark mustard color and it had Freddie Mercury on it.

“Thank you,” Cas said, the reminder that he was wearing Dean’s clothes giving him a secret thrill.

He looked back at Mick. “And what job is it that you do which requires you to wear a suit on a Sunday?” he asked.

“I’m an estate agent,” Mick answered. “Been showing some flats round the area, and I decided I’d earned a pint.”

Cas nodded, and picked up his drink. Of course the guy had to be a realtor; charming and confident were in the job description.

“Well, it was nice to meet you,” he said, thinking he should probably wrap this up politely before Mick got the wrong idea. “But I should go, um, get ready.”

“Oh, I will. Cas.”

Cas turned away from the bar, drink in hand, and saw the owner of his shirt walking through the door. He beamed.

Dean’s face cracked into a gorgeous smile as soon as they made eye contact, and they met in the middle of the room.

“Hey, you,” Dean greeted.

“How was the rest of the party?” Cas asked, barely resisting the temptation to straddle the dude right there on the floor of the pub.

“It was a lot of fun,” Dean said. “And I’m the last man standing - they’ve all gone home. Agingfuckers.”

Cas laughed. “You can go home too if you want, Dean,” he said. “You must be tired.”

“Fuck that,” Dean insisted. “I wanna hear you sing.”

Cas sighed. “I’m not very good,” he confessed. “I’m doing this for Rowena.”

Dean smiled. “You’ll be awesome,” he assured Cas. “I’m sure she would’ve appreciated it.”

Austin, Texas
May 2nd, 1993

Ellen was really good at burgers. And steaks. And pies.

She was also really fucking good at birthday cakes.
Dean bounded into the kitchen like a little kid, just in time to see Ellen and Jo finishing the final bit of frosting.

“Oh my god, Ellen,” Dean said, reverently. “That smells sooooo good!”

“Yeah, well you can keep your filthy hands off it until your brother comes down,” Ellen said, firmly. “Fetch me down those candles, wouldja?”

Dean reached up and opened the ‘treat’ cupboard. He grabbed the box of birthday candles, and counted out ten of them for Sammy’s cake. He helped Ellen press them into the chocolate frosting, then reached automatically into his pocket to pull out his lighter.

He was about to flick the flame out when he caught Ellen’s eye.

“Boy, what the hell is that and why do you have it in your pants?” she demanded, as Jo smirked gleefully beside her.

Dean felt the color drain from his cheeks. Busted.

“Uh… science experiments?”

Ellen folded her arms. “You better pray I never catch you smokin’, Dean Winchester,” she told him, sternly. “Or it’ll be the last thing you ever do.”

Dean slid the incriminating item back into his pocket, and was saved by the entrance of the birthday boy.

“Hey!” Ellen cheered, mood lifting immediately. “Happy birthday, Sam!”

Dean pulled his little brother into a hug, which quickly turned into a headlock.

“Birthday noogie!” Dean declared, as Sam struggled to push him off.

“Dean! Dean, cut it out!” Sam protested.

Dean finally relented, ruffled Sam’s hair and gave him an affectionate shove to the upper arm.

“Look at your cake!” Jo insisted. “I did the sides!”


“C’mon, sit down,” Ellen said. “Ya got a lot of cards and gifts here to open before birthday pancakes.”

They sat at the large kitchen table, and Sam diligently opened each card and present. The careful, methodical way he unwrapped presents drove Dean crazy.

“Just rip it, man!” he begged, making Sam chuckle at his impatience.

The final gift to be opened was from Dean. Sam opened it extra slowly, just to annoy his big brother, but his face warmed into genuine joy when he saw what it was.

“Oh my god, Dean!”

Dean had saved up his allowance to get Sam a new walkman with top of the range headphones, and he was pretty smug when he got the reaction he’d hoped for.
“There’s a C.D. in there already,” he said, proudly. “Listen, listen!”

Sam pulled out the headphones, an impressed gasp escaping him when he did so, and put them over his ears. He hit play, and Dean watched his face change.

“Skynyrd, baby!” Dean cried, triumphantly.

Sam was smiling, but his eyes looked weird. Suddenly he pulled the headphones off and set them down next to him.

“Thank you,” he said, so quiet it was almost a whisper.

Then he left the room without another word.

“Sammy?” Ellen called after him. “You okay, sweetie?”

Dean watched him go, confused.

“What’s his problem?” Jo demanded. “If he doesn’t want that walkman, I’ll have it!”

“Ellen?” Dean began, ignoring his insensitive foster-sister. “Any of these cards from my Dad?”

Ellen shook her head. “No,” she said, sadly. “No card, or gift.”

Dean sighed.

“He might call, later, I guess,” Ellen said, sounding like she didn’t even believe her own words.

Dean looked at her, picked up his present, then followed where his brother had gone.

He knocked on the door of Sam’s room, then pushed it open without waiting for a response.

Sam was sitting cross-legged on his bed, idly plucking short hairs out of the teddy bear he’d had since he was three.

Dean closed the door behind him and sat down beside his brother.

After about a minute of silence, Sam said; “I thought Dad might surprise me and be here when I woke up.”

Dean nodded. “That’s what a normal father might have done,” he said, voice flat.

“He didn’t even write me a card,” Sam added, voice cracking.

Dean put his arm round his little brother, heart breaking a little bit every time John let them down. He was used to it now, but Sam still had hope that their Dad would come back. Dean pondered whether that kind of innocence was a blessing or a curse.

“I don’t know why he’s like this,” Dean said, quietly. “I’m sure he doesn’t upset you on purpose.”

Sam sniffed. “I didn’t mean to get upset,” he said. “It was just because that song reminded me of Dad. He plays that kind of stuff when we ride in the Impala.”

Dean smiled. Those were the good times with John. When he would turn up out of the blue and take the boys on a little road trip. It had started to dawn on Dean how much those trips must worry Ellen and Bill, though. The boys they cared for being whisked away by their crazy drunk Dad at a
moment’s notice. It wasn’t right, and it wasn’t fair. But what young boy wouldn’t be taken in by a fast car, fast food, rock music, and fishing with their Dad?

*Manipulative asshole*, Dean thought, and was impressed with himself for thinking of the word ‘manipulative’.

“I don’t care, anyway,” Sam decided, sitting up. “He doesn’t even act like a proper Dad.”

Dean looked at his brother, so sad that all this was forcing them both to grow up just a little too fast.

“Bill and Bobby are better Dads to us,” Dean agreed.

“You do quite a lot of Dad stuff for me, too,” Sam added, quietly.

Dean felt a little bit embarrassed. “What do you mean?”

Sam shrugged. “You help me with my homework, and you take me to the movies, and help me pick out cool sneakers and stuff,” he said.

Dean smiled.

“And you buy me really neat birthday presents.”

Dean’s small smile became a grin, and he picked up the headphones.

“Come on,” he said, holding them between their heads with one hand, and fiddling with the walkman with the other. “I know a track you’re gonna love…”

*———*

*back at The Rabbit and Hounds, Camden*

*Sunday, June 23rd, 2013*

“You’re only doing that song cause it was in Ally McBeal!” Dean accused.

“So what?” Cas said, defending himself. “It’s jazz, isn’t it?”

Dean shook his head and smiled. They were standing at one side of the stage, in semi-darkness away from the lights. Dean couldn’t help staring at the way the shadows were catching all the angles of Cas’ gorgeous face.

Gavin had played some awesome arrangements of some of Rowena’s favorite songs, and the crowd had been getting bigger all night. Cas and Gavin had done a pretty passable performance of ‘Straighten Up and Fly Right,’ and now Charlie was singing ‘Misty.’

Cas was going to sing ‘Til There Was You’ after Charlie was done, and Dean couldn’t resist teasing him about it.

“You’ve managed to pick a song that’s connected with Ally McBeal and musicals,” he told Cas. “You’re an evil dorky genius.”

“Looks like I was wrong,” came a voice next to Dean. He turned to look at the person responsible.

Some random guy in a suit had just appeared next to them, and was smiling at Cas. Maybe they knew each other.
“Apparently you can be gorgeous and talented at the same time,” the guy said. “How very unfair.”

He winked, then made his way past them to the bathrooms.

Dean watched him go, with a frown, then turned back to Cas, who was looking a little shifty.

“Who’s that?” Dean asked, trying not to sound territorial.

Cas shrugged. “Just this guy I was talking to earlier,” he said. “I think he was hitting on me.”

“Oh.”

Before Dean could press for details, Charlie’s song came to an end and the crowd applauded politely.

“Oh, Jesus, here we go,” Cas breathed.

He hopped up onto the stage, as Charlie stepped down and took his place next to Dean.

“That was great,” Dean congratulated her, though in truth he hadn’t heard a note.

“Thanks!” she said. Then she gasped quickly, suddenly remembering something. “Oh, shit!”

She jumped back onto the stage again and grabbed the mic out of Cas’ hands.

“Uh, before the next song starts,” she announced. “I’d like to welcome a surprise guest…”

Cas looked confused, and Dean looked around for a clue as to the mystery person. He saw Bela Talbot slip into a seat right at the front of the stage. She spotted him, and gave him a sultry smile.

“Joining Cas and Gavin for their super cool rendition of Til There Was You from The Music Man…” Charlie continued. “…we have our very own landlord extraordinaire, Mr Crowley, on drums!”

The crowd clapped, and Cas looked over at Dean with a bewildered expression on his face. There was a loud wolf whistle, and Dean looked over to see Bela with her fingers in her mouth.

Crowley walked through the tables to the front of the stage, and stepped up. He looked grim as ever, and Dean couldn’t imagine him loosening up enough to play cool jazz rhythms. He sat at the kit, and rolled his shoulders. He looked over at Gavin, clicked off a slow four with his sticks, and the intro began.

Charlie appeared next to Dean again, and smiled, triumphantly.

“Crowley plays drums?” Dean said, incredulous.

“He used to be in a band,” Charlie smiled.

“Cas said that he and Rowena hated each other,” Dean remarked, puzzled as to why Crowley would be digging out an old skill to pay tribute to a woman he didn't even like.

Charlie smiled, knowingly. “They certainly knew how to drive each other pretty bonkers,” she said. “But I always knew he had a secret soft spot for her.”

Dean looked up at the curmudgeonly Brit, who really seemed to know his way round that kit.
“I think he’s actually pretty crushed,” Charlie said.

“There were bells on a hill, but I never heard them ringing. No, I never heard them at all, til there was you…”

Dean smiled. Cas’ voice wasn’t the best, but it certainly wasn’t the worst. He was in tune, and he had a cool jazzy vibrato and a sexy, husky tone. This song was really fucking cute, too, damn it.

Dean watched so intently that he didn’t notice when the guy from earlier came and stood beside him.

“He yours?” the guy asked, making Dean jump.

The guy was eyeing Cas with a predatory expression that made Dean want to kill him. He swallowed hard, and managed to fake a totally chill exterior.

“Uh… no… not - not mine,” he answered. It was honest enough, but Charlie gave him a suspicious look.

“He single?”

“Why don’t you just ask him?” Dean snapped.

The guy frowned. “Alright mate,” he said. “Calm down.”

Dean wanted to punch this guy in his stupid, rugged face. He looked at Charlie, who was clearly trying very hard to concentrate on the song and not eavesdrop. He sighed.

“I apologise,” Dean said to the guy, through gritted teeth. “Excuse me.”

Dean shoved past, maybe deliberately knocking into the dude with his shoulder and maybe not, and went to sit next to Bela.

“You take the lead singer, I’ll have the drummer,” she said to him, with a wink.

Dean smiled at her. “Deal.”

He looked up at Cas, who was gazing out above Dean’s head as he sang. Whether it was the song, the sexy way Cas was standing, or the threat of the other man, Dean suddenly wanted nothing more than to drag Cas back to his place, sit on his cock, and ride him til he forgot his own name.

Suddenly his phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out and unlocked it.

Charlie: No competition, Deanio. This guy’s super weird.

Dean looked over at his lovely redheaded new friend, and she smiled at him. He smiled back, and noticed he had three other messages.

Benny: Thanks again for this weekend brother, love ya <3

Jenna: It’s been days since we had an update on this guy you’re not really into Dean. Throw me a bone (ha ha bone) We’re dying here!

Balthazar: Dean that boy’s fucking gorgeous if it weren’t for Benny I’d have got into that sofabled between you. Marry him. Marry him now.

Dean laughed quietly to himself, and decided they could all wait until tomorrow. The song was
ending, and he applauded and whistled enthusiastically.

Cas walked off stage right, towards Charlie, and Dean stood up. He hoped that was it, and he could take Cas home now. He looked over. Weird chiselled guy was whispering in Cas’ ear.

_Fuck. Off._ Dean thought, murderous visions invading his mind. Then he breathed deeply, and intently studied the wall ornaments in order to avoid looking at hot English dickweeds hitting on his man.

_Not his man._

But basically his man.

_Christ._

* * *

Back in Dean’s apartment, Dean couldn’t get Cas naked fast enough.

He’d held his hand all the way to the station, and kissed him periodically on the train, then held his hand all the way to his front door. The possessiveness was strong and unexpected, but luckily Cas didn’t seem to mind.

They were in the hallway, and they’d both kicked off their shoes. Dean had already pushed Cas’ jacket off, and tugged his t-shirt - _oh yeah, that’s my shirt, fuck, that’s hot_ - over his head. Now he had him pressed against the door, and was working on his fly.

“Dean,” Cas gasped, as Dean kissed his neck. “If I’d have known old swinging musical theatre got you this hot, I would’ve sung some to you days ago.”

Dean yanked Cas’ jeans down, and held his face in his hands.

He wished he had a witty retort, but he couldn’t talk. He just wanted Cas. Wanted him so fucking bad. He kissed Cas on the lips; deep and hot.

Cas moaned with pleasure, and Dean pressed himself against his bare torso.

Dean kissed along Cas’ cheek and jaw, and up to his ear. “Fuck me,” he whispered. “Cas, fuck me… I need you…”

Cas answered by kissing Dean’s neck, and unbuttoning his jeans. Lower garments discarded, Cas took Dean’s hand and pulled him to the bedroom.

“Wait,” Dean said, and paused to fish out the condom he’d stashed in his back pocket.

Once in his room, Dean wasted no more time luxuriating in foreplay, and just pushed Cas down onto the bed. He climbed on top of him and kissed him all over, making him arch and gasp and groan.

Dean took Cas’ hard dick into his mouth, and sucked him. It was quicker than his standard pace; Dean usually preferred to tease a little and get his partner worked up, but fuck, he needed this inside him as soon as fucking possible.

Frustrated that it took more than willpower alone to get him open for Cas, he released him so that he could grab his lube.

“Are you okay?” Cas asked, breathlessly, looking up at Dean’s face.
“I’m good,” Dean answered, then coated his fingers and reached behind himself.

“You want some help?” Cas asked, propping himself up on his elbows, and smiling.

Dean shook his head. He knew that if he let Cas prep him, it would be gentle and it would take too long.

F**k, what’s the matter with me?

“You sure you’re okay?” Cas frowned.

Dean didn’t reply. He just pushed another finger inside himself and cried out, softly.

Cas knelt up, and kissed Dean, tenderly. He gripped the front of Dean’s t-shirt, that Dean was only now registering that he was still wearing.

Dean surrendered to the tender kiss, and slowed his movements a little to match. After a little while, Cas wriggled back against the headboard, legs outstretched, and pulled Dean into his lap.

Dean brought the lube with him, and sank down gradually onto Cas once he was gloved and slicked.

“Oh, fuck, Dean,” Cas moaned, and raised his knees to plant his feet on the bed, giving Dean something to lean back on. Cas’ hands gripped Dean’s hips, helping support his weight.

Dean rode Cas hard until his thighs were aching. His face was buried in Cas’ neck and he was breathing hard, every now and then releasing one of his vocal exclamations.

Knowing that Cas liked it when he was noisy, he didn’t hold back. Some exes had made fun of Dean for it - one told him it was like fucking a banshee - but fuck them all cause Cas liked it.

When his thighs really couldn’t take it any more, he rolled off and away from Cas, and got on all fours next to him. Cas took the hint, and crawled behind Dean, bed creaking under all the movement.

Cas re-entered Dean’s body, and Dean screamed.

“Aaaaahhh!! YES!!”

Cas put a hand round Dean’s hip to grab his cock, and he stroked him in time with his deep, hard thrusts.

“Fuck, fuck, Cas, Cas… Ohmygod yes, YES… fuck!”

“I’m gonna come, Dean,” Cas gasped. “I’m gonna come!”

Dean clenched around Cas as much as he could, and Cas stilled inside him. Dean felt him shaking as his orgasm pulsed through him.

Cas pulled out, and Dean immediately turned and pushed him down onto his back. He knelt up next to Cas’s face, and held his cock above him.

“Can - can I?” Dean stuttered. “Please?”

Cas grinned up at him, chest heaving, and licked his lips. “Be my guest.”

Dean jerked himself off fast and filthy, looking down at Cas’ beautiful face. Cas was biting his lip, eyes fixed on Dean’s hand as it worked.
When Dean’s breath started to hitch, Cas looked up into his eyes, and opened his mouth.

It was like every single one of Dean’s favorite porn videos, and he came really fucking hard. Cas closed his eyes, and Dean watched, slack-jawed, as his thick spunk landed all over Cas’ protruding tongue.

Some of it splashed up onto Cas’ face, and he flinched but didn’t pull away. He opened his eyes, and swallowed it all.

Dean collapsed next to him.

“You're fucking awesome,” he told Cas, feeling truly wiped out and immensely satisfied.

Cas chuckled. “I do what I can,” he said, smugly, reaching to pull off his condom.

“Sorry my aim was a little off,” Dean teased, noting the shiny trail on Cas’ cheek.

Cas put his hand up to wipe it off. “That’s okay,” he said. “At least it didn’t go in my eye. That really fucking stings.”

Dean snorted. “Slut,” he teased.

Cas retaliated by wiping his spunky fingers on Dean’s forehead.

“Hey!”

A little play-fighting and some showering later, Cas declared he had to get home.

Dean pouted.

“Come on, Dean,” Cas laughed. “I haven’t been home since Saturday morning. These are all your clothes I’m wearing! And I haven’t done any of my school work.”

“Okay, okay, you can go,” Dean relented. “Hug me first.”

Cas chuckled and wrapped his arms around Dean. “You’re in an odd mood tonight,” he observed. “Are you really okay?”

“I’m fine,” Dean insisted. “Just really wanted you to bang me.”

“I’ve obviously got some extra pheromones today, then,” Cas joked, pulling away. “You can’t keep your hands off me, random cockney guys are trying to give me their numbers…”

“Wait, that guy from the bar gave you his number?” Dean asked, possessive nonsense flaring up inside him again.

“No,” Cas corrected. “He offered to give it to me, but I declined.”

“Why?”

“Why?”

“Yeah, why,” Dean repeated, voice curt. “Why didn’t you take his number?”

Cas frowned at him.

“Look, Cas,” Dean said, with what he hoped was a nonchalant smile. “You and I… we’re not
serious, right?”

Dean saw a flash of hurt in Cas’ eyes, and wanted desperately to take that sentence back, but he couldn’t. It was true. His jealousy was totally unfounded; he had no claim on Cas’ fidelity. Even if they did the Vacationship thing, he had no right to demand any kind of commitment from Cas, and he was certainly in no position to offer any of his own.

“So,” he continued. “Don’t not get numbers from random cockney guys on my account.”

“You don’t think it’s a little disrespectful?” Cas said, in a tight voice. “To exchange numbers with people when you’re already dating someone?”

Dean considered it. “Nope,” he decided. “Not in this case.”

Cas was studying his face, carefully.

“Cas,” Dean said, biting his lip a little. “I’m outta here soon. If you wanna line up some action for after I’m gone, then go ahead. No point staying exclusive to me when I’m not sticking around.”

“But, what…”

“Look,” Dean said, not meaning his voice to come out so stern. “You’re the one who was extolling the virtues of polyamory on our first date, and now you’re offended that I want you to take a guy’s number?”

“No, I’m not…”

“What, Cas? What do you want from me?”

Cas clamped his mouth shut, and looked so upset that Dean wanted to punch himself in the face. He immediately softened.

“Fuck, I’m sorry,” he said, and hurriedly pulled Cas in for another hug.

Cas kept his arms by his sides, and Dean didn’t blame him. He didn’t let go, though.

“I’m a dick, Cas, that was uncalled for. I’m sorry.”

Dean felt Cas’ shoulders loosen, and the hug was eventually returned. Then Cas pulled away, still looking a little mad. His brow was creased and his eyes looked sad.

“I don’t want to date that guy,” he told Dean. “But that doesn’t mean I’m trying to get you to commit to me or anything like that, Dean.”

“I know.”

“I just don’t want to date him. Even after you go, I…”

Cas paused, licked his bottom lip, then sighed.

“I just don’t want to date him. Okay?”

Dean gave him a small smile. “Okay, Cas.”

“I’m going now,” Cas said, turning towards the door. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”
Cas stared ahead of him, but he wasn’t seeing anything. If he’d been asked, he wouldn’t even have been able to tell whether the lights in his office were on or off.

He didn’t know how long it had been since the meeting. Everyone except him had gone home straight after, and he had just been sitting at his desk ever since, feeling numb. He should probably see what time it was. Probably get something to eat and go home to bed. But it all seemed a bit pointless.

The sudden sound of a siren outside the window snapped him out of his trance, and he looked out towards the noise. The city was dark, and the streetlights were on. It hadn’t been dark when the meeting ended.

Cas sighed.

He used to really enjoy the view from this window. He hadn’t enjoyed it, lately. He hadn’t enjoyed anything, lately.

His cell phone buzzed and moved a few centimetres on his desk. He ignored it, as he had every single time it had rung today. He leaned forward, and put his head in his hands.

He’d never felt more alone and helpless in his life.

“Damn you, Chuck,” he muttered.

He released his head, hands dropping forward onto the table. He leaned back in his chair, and let his head fall heavily towards the window again.

He stayed like that until his eyes finally fell closed, and he was still there at eight thirty the next morning, when Hannah walked in.

Wood Green, London
Monday, June 24th, 2013

“Do you think I should have taken his number?”

Patrick shrugged. “I don’t know, Cas,” he admitted. “I s’pose it couldn’t hurt to keep your options open.”

Cas frowned.

“But it sounds like you don’t want other options,” Patrick added. “Sounds like you’re pretty stuck on this Dean, if you ask me.”

Cas pulled a face. “I was trying really hard not to be.”

Patrick laughed. “Ah well,” he said, picking up his bag. “My advice would be to enjoy it while it lasts, Cas. Because very few things do.”
Cas’ toast popped up from the rickety old staff room toaster as Patrick headed out to teach. He reached for the butter, cursing this stupid country for not having real jelly.

He pulled out his cell phone, knowing there was someone out there who would share his pain. A little jovial text would serve as a sign that everything was cool after last night, as well.

Cas: i miss grape jelly. peanut butter and jam is not the same fucking thing. at all.

Dean: I hear you man. England has its good points but we totally win at food.

Cas smiled down at the screen. Last night’s almost-argument had been weird, and he wanted to be able to take the advice of Patrick, and Charlie, and just go back to enjoying this.

Cas: how’s the tate? are you feeling cultured?

Dean: Dude I don’t have a fucking clue what I’m looking at but modern art is cool and weird and I’m down.

Cas smiled at the idea of Dean wandering bemusedly through the art gallery.

Cas: do you wanna get dinner later?

Dean: I got a date with B & Benny.

No alternative offered… thought Cas, a sharp sliver of rejection slicing through him.

He sighed, wondering if that meant this was over now. He really, really hoped it wasn’t. Maybe Dean just wanted to stop now before they both got too attached. Maybe that was the best plan, but Cas felt bitterly nauseas at the idea.

His phone dinged again.

Dean: Picnic in Hyde Park tomorrow?

Cas exhaled the breath he hadn’t noticed he’d been holding.

Cas: that would be lovely :)

“Mr Novak?”

Cas looked up at the sound of the world’s chilliest voice, and hurriedly stuffed his phone away like a naughty schoolboy caught with a cigarette.

“Mr Tod; good - good morning,” he stuttered.

The Headmaster was in his standard black suit, which Patrick always said coordinated perfectly with his soul, and the sight of him was very incongruous with the bright mismatched chairs and cheerful notice boards of the staff room.

“You weren’t in your office,” the Head declared.

“No,” Cas answered, feeling as though he was being scolded, even though he was a grown man who’d done nothing wrong. “I don’t have anyone to see until ten fifteen.”

Mr Tod stared at him for an inexplicably long amount of time. Cas felt like a particularly intriguing
bug under a magnifying glass.

“I would like you to attend a meeting on Wednesday,” he said, finally.

“Of course,” Cas said. Then he paused. “With whom?”

“With myself,” Mr Tod explained. “And Mr and Mrs Foster.”

Cas’ brain caught up, and his heart sank. “Jasmine’s parents,” he said, dejectedly.

“Indeed,” his boss confirmed. “Twelve thirty.”

With that, he turned and exited the room, cane tapping against the wooden floors as he went.

“Great,” Cas said, to no one.

* * *

Hyde Park, London
Tuesday, June 25th, 2013

Dean hoped he’d given Cas adequate directions to the tree he was currently sitting under. Hyde Park was a big fucking place. It was also really pretty and relaxing, and he’d had a very nice walk round it. He’d paused to sit on a bench, and chatted with a cool old lady who apparently got engaged in the park sixty three years ago, and he’d also made friends with some French-Canadian girls who’d been cycling through the park and had stopped for a drink.

Dean loved starting conversations with strangers. It was good for the spirit, and you never knew who you might meet or what you might learn.

He still felt like a jackass after snapping at Cas last night. He’d got a second opinion from Benny, who’d agreed. Then he’d been given a third opinion from B, who’d agreed even more vehemently.

Dean had been for dinner at the happy couple’s place last night, and endured another long psycho-analysis session about his inability to form lasting relationships, and a lecture on how wonderful Cas was.

Dean knew Cas was wonderful. Cas being wonderful was not, and never had been, the problem.

He’d finally steered them off the subject, and he and Benny had spent the rest of the evening being very competitive on Benny’s PlayStation, while B got slowly hammered on expensive Brandy.

The fourth and fifth opinions of Dean’s behaviour had come from his brother and sister-in-law, via Skype. Sam told him that he was being predictably destructive, and also that he was an idiot. Dean had protested that there was nothing to destroy, because he and Cas weren’t in a relationship. Sam had rolled his eyes so hard they nearly fell out of his head.

Then Jenna had come on the screen, and instructed Dean to make Cas a romantic picnic and then suck him off til all was forgiven.

Dean smiled as he surveyed the feast he’d brought with him, and dreamily mused the second part of Jenna’s advice.

“Hello, Dean.”

Dean turned round, and looked up, shielding his eyes from the sun.
“Hey, Cas,” he grinned.

Cas had on another very sharp suit. It was a light gray, and he had on a pastel yellow shirt and aqua tie.

“This looks very nice,” Cas observed, as he took off his jacket, laid it down on the grass and sat on it.

“Well, nothing says ‘I’m sorry for being a territorial dickwad’ like sandwiches and fruit cubes,” Dean said.

Cas tilted his head. “Dean, you don’t have to apologise to me.”

“Okay, but I want to.”

Cas smiled, and Dean mirrored it.

“Well, you’re definitely forgiven if there’s cake in here,” Cas said.

“Even better,” Dean declared, flipping open one of his tupperware containers. “There’s pie.”

They sat in the sun for an hour, talking and sharing all of Dean’s food. He’d got bakery recommendations from B, and the pie was amazing. Damn expensive, too. It might have even been better than Ellen’s, but Dean would’ve died before admitting that out loud.

“What are you doing tonight?”

“It’s Gavin’s birthday, remember?” Cas said. “Dinner at Charlie’s.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Dean vaguely remembered Gavin inviting him to his birthday dinner while they’d been at the quiz night. He’d kind of lost track of his days, though.

“He still wants to celebrate?”

Cas nodded. “He said he did; said he didn’t just want to sit around moping.”

“Is there a date for the funeral yet?” Dean asked.

Given the suddenness of Rowena’s passing, the funeral had to be delayed until after the autopsy and all that other horrible shit that has to happen when someone dies unexpectedly. As if it isn’t hard enough to lose someone with no warning, they have to drag it out for so long before you can actually say goodbye.

“Next Thursday,” Cas said. “Fourth of July.”

Damn, Dean thought. The day after I fly out.

“You’ll have left by then, right?” Cas asked.

“Yep,” Dean nodded, trying to ignore the dread he felt at going away from Cas. “Couldn’t possibly spend Independence Day on the isle of the vile oppressors.”

Cas laughed. “Of course not,” he said.
Dean changed the subject in order to squash the tight feeling in his stomach.

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

“Anything,” said Cas, and he said it so genuinely and sincerely that the feeling inside Dean was replaced instantly with a completely different and far shmoopier one.

“Is this too cheesy for my best man speech?” he asked, pulling out his phone. "Hold on…” he said, scrolling through his notes. “Okay, okay, here it is.”

He cleared his throat, and read from the screen; “When you fall in love, it is a temporary madness. It erupts like an earthquake, and then it subsides. And when it subsides, you have to make a decision. You have to work out whether your roots are to become so entwined together that it is inconceivable that you should ever part.”

Dean looked up at Cas, who was staring at him in that peculiar Cas way.

“Do you think that’s a good quote?” Dean asked. “I was going to follow it by saying something about Benny and B’s roots being really strong. Then I was gonna make a joke about -”

Dean was cut off by Cas leaning forward and kissing him.

The kiss started off quite energised, but then Cas put one hand on the side of Dean’s face, and it just kind of melted into something slow and gorgeous.

Dean dropped his phone on the grass, and put both his hands on the back of Cas’ head. He moaned his approval, and felt his groin come to life as Cas’ tongue stroked against his own.

When they broke apart, Cas put his head down on Dean’s shoulder.

“So, you like it, then?” Dean teased.

Cas adjusted himself so that he was half lying against Dean’s chest under the tree.

“I like you,” he murmured.

Dean stroked Cas’ back, and closed his eyes. Not for long, but he let himself indulge just for a couple minutes. Just a little while of having nothing to do but sit in a sunny park with a beautiful guy.

* * *

Charlie’s House
later that day

Tamara made the most wonderful roast lamb that Cas had ever tasted. The dinner had been fun, but kind of subdued, what with the thought hanging over them of it being Gavin’s first birthday without his mother.

Cas was helping Charlie wash up in the kitchen, while the others stayed in the living room with wine and music.

“Is it weird that Gavin isn’t going out with any of his other friends tonight?”

“What do you mean?” Charlie asked.

“Well, we’re all quite a lot older than him,” Cas said, drying up a large green plate. “Does he not
have friends his own age?”

Charlie shrugged. “I guess so,” she said. “But he’s always been quite an old soul.”

“He had a girlfriend, right?” Cas asked.

“Fiona,” Charlie confirmed. “But they broke up, like, eight months ago, Cas - catch up!”

Cas frowned, as he picked up another plate. He should pay more attention. He didn’t really know the first thing about Gavin, beyond the odd informal chat at the bar.

“He still works in the music shop?”


She sighed as she drained the water. “He mostly just followed his Mom around on her gigs,” she said. “As sad as this is, maybe now he’ll get a chance to do his own thing. Whatever that is.”

Cas put his tea towel back on the rack, and turned to face his best friend. “And how are you today?”

“I’m okay,” she said. “I’m sad. I miss her. But life goes on and I’ve got a good one, so…”

Cas pulled her into a hug. “Yes, you do,” he agreed.

He kissed her on the cheek, and they headed back into the living room, whereupon a glass of gin and tonic was immediately put in Cas’ hand by Dean.

“Thank you,” he smiled, and Dean winked at him.

Cas was just deciding how best to tell Dean how hot he looked this evening, and how much he still hadn't gotten over the Captain Corelli extract, when the music was suddenly turned right down.

“Um, everyone?” came Gavin’s voice, from over by the stereo.

They all stopped and looked at him.

“I’ve, um, I’ve got something I wanted to share with you.”

“Is it Herpes? Because Meg already has that,” said Ash.

Gavin exhaled a laugh. “Um, no.”

They all looked at him, expectantly.

“Basically, um - my grandmother gave me this at the weekend,” he said, pulling a slim plastic case out of his pocket. “It’s a D.V.D. that my Mum recorded for me ten years ago. Apparently she had always planned to play it for me on my twenty-first.”

There was silence.

“I suppose I just - I don’t want to watch it alone.”

More silence.

Dean felt a lump in his throat. He wanted to hug the poor young guy, but seeing as they’d had precisely three conversations, that probably wouldn’t be the most appropriate course of action.
“Well, let’s watch it, man,” insisted Ash, slapping Gavin on the back, encouragingly. “Maybe she’s gonna give you directions to, like, buried treasure or something.”

Meg gave Ash an incredulous grimace. “Buried treasure?”

“Yeah! Or maybe you’re heir to a throne or something, and she couldn’t break it to you until now!”

“Gimme,” said Charlie, holding her hand out for the D.V.D.

Gavin passed it to her, and she took it over to her frankly unnecessarily big entertainment system. Dean had been feeling jealous of it ever since they’d come by last week.

“Gather round, children,” Tamara said, and they all settled into the assorted chairs, couches and beanbags.

Cas sat on the couch next to Gavin, and Dean sat on the floor in between Cas’ legs.

“You okay?” he heard Cas ask.

“I’m fine,” Gavin assured. “It’s probably just some daft song she taped for me.”

Cas put his hands on Dean’s shoulders, and massaged gently.

“Here we go,” Charlie said, adjusting the volume, and backing up to sit on the arm of the chair where Tamara was nestled.

Rowena-from-a-decade-ago appeared on the big screen, looking casual in a way that none of them remembered ever seeing her before. Her hair was down and a little unbrushed, and she had only the faintest amount of makeup on. She was only in shot from the waist up, and she was wearing a baggy purple jumper and a big chunky necklace. She waved cheerily at the camera, and they all listened in silence, everyone experiencing varying degrees of emotion at the sound of her voice.

“Hello, Gavin! Today is the twenty fifth of June, two thousand and two, and it is your tenth birthday.”

Dean chanced a glance up a Gavin, then had to look away again pretty rapidly, since the expression on the poor guy’s face threatened to make him well up.

“We’ve been out roller-skating with your friends, and you’ve opened all your presents, and you are now totally sparko on the sofa, absolutely exhausted! I’ve been looking at you sleeping like that, all innocent; you look just like you did when you were a little boy. Yet at the same time I can see that handsome little face becoming that of a young man, and now I’m sat here all emotional about you growing up. So I decided to make this special video for you, and I'm going to give it to you when you turn twenty one.”

Dean smiled at what a cool idea this was, and how sad that Rowena couldn’t watch it with them. He suddenly ached for a similar video of his own mother. He only had pictures and a few minutes of shitty silent home-movie footage. He didn’t even know what her voice sounded like.

“So, happy twenty-first birthday!” videoed Rowena continued. “I’m sure there’ll be plenty of alcohol involved. Remember, if you’re drunk as a skunk, fall asleep on your front! That way, you won’t choke on your own vomit.”

There was a light chuckle from everyone.
“Good advice,” Meg muttered.

“I hope you’re happy, pet,” Rowena was saying, voice a little quieter than before. “I hope you’ve gone to university and that you’re getting a degree in something. Maybe music, because you’ve just started piano lessons and you’re ever so good. I wanted you to play something more - portable - like a clarinet or something, but you wouldn’t be swayed.”

Gavin laughed a little, then sniffed. Cas’ left hand was removed from Dean’s shoulder, and Dean assumed it had been put it round Gavin’s shoulders for comfort.

*Fair enough, he thought. He needs it more than me right now.*

“I hope you have a lovely girlfriend, or a lovely boyfriend. At this stage we’ve no idea which side your bread will be buttered, but believe me I’ll love you the same regardless. Don’t put up with anyone who doesn’t treasure your heart, and don’t waste your time trying to love someone who isn’t good for your soul. Don’t choose a partner based on their looks or their income - find someone who builds you up, someone who gives you confidence to try things, and to become the best version of yourself.”

Dean wished he’d known this woman. *Don’t put up with anyone who doesn’t treasure your heart.* He’d remember that one.

“I hope you’re heading into a career that makes you happy. Remember that a full soul is more valuable than a full bank account. Having said that, if you do happen to become a plastic surgeon or a CEO then that’s absolutely fine! I’ve been a self-employed singer for years and I love it, but it does get a bit dire some months. Especially now that I can’t get away with buying you cheap, second hand toys. Oh no, you need PlayStation games and top of the line trainers and football spikes… I’d never begrudge you any of it though, petal. I’d sell my kidney for you and you know it.”

There was movement on Dean’s right, and he looked over to see Tamara putting her arms round Charlie. They were both very softly crying. Dean didn’t blame them - his own eyes were getting damp, and he was the least attached of all of them to the lady on the screen.

“I’m sorry for all the times I let you down,” Rowena was saying, looking right into the camera, speaking so sincerely. “Just, all the times you saw me cry or you saw me get angry. You’re only a child and you shouldn’t have to see any of that. I don’t mean to burden you with a load of grown up shit, but you’re all I have. Your wee face whenever I confused you or made you sad… it all haunts me and it probably always will, and I still feel so guilty, Gavin. But please know I always tried to do the right thing. Made a total hash of it sometimes and I’m likely going to continue to make a hash of it - I’ve no doubt you’ll need therapy at some point because of me! But I never had bad intentions and I always, always just want you to be happy.”

Dean heard sniffing from all sides of the room, and knew that they were all fucking gone. He wiped his eyes.

Rowena sat up straight and shook her head. “Right!” she said, sounding determined. “I’m going to wake you up now, and we’re going to finish this cake together. Happy birthday my darling.”

She blew a kiss to the camera, then leaned forward, and the screen went black.
Sometimes, Cas talked to his fish.

He felt no shame in doing so. People talked to their dogs and cats all the time, so why shouldn't he talk to his fish?

He loved his aquarium. It was pretty big, and stood proudly in all its hexagonal glory on a black stand beside his television. He had twelve fish in total now, and all manner of lovely plants and ornaments.

He watched his rainbow fish circling the polar bear that Dean had given him, and smiled.

The tropical fish reminded him of being by the sea in Malaysia and Thailand, and it was very good therapy to have them in the house. He could get hypnotised by them, and recapture some of the peace he’d found while he was out there.

Cas used to see his experiences in Boston as a heavy black ball that sat inside him, coloring everything he did, and making every day a struggle. With help from Pamela, and from the people he met while travelling, he'd found a way to change his mindset. Instead of one giant weight, he started to picture lots of little small ones. He developed a visualisation technique where every time a positive thought or experience came into his life, one of those small heavy black balls was replaced with a colorful bubble. Travelling put lots of positive bubbles inside him, and the satisfactions of his job created quite a few, as well.

Dean Winchester was certainly helping to turn everything from heavy to light, and Cas was already nervous about the amount of leaden blackness that would return to him once Dean went home.

Cas was focusing on the fish before he went to work today, because he was very worried about this meeting with Mr and Mrs Foster. Trying to convince an uber-religious, closed-minded couple to accept the psychological needs of their transgender child was not going to make for a good day.

He’d decided to tell Dean that they couldn’t see each other today. He’d told him that he really needed to prep for and concentrate on this meeting, and knowing that it would drain him, he’d want to just go home and sleep in the evening.

Truthfully, Cas just didn’t want Dean to see him in a dark place.

Added to all his school-related anxiety, watching Rowena’s video had made Cas miss his own mother terribly. Plus, remembering what day it was tomorrow was making him feel increasingly like shit. He didn’t want to put all that on Dean.

Cas wanted Dean to go home with lasting memories of him that were sunny and happy and sexy and fun. He wanted Dean to remember the picnics, the poetry, the earth-shatteringly profound sex, and the laughs. It was bad enough that the poor guy got caught in the middle of all the Rowena sadness. Cas had no desire to put any more gray clouds over Dean’s trip. He’d see him again tomorrow, when he felt a bit better.

He didn't want Dean to be lonely though, so he tried to assemble the squad.
Cas: i think dean’s on his own today - anyone around to keep him company?

Charlie: Home with Audrey honey sorry :( 

Ash: colorin folk in all day dude

Meg: I finish at lunchtime, I can entertain the little cowboy ;)

Cas rolled his eyes. Great - Meg hitting on Dean all afternoon, just what he needed to calm his nerves. He wished he hadn’t bothered.

“Wish me luck,” he said to his little aquatic audience, and grabbed his coat.

* * *

Cromwell Road, London

Dean was headed into the Natural History Museum, and he was really excited.

With Cas out of action for the day, he’d invited Benny and Balthazar to join him. Unfortunately, they were spending the day collecting various family members from airports, and finalising wedding shit with their venue before Saturday, so he was on his own again. He didn’t actually mind, though. He suspected that Benny would have gotten bored, and that B would’ve done something embarrassing like pretend to be a dinosaur expert, or dry-hump a caveman mannequin.

Dean was totally into everything in this museum, and had to keep reminding himself that he was an adult, to stop himself running around and yelling ‘Wow!’ at everything.

Having fully absorbed all the exhibits, and having spent probably far too much money on nonsense from the gift shop, Dean went back out into the sunny London street. He found a cafe and got himself a mediocre coffee, and drank it while reading over his guide book. He really wanted to text Cas or send him a picture, but he knew his favorite psychologist had an important day, and he didn’t want to disturb him.

He placed another call, instead.

“Mornin’ Garth! Bobby there?”

“Hi, Dean!” Garth cried down the phone, sounding delighted. “Oh my god, are you having the best time? We really miss you!”

Dean shook his head but couldn’t help a little fond smile. “I’m having a great time, thank you, Garth.”

“Do you miss us? Do you miss me?”

“Yes Garth, I miss you horribly. I’ve wept every night.”

Eventually Dean managed to persuade Garth to relinquish the phone, and pass him over to Bobby. A brief explanation and some heavy convincing later, Dean hung up the call, satisfied but still a little bit conflicted about the decision he’d just made. He chewed on his lower lip, staring at his phone screen.

He jumped a little as it started to ring again, and he was pleasantly surprised at the caller I.D.
“Hello, Meg.”

“Hey, cowboy,” she greeted. “Clarence tells me you’re flyin’ solo today.”

“I usually am, sister,” Dean said, before sipping some more coffee.

“You wanna come see a movie?” Meg asked.

“Sure,” Dean replied, pleased to be invited. “I’ve finished educating myself for the day. You run out of friends?”

“I have a standing Thursday afternoon movie date with Audrey, but she’s sick.”

Dean still found it hard to reconcile that ice cold voice with Meg’s apparently awesome babysitting skills.

“Well, I’m happy to fill in for her,” he told her. “I can even buy my own candy. And take myself to the bathroom.”

“I can always hold your hand if you get lost.”

“No need to hold anything, thank you. What are we seeing?”

“Well, we can’t see Iron Man,” Meg said. “If I appreciate Robert Downey Junior with anyone other than Cas, he loses his shit.”

Dean chuckled. “Star Trek?” he suggested.

“Star Trek,” she repeated, sounding pleased. “Meet me in Leicester Square in an hour?”

Dean looked at his watch. “Sure,” he said, mentally reviewing the tube map that he’d tried to memorise. “See you there.”

* * *

Wood Green

Cas was delighted.

The meeting had been a much greater success than he’d predicted. Mr Tod had been unexpectedly supportive of him the entire time, and with help from the school nurse, they’d managed to explain to Jasmine’s parents that this wasn’t the devil inside her, or a phase - but that it was a very real and important situation, and with a little cooperation and communication, there could be a positive outcome for everyone.

Mr and Mrs Foster were still reluctant to concede, and Mr Foster in particular was adamant that he’d never refer to his daughter as a ‘he’, but they’d definitely made progress. They’d agreed that they needed to talk about it at least, and Cas was pretty sure he’d convinced them to stop seeing this as a choice that their daughter was making just to be disobedient.

He’d also presented them with stacks of evidence to support the fact that anxiety and depression were actual real conditions, and that ignoring a suffering teenager, or labelling them a ‘drama queen’, was not helpful behavior from the people who were meant to be providing unconditional love.

He was certain that he’d got through to the Mom, because when he’d said; “By punishing a child for something they have no control over, you push them further and further away, and make them feel
Cas had given them lots of literature to read over, and he’d even managed to find a paper written by a Transgender Christian woman, so he hoped that would help bring them round.

He was feeling really hopeful. In fact, he was in such a good mood that he decided he’d surprise Dean on his way home, later. He assumed Dean would go back to his apartment after he’d been to the museum, and Cas started fantasising about turning up on the doorstep in nothing but his trenchcoat.

* * *

Dean and Meg settled into their seats, and Meg fired one more disapproving look at the mountain of food on Dean’s lap.

“Stop judging me,” he told her, as he negotiated the balance of his popcorn, hotdog, Coke and bag of candy.

Warrant’s ‘Cherry Pie’ suddenly blasted from Dean’s pocket, and Meg laughed at him as he desperately tried to set everything down so he could get his phone out.

“You are the worst,” she told him, assisting his efforts by grabbing his drink and the hot dog. “Eighties rock as your ringtone? I’m so ashamed right now.”

“Shhhh!” came a voice from behind them.

“You shush!” Meg told the lady.

“Sorry, sorry,” Dean said, sheepishly, then looked daggers at Meg. “Don’t start fights,” he hissed.

“Don’t leave your shitty ringtone on,” she shot back. “Is it Cas?”

“No, it’s Benny,” Dean answered, cutting off the call.

**Dean: Bro I’m at the movies what’s up?**

**Benny: Nothin just need you to pick up rings! I’ll call you tomorrow.**

Dean sent Benny a thumbs up emoji, then turned his ringer off, and flicked a bit of popcorn at Meg. The lady behind them clicked her teeth in disapproval.

Star Trek was twelve kinds of awesome, and Dean came out of the movie theatre feeling buzzed, and wishing he were Chris Pine.

“You wanna get dinner?” he asked Meg.

“You’re not eating with Castiel Casanova tonight?”

“No,” said Dean, not able to hide his disappointment. “He had an important thing going on at the school and he said it would probably wipe him out, so I promised to leave him be.”

“Is it driving you crazy?” Meg asked, grinning.

“Yes.”

Dean didn’t see the point in trying to save face. It was driving him crazy. He wanted to hang out
with Cas all day every day.

“Well, I may have just the thing to cheer you up,” Meg said, mysteriously.

Turned out that Meg’s method of improving Dean’s mood was extremely effective.

She lived in a room above a take-out place, so she treated him to a crazily large pizza, which even Dean wasn’t certain he could manage after all his movie food.

She also produced, courtesy of Ash, two modest but strong joints, which helped enormously with appetite stimulation.

Dean hadn’t smoked weed in a while, but he figured while he was on vacation he could indulge. He might have to do the unthinkable when he went home, and start being healthy for a while. He could eat salads and join the gym. Not for long, for Christ’s sake, but he could.

They smoked, and ate, and smoked, and talked. Dean really did like Meg, despite the weird gothic vibe she had going on. He’d been worried about missing his last train, but she said he could have her couch for the night, so he'd kicked back and chilled out.

It was nice. It wasn't as nice as being at Cas’s place, but it was nice.

“So tell me, cowboy,” Meg said, on an exhale. “What's Castiel like in the sack?”

Dean’s eyes glazed, dreamily. “Impeccable, thank you for asking,” he replied.

“Damn,” Meg smiled. “If only he weren't boys-only, I'd have tapped that years ago.”

“Oh, you like my man, huh?” Dean said, shoving her playfully in the shoulder.

“Fuck, yes!” Meg replied, emphatically. “He's fucking beautiful.”

Dean took a drag. “Yeah,” he said in a strangled voice, then blew his smoke out. “He sure is.”

Meg lay back on the couch.

“So you're gonna move here and marry him and adopt some beautiful babies, right?”

Dean smiled and closed his eyes. “Sometimes that does seem like the optimum option,” he mused.

“Optimum… opshumm…” Meg attempted, carefully, clearly nestled quite far inside a stoned fog.

Dean laughed at her, although he wasn't far behind.

“It's a real shame,” he sighed, words heavy with pot. “I could get used to him.”

Meg hummed her agreement and took another drag. “So take him back to the ranch with you!”

Dean giggled. “I don't live on a ranch, Bronx-girl. I live in a house!”

“Whatever,” Meg shrugged. “You could teach him to ride a horse and lasso shit.”

Dean shook his head and finished his final puff. “Have you ever been to Texas?”

“Nope!” Meg chuckled. “It's all dust and ribs and livestock, right?”

“Sure,” Dean yielded, stubbing out his joint. “I need to piss. Then I plan to pass out on this couch.
Whether you’re there or not.”

He got up unsteadily, and made his way to the bathroom, as Meg laughed and heaved herself up.

“Okay, cowboy,” she called. “I’ll go to bed, then. Come join me if you get cold!”

“I’ll never be that cold, sweetheart!” Dean yelled, affectionately.

He heard her laugh just before the door closed behind him.

***

Cas looked at his phone. Dean hadn’t called back.

He’d turned up at the door of Dean’s apartment building like he’d planned, and rang the buzzer. There had been no reply. He’d called Dean’s cell, and got his voicemail.

So he’d gone home, dejected. And also grateful that he’d decided to wear clothes under his coat in the end.

He wanted to call again, but didn’t want to pester Dean if he’d found something else to do. After all, Cas had been the one to tell him he couldn’t see him today.

*Just leave the guy alone. Go to bed.*

Cas grumpily took his own advice, but not before he’d had a large gin and tonic to get over his disappointment. He hoped it would knock him out sufficiently so that he wouldn’t dream tonight.

***

_Holloway Road, London_

_Thursday, June 27th, 2013_

Meg’s couch was nowhere near as comfortable as Benny’s, but fortunately Dean had been too stoned last night to notice. Waking up now, however, his poor back was not impressed.

Neither was his mouth, which was bone dry and tasted like ass. And not in the good way. He hauled himself to the kitchen and got himself a big glass of water.

Returning to the sitting room, Dean glanced at his phone to check the time, and realised it was still on silent from when he’d changed his settings at the movie theater. He noticed he had a missed call from Cas, and two from Jenna.

Immediately he panicked that something had happened to Sam, so he called Jenna back straight away, frantically pulling on his clothes.

Jenna answered blearily and Dean absently clicked that it was still the middle of the night in Austin.

“Jen! Are you okay? Is Sam okay? I had two missed calls from you but I was at the movies and I forgot to turn my phone back on…”

“Dean, Dean, stop yelling, it’s three thirty in the fucking morning.”

“Sorry, sorry, is he okay? What’s going on?”

“He’s fine!” Jenna assured him. “I was only calling because we’ve had an issue with our hotel and we might need to sleep on your floor on Friday.”
“Is that Dean?” Dean heard his brother’s sleepy voice.

“Yeah - douchewad forgot there’s this thing called a time difference.”

“Hey!” Dean snapped.

“Dean,” Sam had evidently grabbed the phone. “Can you fucking call us back when we’re actually awake?”

“I was returning your wife’s calls, asshat,” Dean spat. “I panicked man, I thought you’d had a relapse!”

Sam sighed, “Goodnight Dean. We love you, but I’m hanging up now. Talk to you tomorrow.”

Before Dean had time to move his mouth into the correct shape to form his next word, he heard two successive beeps, indicating that the call was over. He scowled at his phone, tossed it onto the couch, and finished getting dressed.

After a quick coffee and some toast with Meg, who is apparently horrible at being awake in the mornings, Dean set off for the tube station.

As he walked, he remembered his other missed call, and pressed Cas’ name in his contacts.

Cas answered, which surprised Dean because he was expecting to leave a message.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Hey, man!” Dean answered. “Aren’t you at work today?”

“I am,” Cas confirmed. “But I don’t have anyone to see until a little later. I’m just doing some paperwork in my office.”

“Oh, cool,” Dean said, noting that Cas sounded very weary. “So listen, sorry I missed you yesterday. I went to the movies with Meg and I guess I forgot to turn my ringer back on.”

“Okay, that’s alright,” Cas replied. “I went to your apartment on my way home from work to see if you wanted to come over, but you weren’t there.”

“Ah shit, sorry, baby,” Dean said, frustrated that he missed the opportunity to spend the night with Cas. “I ate dinner at Meg’s and we got kinda baked so I wound up crashing there.”

Cas’ only response was silence.

“You wanna meet up tonight instead?” Dean asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Cas answered, his voice short and a bit stilted. “I’ll text you when I leave school.”

“Awesome,” Dean said. “See you later!”

“Bye, Dean.”

Dean put his phone in his back pocket and jogged down the stairs at the station. Cas sounded really down. Dean guessed that the meeting hadn’t gone so well. Or maybe he was just still cut up about Rowena.

***
Having dutifully collected Benny and B's wedding rings from a jewelry store that looked as though it had the freaking crown jewels in the basement, Dean headed back to his temporary home and called his now-fully-awake brother.

The hotel that Jenna and Sam had booked had messed up their reservation, so rather than try and find another room at short notice, it would be simpler all round for them to stay with Dean. The night of the wedding was all fine - Balthazar had booked out an entire floor for his wedding guests, so all the Winchesters were ensured a bed after the festivities - it was the Friday night that was causing problems.

Benny was staying with the Best Man that night, too, which would make it a little cramped, but fun.

“It'll be a classic sleepover,” Dean said, into his laptop. “I have a huge bed, plus a nice couch and a lot of cushions that can be spread out on the floor, so we'll make it work!”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah - we'll work it out, man, don't worry.”

“Thanks, Dean,” Sam said. “That makes life a lot easier.”

“I live to smooth your path, my liege,” Dean joked, hand on heart.

Sam played along by bowing his head solemnly in response.

“Hey,” Dean suddenly said. “Can you bring over some grape jelly with you?”

Sam looked baffled. “What? Why?”

“Cas, he - uh - he misses grape jelly.”

Sam smiled, knowingly. “Of course he does. Anything else you want me to bring for your not-boyfriend?”

“Shut up.”

Sam chuckled.

Dean chewed his lip a little and coughed. “Also, I - uh - I've pushed back my return flight,” he said. “I called Bobby and asked him to organise it for me.”

“How come?”

Dean sighed. “I wanna be here for the jazz lady’s funeral.”

The last time they’d spoken, as well as filling Sam in on all his jealous misadventures, Dean had also told Sam all about Rowena. In fact, he’d told him everything about the pub and all the people he’d met, and how odd it was that he’d never once felt out of place or unwelcome in the grieving friendship group.

Sam stared at his big brother through the screen. “Why?” he asked, quietly.

“That’s a really good question,” Dean answered, with a wry smile. “I just felt like I wanted to stay.”

“For Cas?”
“I guess so,” Dean said. “I don’t know. I haven’t even told him yet.”

Sam raised his eyebrows and ran his hand through his hair. He went to say something, then looked as though he stopped himself. He sighed, shook his head a little and licked his lips.

“What?” Dean asked, reading his brother easily.

“Sorry, I just - you really like him, Dean.”

Dean opened his mouth to protest, but Sam wasn’t done.

“And I don’t mean ‘like’ in any kind of trivial way,” he told Dean. “I mean, shit, Dean - you’ve been seeing him for two weeks and you’ve already had your first argument and been through a death together!”

“It wasn’t really an argument…”

“Tell me five facts about him.”

“What?”

“Five facts. That he’s told you. Go.”

Dean frowned. “I don’t know what you’re trying to prove, Sammy.”

Sam stared at him, expectantly. Dean sighed.

“Fine. He’s from Boston, both his parents are dead, he loves Robert Downey Junior, he used to have a cat, and he likes mafia movies.”

Sam nodded. “Mm-hmm. Now tell me five things you’ve found out about him on your own.”

“What?”

“Five things - that you’ve noticed about him. Not things he’s told you, just things you’ve discovered.”

Dean looked away from the screen, and thought for a moment.

“And nothing sexual, for god’s sake,” Sam added.

Dean smiled a little.

“He always licks his teeth after he has a gin and tonic,” he began. “He jiggles his leg when he’s nervous. His friend Charlie is the most important person in his life. His eyes get narrower when he’s pissed. He rubs his left arm when he’s tired.”

Dean looked back at his brother, who was smiling. Not a mean, mocking smile, but a soft, kind one.

“Your whole face just changed,” Sam said, gently. “I have literally never seen you look like that.”

Dean frowned and shifted in his chair, feeling uncomfortable.

“Come on,” he said. “Don’t start.”

“Dean,” Sam started. “I know it sounds stupid, and Jesus I’ve never even seen the guy, but this…”
He took a deep breath, and seemed to order his thoughts. “Maybe it’s the after-effects of being sick,” he said. “But I’m totally on board at the moment with life changing decisions and seizing those lightning-bolt experiences!”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about opportunities for happiness,” Sam said. “Fuck, Dean, we’re so lucky - we have money and our health and jobs. You can do anything you want, so don’t get stuck thinking you can’t change, or that you have to follow someone else’s rules.”

Dean put his hands up. “Sam, I legitimately have no fucking clue what you’re talking about.”

Sam sighed. “I know it’s trite, but I guess I’m trying to tell you to follow your heart.”

Dean looked disgusted. “You did not just say those words.”

Sam laughed. “I did! And I’ll fucking say them again!”

Dean shook his head, smirking.

“I gotta go,” Sam said.

“Alright.”

“Think about it.”

Dean rolled his eyes, but nodded. “Okay.”

“See you tomorrow, jerk.”

“Have a safe flight, bitch.”

Dean closed his laptop and got up to make himself a coffee. He was amused by Sammy’s cute little fairytale head. Had Dean still been a teenager, he’d have probably agreed with his brother about the whole seizing the day crap, but he was a bit too battle-scarred and cynical for all that.

Sure, he could move to England in a flash of romantic grandeur, but then what? When the heat fizzles from the relationship and he doesn’t have a fucking job and he’s the other side of the world from his family? Life-changing decisions are all well and good if you really do wanna change your life, but Dean wasn’t sure he did.

He did, however, want to tell Cas about his change of short-term plans. Let him know that they were going to get a few more days together.

Dean: Hey angel pie where are you? Still wanna get dinner?

Cas: in jn the oub

Dean made a face at the nonsense on his phone.

Cas: *pub

“Okay…. you’re drunk.” Dean told Cas’s name on the screen.

Dean chewed his lip. Cas had sounded kind of off on the phone this morning. Dean should’ve checked that he was okay. Now he was drowning his sorrows somewhere, and Dean hoped he
wasn’t alone.

Dean: Crowley’s?

Cas: nored red lion its loud

Dean: Are you ok? Are you on your own?

Cas: alwhys

Cas: *alwaays

A little googling later, Dean had discovered the location of the Red Lion pub in Hatfield, and he set off to find it. It was quite a walk, and he didn’t know if Cas even wanted him to show up, but he had a bad feeling about Cas’ state of mind.

He turned down the street he’d been looking for, and saw the pub a little way down. As he approached, he caught sight of Cas standing outside, looking very unsteady on his feet.

“Hi,” Dean said, warily, studying Cas’ face to gauge how smashed he was.

“Oh,” Cas said, narrowing his eyes. “Hello, Dean.”

Dean wasn’t sure what it was that had kicked Cas off into a binge, and really he had no idea what the guy was like after a skinful. He’d never seen him like this, and for all he knew Cas could be a dangerous drunk. He certainly hoped not, but caution was likely the best option here.

"Are you alright?"

Cas shrugged and pulled a strange expression. “I’m really great,” he spat.

Dean pursed his lips. “I gotta tell you, man,” he said. “There’s not a lot of evidence backing up that claim.”

“Did you have fun at Meg’s?” Cas sneered.

Dean frowned, concerned by the confrontational tone. “Uh, yeah, I guess.”

“Get good and high, did you?” Cas enquired, patronising and sarcastic. “Forget aaaall your troubles?”

“What exactly are you getting at?”

“I shouldn’t really be surprised, should I?” Cas snapped, angrily. “You said yourself you get easily bored of just one set of reproductive organs.”

“Cas, what the hell are you talking about?”

“Bored of my dick so soon?” Cas laughed, sourly. “Missing vaginas so much already?!”

Dean raised his eyebrows, reminded himself that this was just the drink talking, and took a deep breath through his nose.

“Cas…”
“Did you fuck her?” Cas demanded.

“Excuse me?”

“Yeah, mate!” offered a drunken passer-by. “We all did!”

Dean rolled his eyes, and waited for the guy to be pulled away by his laughing friends.

“Come on, Dean, tell me!”

“Tell you what?”

“Did - you - fuck - Meg?!”

“Are you serious?”

Cas swayed tipsily towards Dean, and grabbed hold of his collar to steady himself. His face was inches from Dean's, and he reeked of many different kinds of alcohol.

“Did you kiss her?” Cas slurred. “Kiss her with these big beautiful lips?”

Dean turned his face away, and Cas laughed, bitterly.

“Come on, tell me,” he urged. “Did you lick her pussy?”

“Stop it.”

Dean grabbed Cas’ wrists. He didn't like this side of Cas. He wanted it to stop.

“Come on Dean, I wanna know! Did you get her all wet so you could fuck her like you fucked me?”

“Cas!”

“Did she make you scream? Did you come inside her? Fucking TELL ME!”

Cas shook Dean hard by his coat collar, then started to cry. He dropped his head onto Dean's shoulder, and weakly punched once at his chest.

“I wanna know…” he sobbed.

“For fucks sake, Cas.”

Dean pushed Cas off him, and steered him by his upper arms over to a small wall, where he made him sit down. Cas buried his face in his hands, and Dean crouched on the ground in front of him.

“What the fuck, man?” he asked.

Cas sniffed and looked into Dean's eyes.

“Did you sleep with her?” he asked quietly, and he looked so sad that Dean stopped being mad, and just sighed.
“No, Cas, I didn't sleep with Meg.”

“Why not?”

Dean raised his eyebrows. He couldn't believe Cas really thought he would do that. “Why not?!”

“Yeah,” Cas said, bouncing his knee, compulsively. “I mean, you and I aren't serious, so you can sleep with whoever you want, right?”

Dean rubbed his fingers over one eye. “Cas…”

Cas held his head in his hands again.

Dean put his hands on the outside of Cas’ knees, bringing the leg movement to a stop. “Look at me,” he instructed.

Cas lifted his eyes.

“I don't want to fuck Meg,” Dean said, slowly. “I don't want to do anything with anyone, except you.”

“But we're not…”

“...serious, right, I know, I said that. And I'm sorry it hurt you.”

Cas straightened up and looked into the mid-distance, chewing on his lip.

“But whether we're serious or not,” Dean continued. “I don't want anyone else right now, Cas. I just want you, for however long it lasts. I know I can't be yours for good, but I promise I am all yours while I'm here, okay?”

Cas turned his face back down to Dean’s.

“I'm very intoxicated,” he said, after a pause.

Dean huffed a laugh. “Yeah, no shit.”

He stood up and helped Cas to his feet. “Come on, Stumbles, let's get you home.”
Cas felt so stupid. He also felt kind of numb, and very hazy, but mostly really fucking stupid.

He fell into the cab, slurred his address to the driver, then slumped on Dean’s shoulder. He closed his eyes, knowing that if he looked out of the window at the moving world, he would definitely hurl.

He didn’t remember much after getting to the pub. He remembered ordering a lot of neat vodka, and then some Sambuca. So stupid. Cas had never been able to handle mixing his drinks, and he usually didn’t drink anything any more apart from gin, and the odd glass of wine.

He hadn’t eaten very much today, either, which didn’t help.

He remembered talking to a lot of people he didn’t know. Then Dean had been there, and Cas had yelled at him. Poor Dean. Poor, beautiful, blameless Dean.

Cas wanted to apologise, but he couldn’t make himself speak. He just moaned a little, then kind of zoned out, vaguely aware of the unintelligible voices of Dean and the cab driver. The jolts of the speed humps along his road stirred him, and he felt Dean moving to get out of the cab.

Cas dropped his key about five times before Dean took it off him and opened the door. He walked up to his room like he was in a dream. He really hoped he was. He went to the bathroom, very unsteadily. After peeing, he turned towards the door, but he must have spun around too fast, cause the world went spotty and he knew he was gonna throw up.

He got his head over the bowl just in time. It wasn’t a lot - not nearly enough to get all the alcohol out of his system. He groaned, and stood still for a minute, trying to pull himself together.

He brushed his teeth very gingerly, then walked slowly into his room. Dean helped him undress without a word, and Cas fell gracelessly onto his bed.

He felt Dean dislodging him so that he could get the sheets out from under him.

“Dean, I’m so sorry.”

His words felt heavy, and his voice didn’t sound like it belonged to him.

Dean pulled the covers up to Cas’ shoulders. “Just sleep it off, big guy, we’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

“Are you staying?”

“Yeah. I’m just gonna go get some water and then I’ll come to bed.”

“Okay…” Cas murmured, seconds away from unconsciousness.

***
Dean read his message from Sam for the fourth time.

**Sam: flight on time, Heathrow at 8, train at 8:40, Hatfield at 10:07! London baby!**

Dean looked at the clock on Cas’ microwave. Sam was about to land, and Dean therefore had two hours to sober Cas up and make sure he was okay, before meeting Sam and Jenna at the train station.

He’d already taken it upon himself to call Cas’ school and tell them he was sick. He'd remembered the name of it and found the office number on their website. Dean was proud of his little detective work. He liked finding things out and researching, even something silly like a phone number. He just liked finding the answers to stuff.

He finished stirring the coffee, and picked up the two large mugs - mugs which he presumed were gifts from Charlie, because one had a picture of Cher dressed as Wonder Woman on it, and the other had ‘525,600 MINUTES’ emblazoned on it in rainbow writing. Dean may not have had a PhD in musicals like Cas and Ash, but even he knew that was a 'Rent' reference.

He walked up the stairs, and stepped into Cas’ bedroom just as the man himself was rousing.

Dean placed the coffee down, and sat on the bed next to the poor, hungover little angel.

“Morning, sunshine,” Dean said, in a quiet, sing-song voice.

Cas put his hand over his eyes, and groaned.

“Hello, Dean,” he croaked.

Dean chuckled. “Pretty rough night, huh?”

“I'm so embarrassed...”

Dean’s mouth quirked up into a small smile. “Look man, we've all had one too many, and said some shit. I've been there.”

Cas flopped his arm down, and looked at Dean through heavy eyes. He pulled himself up to sitting.

“It was all just so unnecessary, and I'm so sorry.”

“It's okay, Cas, really.”

Cas sat back heavily against the headboard.

Dean reached into his pocket and produced the packet of painkillers that he’d liberated from Cas’ medicine cabinet. He tossed them into Cas’ covered lap.

Cas looked down, took hold of the packet, and grunted appreciatively.

“I think I might still be a little drunk.”

“Probably,” Dean nodded, then sipped his coffee.

Cas reached over to grab the water Dean had brought up last night, and swallowed down two tablets.

He put everything down on the nightstand, and let his head fall back heavily again.
They sat in silence for a short while, and Dean drank his coffee, every now and then glancing at Cas, who was just staring into space.

It once again occurred to Dean how not normal this situation was.

Two weeks ago he met a guy on a train, then saw him again in a bar, and they've been in each other's pockets ever since. Now he's nursing him through a hangover after being accused of cheating? It was like they'd been together for months, and what the fuck happened to Dean’s plan to have a casual holiday romance?

The voice in Dean’s head which had been telling him not to get attached had been well and truly silenced. Even after last night's little display of drunk douchiness, Dean knew that whatever happened in the future, he wanted Cas there in some capacity.

And he was surprised to find that the realisation didn't scare him at all.

“Can I tell you something?” Cas suddenly asked, not looking at Dean.

“Sure,” Dean said, shuffling up to sit next to him.

“I wanna tell you the reason why I drank, like, a whole liquor store yesterday,” Cas said, a little nervously.

“It wasn’t cause you were mad at me for going to Meg’s?” Dean asked, though deep down he'd known that couldn't really have been the problem.

Cas shook his head.

“Rowena?”

Cas shook his head again. “It was my friend Hannah’s birthday yesterday,” he said, flatly.

Dean didn't respond, just waited for the rest of the story.

“She would've been forty.”

‘Would’ve…’ thought Dean. Ouch. How many people has Cas lost?

“The reason I left the law firm,” Cas told him. “Was because my boss, who was also my good friend, disappeared one day with no explanation, and I was left in charge.”

Dean blinked, unsure what that had to do with anything, or why Cas was telling him that.

“I tried so hard, Dean, but I had no idea what I was doing. I was good in the courtroom, but I was terrible at managing people, managing the books. I was in way over my head.”

Dean didn't know what to say, or whether he should even try, so he just held Cas’ hand in support. Cas squeezed it, gratefully.

“Our regular clients and all the other employees kept demanding to know where Chuck had gone, and I didn't know what to tell them,” Cas said, eyes distant and voice unusually small. “We had investors and shareholders and board members, and they were all losing faith. I had to hand over my cases to other lawyers, because I was trying to do Chuck’s job, and I didn't have time for my actual job. A lot of those cases were lost because I was unable to sufficiently prep my clients and colleagues. Everyone was so angry with me all the time.”
Cas swallowed hard.

Dean had definitely not been prepared for this sudden volunteering of information. He felt touched that Cas wanted to share it with him, but also he was concerned that Cas might still be under the influence.

“You don’t have to tell me all this if you don’t want to,” he said, softly.

Cas flicked his eyes to Dean’s, briefly. “I do want to. I want you to know this, Dean.”

Dean licked his lips. “Okay. If you’re sure.”

Cas took a deep breath, and continued.

“Hannah was Chuck’s secretary. She was great, and she worked so hard to help me. But, I just couldn’t do it. I made some terrible decisions. I fired two people in a desperate attempt to save money and show authority. After I did that, three more of the staff quit in protest. Clients were withdrawing their business every day, people were trying to sue me for compensation, and our shares nose-dived.”

Dean frowned. He’d never been one for the corporate world, wasn't really sure how shares worked, and couldn’t imagine the kind of pressure Cas had been under. The poor guy. What a shit-storm.

He looked up at Cas’ face and saw that his cheekbones were wet with tears.

“Hey,” Dean said, suddenly very worried. He shifted his body towards Cas and wiped a thumb underneath his eye. “Cas, come on, sweetheart, don't cry…”

Cas sniffed and rubbed a hand over his face. He still wouldn't look directly at Dean.

“Our finance department told me the company was going under,” he said, quietly. “They told me I'd have to pay the remaining staff what I could in severance, and then file for bankruptcy.”

Dean stroked his fingers up and down Cas’ arm, trying to be soothing but not convinced he was helping at all.

“I didn't listen,” Cas shook his head. “I was so mad at Chuck for leaving, and so determined to fix it and prove that I could do it. I told them I'd get the firm back on its feet.”

Cas’ lip trembled and he drew in an uneven breath. “Four months after that the company went into liquidation. There was nothing left. I let everyone down.”

“Cas,” Dean tried, but Cas wasn't done.

“Some shareholders had seen it coming, and withdrawn their investments before they lost everything, but…” Cas dropped his head back and it landed with a thunk on the headboard. He didn't seem to notice. “There were some people who lost every penny, Dean. And Hannah was one of them.”

There was a thick silence as Dean registered the implications of Cas’ story. He started to feel a bit sick.

“Wealthy business people who made a bad investment can generally remain solvent, cause they have fingers in many pies,” Cas said, bitterly. “Not-so wealthy business people who made a bad investment may wind up having to sell their houses or cars, but they’ll get back on their feet eventually. And secretaries who sunk their life-savings in shares in a company because they trusted the people running it…”
He tailed off and closed his eyes.

“From the time Chuck vanished to the time it all collapsed was a little under nine months. Hannah barely slept the whole time; she was working so hard, and worrying, and trying to find him, and trying to keep me going. Neither of us were particularly stable by the end. But I didn't know she lost all her money until after.”

Dean held his breath, braced for the inevitable. When Cas spoke, it was just above a whisper.

“She drowned in her bathtub. They thought it was an accident. But then they found the fuck-ton of alcohol and prescription drugs in her system.”

Dean pulled Cas close to him, and noticed he was shaking.

“Cas, that’s not your fault,” he said.

“Of course it is!” Cas couldn't stop the tears now. “I let her down so badly, Dean! I let everyone down but, but… Hannah… She was so sweet, and she just wanted to help me and I… I… oh god!”

Dean held Cas tightly while he let it all out. When his sobs started to subside, Dean stroked his hair and kissed him on the side of his face.

“Cas - Jesus - I can't imagine what it must be like to have to carry this around with you every day,” he said. “But it sounds to me like you did what you thought was right at the time. You did your best, and that's all anyone can ever do. You can't blame yourself for what Hannah did.”

“If she'd told me,” Cas said, desperately, breathing getting shallow and erratic again. “I would’ve helped her, I would've stopped her.”

“Of course you would.”

“I would've never let her feel so alone, Dean, I would've done anything…”

“I know, Cas, I know, shhh, come on, sweetheart.”

Cas moved so his head was in Dean’s lap, and Dean gently petted his hair and face until he calmed down again.

“This is why you do what you do, isn't it?” Dean surmised, in a quiet voice. “You need to help as many people as you can.”

Cas didn't answer, just cuddled in tighter to Dean’s legs.

“You're a good man, Cas,” Dean said, gently. “I'm so sorry you went through that.”

“That’s why I went away,” came Cas’ quiet voice. “Why I went to Malaysia. It was so beautiful.”

“Did it help?”

“I - I learned how to give myself peace, but it's kind of - fragile, I guess. The guilt still gets in. I have to fight a lot.”

Dean stroked Cas’ hair and forehead.

“You ran pretty far,” he said, more to himself than to Cas.
Cas sat up and looked at him, eyes red.

“Do you think I'm a coward?” he asked, voice barely audible.

Dean shook his head. “No, I don't,” he said, truthfully, taking hold of Cas' hand again. “I think you made some mistakes, and you're still paying for the consequences. You fought, and you didn't give up. You fell, but you got back up again and that makes you very brave.”

“A lot of people hate me.”

Dean's chest hurt to hear Cas say that.

“Cas, when bad shit happens, people need a villain. It makes things easier for them to see things in black and white; good and bad. Let them hate. They'll get over it. From the story I just heard, you're not a villain. You got dealt a bad hand, that's all.”

“I sometimes wish someone would've arrested me over it.”

“What? Why?”

“So I could feel like I paid my penance, you know? There are days when I feel so happy and I don't think I deserve to.”

“That's bullshit, Cas,” Dean said, firmly. “You being miserable isn't going to make all those people happy and rich again, is it? Now, I didn't know Hannah and I can't speak for your friendship, but I know that beating yourself up for the rest of your life is no way to honor a deceased loved-one. God, do I know that.”

The two of them sat quietly for a few minutes, leaning against the headboard, Dean stroking a thumb over Cas' hand.

Cas rested his head down on Dean’s shoulder.

“This is so weird,” he said, quietly.

“What?” asked Dean, tilting his head to meet Cas'.

“I haven’t talked about any of that for years,” Cas said. “Not even Charlie knows all of it.”

“Thank you for sharing it with me,” Dean said, softly.

Cas lifted his head, and they looked at each other. Something unspoken passed between them, like it always fucking seemed to do when Dean locked eyes with those big beautiful blue ones, and they both smiled a little.

Cas leaned his head forward and kissed Dean on the lips. Dean put his hand on the back of Cas’ neck, and reciprocated, slow and easy. There wasn't too much sustained opened-mouth action or tongue, due to Cas’ current physical state, but it was nice, and soft, and oddly meaningful.

The kiss came to a natural stop, and Dean pulled Cas in for a cuddle. Cas nestled his head at the junction of Dean's throat and shoulder, and it felt very fucking right.

“I'm staying for Rowena’s funeral,” Dean quietly announced.

“You are?” Cas sounded surprised and pleased.
“I moved my flight.”

Cas looked up into Dean's face.

“Gonna fly home on the sixth instead.”

Cas’ eyes filled up with tears again, and he threw his arms back around Dean.

Cas had him gripped really tight, and Dean genuinely started to wonder whether he would let him go in time for him to meet Sam and Jenna.

Eventually Cas loosened his hold, and sat back, wiping his eyes.

“Dammit,” he said. “I need to pull myself together.”

“You’re fine,” Dean told him, stroking down his arm. He didn’t want them to stop touching.

“How come you’re staying?” Cas asked. “You didn’t need to do that.”

Dean shrugged. “I know,” he said. “And I know I didn’t even really know her, but I just… It’s weird. Just don’t wanna go home yet.”

“I’m glad,” Cas said, with a smile. “I don’t want you to go home, either.”

* * *

from<gabriel@gabesgateaus.com>
to<c.novak@woodgreencollege.sch.uk>

Hey baby bro! Good to hear from you.

We’re all gravy thanks - store going well, new website featuring my face is obviously what’s pullin em all in!

Sorry to hear about your friend, but damn RELIEVED to hear that you’ve been dating! Swear to god I was about to fly over there myself and bitch slap your lonely single ass all over High-nonsense-shire or wherever the hell you live.

Kali’s still killin it at the magazine, looking better with every day that passes, while I just get steadily grayer and fatter and more phenomenal.

Ambriel’s doin great, aceing school, much smarter than me. The twins are fucking chaotic but I couldn’t love them any more. Hael kinda looks like you - dark and moody with a penchant for the dramatic. Inias is inheriting my sense of humor much to his mother’s disgust.

Cassy we’d fucking LOVE for you to come visit, just gimme a date kid and I’ll be ready. Bout time you put down the tea and scones and came over here for some real food.

Have a good time at the big gay wedding - fight off all the other hoes and catch that bouquet!

G x

* * *

Dean: How are you feeling angel cakes?
Cas: still a little bit like death. has your brother arrived safely?

Dean: Yep! They're settling in, waiting on Benny to get here now.

Cas: have a good evening ;) hope your speech goes well tomorrow and I'll see you at the reception

Dean: You're not going to be able to resist me in my super fitted super designer suit ;)

Cas: i can't resist you anyway dean

By early Friday evening, Sam, Jenna, Dean and Benny were all sitting at Dean’s kitchen table with three large pizzas, some hot wings, and enough Doctor Pepper to drown in.

Benny had got to Dean's about two hours ago, armed with his suit and his speech and all other essential Groom accessories. Sam and Jenna had had a jetlag-combatting afternoon nap, and now they were all talking about tomorrow’s big event.

“Sure, I’m excited,” Benny said, picking up another meat-packed slice. “I love a party.”

Dean smiled round his pizza, knowing exactly how true that statement was.

“But I’m just really lookin’ forward to me and him gettin’ to the end of the day with matching rings and the same name, you know?”

Sam and Jenna nodded, knowing exactly what Benny meant, and Dean couldn’t have felt more like a spare wheel. He never really got the marriage thing, even having grown up with the long-lasting example of Ellen and Bill. He was thrilled that his brother and his best friend were so happy having decided it was what they wanted, but that level of commitment was certainly not for him.

He tried not to be openly cynical about it in front of any of them, but it was just never something he’d ever imagined himself wanting.

Despite himself, though, Dean’s first thought at Benny’s words was Castiel Winchester. And then, hot on that thought’s heels; Dean Novak.

He shook his head, imperceptibly, and devoured another hot wing.

“So is it nice having your best buddy over?” Jenna asked Benny, putting an arm round Dean’s shoulders, and squeezing him with her deceptively strong grasp.

“I don’t know,” Benny quipped. “I ain’t seen him! He’s been too busy not falling in love.”

“Fuck off,” Dean mumbled through his mouthful. He swallowed, then looked right at Benny. “We’ve hung out,” he said, defensively, and a little guilty.

“I know, brother, I know,” Benny said, through a laugh. “I’m kidding.”

“Man, I cannot wait to meet this guy,” said Jenna, gleefully.

“He’s cute,” Benny told them. “Really nice eyes.”

“He’s a teacher, right?” Sam enquired.

“Counsellor,” Dean corrected.
“Perfect!” Jenna interjected. “Free therapy!”

“I don’t need therapy,” Dean insisted, and it was hard to tell whose snort of derision was the loudest from his three guests.

When they were all truly full of pizza and wings, they migrated to the living area to chill before going to bed. Benny and B’s wedding ceremony wasn’t until early afternoon, (Benny cited the reason for this as his fiancé needing as much primping and preening time as possible) so there was no need for too much of an early night.

Jenna and Sam were on the couch, Benny on the chair, and Dean sat on a cushion on the floor. He had his knees up wide in front him, resting his arms across them.

Sam was idly playing with Jenna’s hair as she painted her nails.

“I’m sorry we’re crashing your groom-and-best-man time,” Sam said.

“Don’t be a damn fool,” Benny chastised. “It’s good to see you, Sam. I’m really glad you’re here.”

The subtext of Sam’s illness was heavy in Benny’s voice, and they all went a little bit quiet.

Dean still went cold at the implication of the loss that he’d been spared.

“What’s your first dance to?” Jenna asked, cleaving the silence.

Benny smiled. “Don’t laugh…” he pleaded.

“Oh god, it’s Bieber isn’t it?” Dean said, turning his mouth up. “You two always did have an unhealthy obsession with that poor boy.”

“It’s not fucking Bieber, you tool.”

Dean ran through some of the possibilities in his mind. Knowing B, it could be anything from fucking Sister Sledge to Lady Gaga. But Benny’s romantic song taste was always more in the Willie Nelson kinda bracket.

“It’s a song by Sarah McLachlan called Arms of the Angel,” Benny said, with a tone daring them to make fun of him. “It’s cheesy as all hell, but someone sang it at Juilliard when we met at this concert thing, and I don’t know.”

He shrugged and tailed off. Dean very rarely saw Benny even close to being vulnerable or embarrassed. It was nice. He smiled fondly at his friend, who was looking down at the pizza in his hand.

“Hey, if it means something to you, then that’s all that matters,” said Sam, genuinely.

“I’m sure it’ll be perfect,” Jenna added.

Benny smiled. “Yeah, as long as he hasn’t planned some fucking choreographed flash mob or some shit!”

Dean was about to say that he wouldn’t put that past B, and that they should probably be prepared, when his intercom buzzed.

He frowned, and got up off the floor, making some decidedly old-man noises as he did so. Fucking knees.
“Yeah?” he said, as he pressed the button.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Cas?”

Dean’s three visitors perked up immediately, like little Meercats.

“What’s up?” Dean asked, feeling flushed, knowing he was being carefully watched.

“Can I come in?” Cas’ voice came through the tinny little speaker. “I have something for you.”

Dean looked over his shoulder at his smirking audience, and rolled his eyes at them. “Sure, man, come on up.”

He pressed the release button, and went to open the door.

“Ooh what does he have?!” Jenna burst, high-pitched and far too excited.

“I don’t know,” Dean said, with forced patience. “Hopefully a taser gun.”

Cas was at the door in less than a minute, Dean’s apartment being only on the second floor.

All Dean’s confusion and slight embarrassment about the situation dissipated at the sight of Cas’ face. He smiled, then noticed that Cas had a large backpack on his shoulders.

“You hike here?”

Cas tilted his head, adopting that universal ‘ha ha very funny’ expression.

“It’s my old roll-up bed that I took travelling,” he said, moving to slide the bag off his back. “Given your extra house-guests, I thought it might be useful.”

Dean put a hand out to help take the weight. “Well, thank you, Cas,” he said. “That’s very thoughtful.”

As they both straightened up, Dean found that their faces were very close together. Cas smelled gorgeous, as usual, and his lips looked extra kissable. Dean’s mouth was slightly open, and he quirked one side up into a suggestive little smile, and was about to lean in.

“Ain’t ya gonna invite him in?” Benny bellowed, from over Dean’s shoulder.

Dean closed his eyes, and dropped his head in exasperation. Cas laughed, and kissed him on the top of his head.

“Hello, Benny,” he greeted, walking past Dean and heading into the apartment.

Introductions were made, and after they’d all convinced Cas that he wasn’t intruding, he made himself comfortable next to Dean on the floor, and they all had hot chocolate.

They chatted for a couple of hours, and every now and then either Jenna or Sam would give Dean a very pointed look - usually after Dean had laughed too hard at something Cas said, or if Cas mentioned something that he and Dean had in common, or revealed a personality trait that they knew Dean liked.

At around eleven, Benny looked at his phone. “Well, kids, some of us are gettin’ married tomorrow,”
he said, “I’m gonna go out into the hall and call B, then I’mma hit the hay.”

“C’mon, Cas,” Dean said, knocking Cas on the leg with the back of his hand. “Help me with this bed.”

Jenna and Sam disappeared into the bathroom to change and brush their teeth, and Cas and Dean rolled out the bed and arranged the cushions and blankets. Cas produced a foot pump from his seemingly bottomless bag, and blew the bed up til it looked nice and comfy.

“Well, this is gonna be much better than the floor,” Dean appraised.

Once Cas was done, Dean pulled him in for a hug and a kiss. “Plus, it’s gonna smell like you,” he said, voice low.

He kissed Cas, not meaning for it to get steamy, but fuck it how could he not get steamy with this damn guy bringing him blow-up beds, and charming the pants off his family, and being all sexy all the fucking time without even trying?

Sam cleared his throat from the doorway.

Dean let Cas go, and looked over at his brother, who was in nothing but plaid pyjama pants.

“Jesus, Sammy, put some clothes on,” he scolded.

“Dean, it’s okay to be jealous of my abs,” Sam mocked.

Cas chuckled, and Dean turned back to him, accusingly.

“Don’t look at his abs!”

Cas held his hands up in a protest of innocence.

“Yeah, no ogling my husband,” Jenna said, appearing behind Sam, wearing a bathrobe and a sly grin.

“There’d be nothing to ogle if he’d cover up,” Dean chided.

“Let me live, man!”

Benny appeared back at the door, phone in hand. “Sam has his shirt off,” he said, into the phone. “No, I’m not sending you a picture, you pervert.”

Cas laughed, and put both his hands on Dean’s face. He kissed him once on the lips.

“Goodnight, Dean,” he said, and turned toward the door.

“Night, Cas!” Sam and Jenna chorused.

Cas waved over his head, and high-fived Benny’s waiting palm as he exited.

“Smooth fucker,” Dean muttered to himself.

“Oh my god, Dean, I love him!” Jenna gushed, as soon as the door had closed, rushing to Dean’s side.

“I love you too, baby,” Benny told B, through his phone. “Sleep well.”
"He's so fun and smart and I really like his smile and his face…"

"Goodnight, Jen," said Dean, heading towards the bathroom.

He shook his head at his topless brother, but squeezed his shoulder, affectionately, as he passed.

When Sam and Jenna were tucked up in the main bed, Dean elected to engage Benny in one final wedding-eve pep talk. He was lying on the borrowed bed, looking up at the ceiling, and Benny was settled on the couch.

"You know it’s my duty as best man to make sure you’re not having second thoughts, right?” Dean said. “He’s already dramatic enough without being jilted at the altar.”

“Ain’t nobody getting jilted,” Benny assured him. “I love him to death, man, no cold feet here.”

Dean smiled. “Can I ask you something, man? No bullshit?”

“Dean, you could ask me for my kidney, you know that. Hit me.”

Dean wished he could borrow a bit of Cas’s psychic shit for a while. He wanted to look down the line a few years and see if he was happy. If Benny was happy. If all the decisions they were making now were the good ones.

“What’s it like?” he asked, plainly. “Having enough faith to just go - ‘this one’. This person, this decision. ‘This is me now’.”

Benny paused for a beat. “It’s a relief,” he told Dean.

Dean frowned. “Okay, but what happens when you get bored? When you fight and wish you were with someone else?”

“Dean,” Benny said, and Dean could’ve been irritated with the practised and slightly patronising patience in his best friend’s voice, if it weren’t for the fact that he knew he was a pain in Benny’s ass. Of all the things to say to a guy the night before his wedding.

“I’m sorry,” Dean said.

He regretted saying anything. He didn’t mean to get all negative about relationships. He just wanted to know how people did it. How it was possible to be chilled about connecting yourself so wholly to someone else.

“Don’t be sorry,” Benny replied, with a slight laugh in his voice. “I know what you’re saying. Brother, you think I don’t get bored? You don’t think we fight? You don’t think I see guys that are calmer and less high maintenance than B, and wonder why I couldn’t have ended up with someone else? You don’t think I still worry that one day he’s gonna leave my trash ass for fucking Prince William?”

Dean propped himself up on an elbow and looked at his friend, smirking at the exaggeration, but also interested to hear about the cloudy side of what he’d assumed was an idyllic pairing.

“But all that shit is temporary,” Benny told him, smile returning to his face. “It’s impossible to have a relationship where you’re happy one hundred percent of the time, Dean. But you get over the crappy parts, and at the end of the day if you can still look into each other’s eyes and see the person that hooked you in by your soul, you stick at it.”
Dean took a deep breath, and blew it out, considering Benny’s words.

“You’re afraid,” Benny announced.

Dean didn’t even try to argue.

“You’re right,” he agreed, and Benny raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“You know,” Dean continued. “Last night, Cas told me a whole bunch of shit about his old life in Chicago. He went through some crap, man, like you wouldn’t believe.”

Benny nodded, but didn’t ask for details.

“And after hearing it…” Dean took a beat, and licked and bit his lower lip while he tried to think of the best way to explain himself. “...I don’t know, it all just - it made me like him even more, I guess. He let me see a little bit more of him, and now I kinda wanna know everything. Wanna know him inside out.”

“Right on,” Benny said, sounding pleased.

“But,” Dean added. “It’s the reciprocation.”

Benny looked at him askance.

“When it’s my turn to let him in,” Dean said, looking right into Benny’s eyes. “I don’t know if I can.”

Benny licked his lips. “You mean, you don’t know if you’re secure enough to believe he’s still gonna be interested after you unpack all your Dean-issues.”

Dean’s shoulders sank, defeated. “Right,” he sighed.

Benny shifted on the couch. “Look,” he started. “You’ve always been one foot in, one foot out, not wanting to make decisions. You like having an out, like having options, I get it. But maybe it’s time to just go in to something up to your neck for once. Commit. Totally. Don’t give yourself the ability to be like, ‘well I wasn’t really tryin’ so that’s why it didn’t work’.”

Dean chewed on his cheek, forcing himself to really process what he was being told, instead of letting himself get defensive.

“You can’t be on the bench for your own life, Dean. Even if it ends up being a total fuck-up, you gotta be able to say you gave it everything you had.”

Dean didn’t know what to say.

“Lie down, Dean,” Benny advised. “Sleep on it.”

Dean did as he was told, and heard Benny reposition himself.

“Night, man,” Dean said. “Thanks.”

“Night, brother.”

Dean didn’t know how long he lay there, mind whizzing up and down his various trails of thought, but he soon became aware of the soft snoring coming from the couch.
He started to go over his speech in his head, when his phone silently illuminated in the dark next to him. He picked it up, blinking at the light from the screen.

Cas: thinking about you

Dean smirked. He knew he'd turn Cas into a sexter.

Dean: Oh yeah? What am I doing? ;)

Cas: actually i wasn’t thinking those kind of thoughts. but i am now <3

Dean: Well don’t think too hard baby cos even I draw the line at masturbating while lying next to my sleeping best friend lol

Cas: doesn’t stop me from masturbating now does it?

Dean bit his lip, instantly turned on. He was also grateful to be able to stop with all the deep and meaningful angst in his head.

Dean: I guess not. Have at it!

Cas: really looking forward to seeing you in your suit, maybe i’ll start with that image

Dean: Be careful when you tear it off me sweetheart it’s rented and it’s worth more than my house

Cas: i promise to be gentle ;) 

Dean exhaled a little laugh, and was ready to wish Cas a good night and settle down, when a second message came through.

Cas: btw sam and jenna are very nice, i really like them a lot

Dean: They liked you too baby

Cas: sweet dreams dean, see you tomorrow xxx

Dean smiled and turned his screen off, vaguely registering how easy it had now become to picture Cas joining his family around a table at Thanksgiving or Christmas.

“You can’t be on the bench for your own life, Dean."

He rolled over, and closed his eyes.
Cas had never been anywhere this fancy in his entire life. He was, once again, thankful for Charlie, who had made him rent a new suit. His work clothes were nice, and certainly not cheap, but turning up here in one of them would've made him look more underdressed than the staff.

It was already six forty-five; he was late. The reception guests were invited to arrive from six, but his train had been cancelled and he’d had to wait for the next one. Not that he’d have caught the one he originally meant to anyway, because he’d left his house a little later than he intended. He’d been having second thoughts about going, and he’d had to call Charlie and get her to talk him into it.

“It’s a wedding.”

“So?”

“So,” Cas explained. “There’ll be love and emotions weaved right into the atmosphere… and he’ll be in a fucking suit!”

“Castiel, you’re already fucked, why continue to fight it?”

“That’s not very helpful.”

“Look, it’s actually ideal - if you accidently make any love confessions, you can blame the ambience and or the alcohol!”

A very handsome concierge with a French accent and mesmerising eye-lashes relieved Cas of his overnight bag, and assured him he would deliver it to the Best Man’s suite. Cas thanked him, and walked away from the gilded check-in desk.

The signs to the wedding reception were hard to miss. There had clearly been a cultural fusion in the design, for above the perfectly calligraphed lettering, there sat a Louisiana brown pelican, and a fleur-de-lys with the colors of the English flag running through it. Cas smiled. These guys were so cute.

Cas self-consciously adjusted his navy blue bow tie, and turned down the hall towards the sounds of the party.

The main lights of the room had been dimmed, the hotel ballroom’s disco lighting had been activated, and the music from the live swing band was loud enough to get everyone going without being oppressive.

The first few people Cas saw as he entered were strangers, and he beat down his historical social anxiety to force himself through the throng to find a familiar face.

The face that finally relaxed him was Sam’s.

The younger Winchester was leaning against the bar, with a glass of wine, watching the activity on the dance floor.

“Hello, Sam.”
“Cas, hey!”

Sam put his hand out to shake Cas’. He looked genuinely pleased to see him, and Cas smiled warmly. He really had warmed to Sam, even after the brief conversation they’d had at Dean’s last night.

“You look great,” Sam told him, as they shook hands. “Great suit.”

“Oh, thank you,” Cas answered. “It’s rented.”

Sam looked very nice, too, but Cas wasn’t certain of the etiquette of complementing the attractiveness of the brother of the man you’re seeing. Especially after the man you’re seeing has recently revealed a slight insecurity about said brother’s very toned body.

“How was the service?” Cas asked.

“Oh, man, it was so good,” Sam said, with a smile. “I had a few actual tears.”

Cas smiled, and looked out to the crowd to see if he could spot Dean.

“You want a drink?” Sam asked him. “It’s a free bar until ten.”

Cas raised his eyebrows. “Free bar?” he repeated, amazed. “There’s like two hundred people here, how fucking rich is Balthazar?”

Sam laughed. “I know, right?!”

Cas turned to the impossibly beautiful barmaid, and ordered a large gin and tonic, which arrived almost immediately.

“Dean’s speech was really good,” Sam told him, as he turned back around with his drink.

Cas smiled - he knew Dean had been worried about talking in front of so many people.

“Did everybody laugh at his terrible jokes?” he enquired.

“Every single one,” Sam confirmed. “He was very charming. I think quite a few members of B’s family have fallen in love with him.”

Cas was utterly unsurprised by both that sentence, and by the stab of fierce possessiveness inside him. At this point, the daily absurd jealousy since he met Dean was fairly standard.

“There’s one particularly tenacious cousin that you might wanna watch out for,” Sam added. “Her name’s Antonia, and she doesn’t seem to want to take no for an answer...”

Cas scanned the dancers. If he saw some random woman all over his man, he might not be able to be held responsible for his actions.

“...but luckily, Jenna rescued him.”

Just as Sam finished speaking, Cas caught sight of Dean. He was indeed dancing with Jenna, and looking so fucking smoking in his wedding suit that Cas nearly started dribbling. He let out a relieved breath, and let a smile take over his face.

“You know,” Sam said, quietly. “There’s a picture of me at my wedding, looking at Jen, and the expression on my face is a lot like that.”
“Like what?” Cas asked, turning to look up at him.

“Like the one you had just then when you saw Dean.”

Cas screwed his nose up. “Need to work on my transparency, huh?”

Sam chuckled.

“Yeah, your career in M.I.6 isn’t gonna go so well,” he joked, and took a sip of his wine.

Cas followed suit, and took a large gulp of gin. His view of Dean kept being temporarily obstructed by other dancers, but he was in plain sight every few seconds.

“I gotta tell you, man,” Sam added, eyeline directed in the same place. “Just going on last night, you seem pretty great together.”

Cas’ eyes widened.

“Wow,” he said, with a smile. “That’s you and Benny who have both told me that. Guess I really should’ve got here in time to try to catch that bouquet.”

Sam laughed, in the same relaxed and uninhibited way that Dean did, and Cas smiled at him.

“It’s a shame there’s usually an ocean in between us,” he commented, wondering whether Sam would encourage him to fly to Texas in a super grand gesture of love. Not that Cas would do that. Probably.

“And Dean’s commitment problem, which is just as wide,” Sam added, with a smirk.

*His and mine, both.*

Cas turned his head back to watch Dean dancing with Jenna, and thought, for the millionth time, how really damn handsome the guy was. In a suit, or in jeans and a t-shirt, or in nothing at all, that fucking face just glowed. Dean looked good dancing, and he definitely wasn’t as drunk as he’d been at the bachelor party. He and his sister-in-law were obviously great friends, judging by the way they were joking and giggling while they danced.

“Jenna is very beautiful,” Cas told Sam.

“She sure is,” Sam said, beaming. “I never usually get to see her all dressed up - she’s either in her uniform or her pyjamas.”

Sam leaned in to Cas a little closer. “The uniform still gets me even after all these years,” he confessed.

Cas grinned. “I don’t think even I could resist a girl who has her own handcuffs.”

Dean and Jenna had apparently spotted Cas, because he turned back and suddenly they were both pushing through the crowd towards him.

“Hi, Cas!” Jenna cried, and was clearly going in for a hug, but was beaten to it by Dean.

Dean threw his arms round Cas, then pulled back a little to kiss him on the side of his face at his jaw line.

“Hi, Cas,” he said, echoing his sister-in-law, but with a good deal more impure suggestion in his
“Hello,” Cas returned. “You look remarkably beautiful.”

Dean bit his lip and threaded the fingers of both hands around Cas’. “Thanks,” he said. “You too.”

“Come on, you,” Jenna said, taking her husband’s hand. “Your turn.”

She dragged Sam off back towards the floor, leaving Dean and Cas together at the bar.

“Are you having a nice day?” Cas asked, mentally blocking out everything in the room but the man before him.

Dean’s suit was pale gray, with an ivory-blue silk handkerchief in the breast pocket, and a matching cravat. It was precisely tailored to accentuate every muscle and curve, and he looked so delicious. He also smelled phenomenal.

Cas nuzzled against Dean’s face and neck like an overly amorous cat.

“I’m having a very nice day,” Dean confirmed. “And I’m about to have an even better night.”

He turned his face and kissed Cas gently on the lips. Then he pulled back, winked and offered to get him another drink.

As Dean leaned over the bar, a very thin woman in a tight lilac dress appeared beside him, on the other side to Cas.

She placed a hand on Dean’s upper arm, and Dean looked at her.

“Dean,” she cooed. “Could you get me another champagne please, darling?”

Her voice was smooth and haughty, and Cas assumed this was the cousin that Sam had mentioned.

“Certainly,” Dean said, ever the gentleman.

He placed the order, then stepped away from the bar, so that Cas had a full view of this lady.

Dean put a hand out to each of them.

“Antonia Bevell,” he said. “This is Castiel Novak.”

Cas stretched a hand out, offended but not at all surprised by the disdainful expression she threw him as she looked him up and down.

“Nice to meet you,” Cas lied.

“Castiel,” she repeated, making the name sound like a chemical. “What an unusual name.”

“It’s an angel,” Dean told her.

“Indeed,” she said, wholly unimpressed.

The barmaid presented their drinks, and Dean handed Ms Bevell her champagne. She did not say thank you.

“Dean,” she crooned, voice like particularly sticky molasses. “I was thinking about going for a little walk in the gardens. Won’t you join me?”
Dean rolled his lips in, and Cas hoped he was thinking of a polite way to tell her to go fuck herself.

“Actually, Toni,” Dean said, slowly. “I’m afraid I will have to decline.”

She looked very confused, as if this was the first time anyone had said no to her. Cas concealed his smug smile by having a drink.

“You see, Cas here is my date for the evening,” Dean explained. “And it would be very ungentlemanly to leave him on his own and go off with you. Don’t you think?”

If looks could kill, Cas would’ve dropped dead on the floor.

Antonia forced an extremely thin and unconvincing smile, and, with the practiced formalities of the British elite, excused herself.

“I’m terribly sorry, I had no idea,” she said, flatly. “Of course, that would be extremely unchivalrous of you. I shall find someone else to accompany me.”

She lifted her glass a little, and concluded; “Good evening.”

She then flounced off with as much dignity as one can when one has been rejected in favor of a member of the opposite sex.

“You know,” Cas said, watching her. “If you go with her, you could end up inheriting a shit ton, and never have to work again.”

“Are you kidding?” Dean sneered. “Spending more than ten minutes with people like that is work.”

Cas smiled. “All the beautiful rich boys and girls to choose from, and you really wanna spend this evening with me?”

Dean put his drink down, and went in for a very non-PG-rated kiss. When they came up for breath, he whispered in Cas’ ear.

“Yes, I do. I wanna spend the evening dancing with you, and only you, because you are hands down the hottest person here. Of either sex. Then I wanna take you up to our insanely swanky hotel room and suck your brains out of your cock.”

Cas literally whimpered like a wounded puppy, and Dean shot him a self-satisfied smirk.

“Can’t - can’t we just pick a bathroom and you can do that right now?” Cas breathed.

“Absolutely not,” Dean scolded. “Bathroom blow jobs? Who do you think I am? You have to be patient.”

Cas pouted.

“Aw, don’t do that…” Dean laughed. “I’ll make it worth the wait, I promise.”

The band came to the end of their song to enthusiastic applause, and the lead singer announce down his mic that the buffet was now open.

Dean was delighted. “Yes, more food!”

He tugged Cas by the hand across the room to the overloaded tables. It all looked incredibly sumptuous - Cas couldn’t have even attempted to name the dishes he was looking at. There were
various pastry arrangements with salmon and caramelised vegetables, an assortment of different fancy breads, chicken, cheese, desserts… it all looked amazing, and he and Dean left the table with plates piled high.

“I should find Benny and Balthazar, and congratulate them,” Cas said, as they sat down.

Dean looked around the room.

“They were dancing,” he said. “I have no idea where they’ve gone.”

“Maybe they went to select a bathroom,” Cas suggested.

“Probably,” Dean said, stuffing his mouth.

“My brother certainly snuck off for some covert wedding-day action when he got married,” Cas remarked. “He wasn’t even subtle about it. Came back without his tie, and wearing my sister-in-law’s tiara.”

Dean laughed. “I think Sam and Jen managed to contain themselves until the evening of their wedding,” he said, then shuddered in the way one does whenever one accidently visualises the sexual activity of a family member.

Cas selected from his plate something which looked beef-based, but in this environment could just as easily have been veal or venison or fucking Reindeer, and smiled.

Christ, but it had been a strange month. The man of his dreams had appeared unannounced in his life, he’d lost a friend, gained a couple more, and essentially he was feeling increasingly like someone had picked up his life and given it a vigorous shake. Every day brought with it a new cocktail of emotions and the occasional epiphany.

Cas had attempted to resist falling for Dean, and he had failed spectacularly.

Looking at him now, he couldn’t imagine having to go back to living without him. Which was ridiculous and pathetic and Cas had no idea how to deal with it. So he ignored it. For now.

“It’s nice that you and your brother are so close,” he said, in reference to the fondness in Dean’s voice whenever he spoke about Sam.

“We’ve been through a lot,” Dean agreed. “No one on earth I trust more than that giant moose boy.”

Cas smiled.

Dean suddenly paused, luxury cheese half way to his mouth, and bit on his lip. He looked a little troubled all of a sudden.

“He was the only person who ever really needed me,” he said, quietly, obviously trying to sound pragmatic, but Cas could hear how sad he was.

“He’ll always need you, Dean,” Cas assured him. “You’re his big brother.”

Dean shook his head. “No,” he countered. “He has Jenna, and they’ll have a family soon. He’ll be an amazing father.”

Dean looked up, over Cas’s shoulder, and his face changed. Cas turned to see what he was looking at, and saw the grooms. Evidently they had not gone off to enjoy some marital relations - they were standing by their cake having some photographs taken. They were laughing, and periodically
kissing, and looking nauseatingly blissful.

“You think Benny doesn’t need you, now, either?” Cas asked, looking back at Dean.

Dean gave a wry smile, and met Cas’ eyes.

“I’m not trying to feel sorry for myself,” he said. “Just tellin’ it like it is.”

Dean finished his champagne and put the empty glass down on the table beside him.

“It’s cool,” he declared. “If no one’s depending on you, that makes you free, I guess.”

Cas frowned. He knew Dean didn’t believe that. He also knew that he was wrong about not being needed, but he figured now wasn’t the time to start trying to convince him.

“Come on,” Dean said, grabbing Cas’ hand and leading him to the dance floor, temporarily abandoning the luxury buffet food.

Cas went, willingly, and let himself be pulled into Dean’s grip as the current song swelled into its next chorus.

__________________________

Austin, Texas
March 14th, 2000

“I know it sucks, Dean,” Ellen said. “But these things happen.”

“Ellen, I’m actually okay,” answered Dean.

“Really?”

When Ellen had called him in to her office, Dean knew exactly what she was going to say. His album sales had peaked in ninety seven and ninety eight, but had pretty much tanked last year. People were losing interest in him.

Dean got it. It made no business sense for Hunter to keep investing in him if he wasn’t selling. May as well spend the studio’s money on an artist that’s actually going somewhere.

“Yeah, really,” he told Ellen. “Truthfully, I guess my heart hasn’t really been in it lately anyway.”

“We did kinda notice,” she said.

Dean sighed, and sat back in his chair. It was a shame; he’d been so excited back in the day about the thought of being a star. But he wasn’t a star. He was just another pretty boy with a guitar, and the world certainly didn’t need any more of those.

“I’m not exactly the cutting edge artist y’all need,” he said, with a small smile. “Country covers and acoustic versions of classic rock ain’t gonna cut it in the new millennium.”

Ellen sat forward. “Dean, you’re perfect the way you are, and you always have been.”

Dean stared at her, surprised at the sudden and sincere words.

“Where did that come from?” he asked.
Ellen shook her head. “Just don’t go thinking you did anything wrong, or that you’re not good enough,” she insisted.

She pointed above her head at the framed disc on the wall, and the signed poster from Chester Dean’s first tour.

“You’ve been a success, Dean,” she said. “People loved you. A lot of people will remember you very fondly. But this industry is shitty, and people are fickle.”

Dean smiled up at the mementos, and frowned a little seeing Lisa’s disc slightly higher up on the wall than his.

“It was fun while it lasted, I guess,” he said.

“You’re still gonna work for me, right?” Ellen asked. “Always need experienced producers.”

“Ellen, don’t hire me out of pity…”

“Pity?!” she spat. “Who do you think you're talkin’ to, boy? This company is my life. If I thought you were gonna fuck it up, I’d tell you to get gone.”

Dean smiled. He had no doubt that she would.

“So when I say I need you,” she continued, in a gentler tone, but still with an unmistakably stern undercurrent. “You’d better take me at my word. You want the job or not?”

Dean looked at her. He wanted to believe her, but couldn’t help feeling that this was Ellen throwing him a lifeline. Like she’d been doing his whole damn life. He wondered if there would ever come a point where he didn’t feel like a burden on Ellen and Bill.

“Yes, Ma’am, I do.”

Oh yeah, he’d take the job, and he’d work his ass off.

_____________________

Chelsea Harbour Hotel
Sunday, June 30th, 2013

It was coming up to one a.m., and most of the guests had gone up to their rooms, or left in their cabs, and now only the hardiest of wedding partiers remained.

The band had packed up and gone home, and it had been solid disco through the hotel P.A. since eleven. B was still dancing, as he had been for the best part of the last four hours. He was the only one left on the dance floor, everyone else having been bested by high heels or fatigue.

Benny, Dean, Cas, Sam and Jenna were sitting at one of the round tables, upon which was strewn various Reception debris - party streamers, empty wine bottles, abandoned napkins, disposable cameras…

Dean was beyond tired, but he was feeling really good. The ceremony had been awesome, his speech had gone really well, the food had been fucking amazing, and he’d been dancing with his beautiful angel all night. He was just brimming with happiness, and he knew that kind of sensation didn’t last long, so he was gonna bask in it as long as he could. The steady intake of alcohol all day was helping the buzz, but it went deeper than that. This was the kind of good you only feel when
surrounded by the people you love and who love you back.

The only other guests who had endured were Benny and Balthazar’s respective grandmothers, who were sitting at the bar drinking Earl Grey and getting on like a house on fire.

“Your Nana’s the last one standing, as always, Ben,” Dean said, loosening his disheveled tie.

“Yes,” Benny agreed, voice rough with the long day. “Eighty-nine years old and I bet you any money there’s Bourbon in the bottom of that teacup.”

Dean grinned. He’d met Benny’s grandmother a few times, and she was awesome. She used to throw what she called ‘The Grand Cajun Occasion’, to which the Winchesters had often been invited before Benny emigrated. It was always one hell of a party.

“Who’s her friend?” asked Jenna.

“My new grandmother-in-law, Catherine,” Benny answered. “That woman’s worth more than all of us put together.”

At that moment, the old ladies both howled with laughter at something, and the bartender scurried off, looking mortified.

“Filthy sense of humor, too,” Benny added. “Lord knows what she just said to that poor boy.”

Dean nudged his brother, who was sitting next to him, eyes drooping. “Go to bed, dude,” he suggested.

“Yeah, go, Sam,” Benny agreed. “Ain’t no shame in not being able to last any more, it’s okay that you’re gettin’ old.”

“Fuck you,” Sam said, through a yawn.

Benny laughed. “Alright, well, I’m gonna go drag that idiot off the dance floor.”

“He may be an idiot,” Dean said, watching B perform some kind of interpretive dance to a Kate Bush song. “But he’s now officially your idiot.”

Benny looked at Dean, and beamed. Dean grinned back; he was so fucking happy for his friend.

“Thanks for everything today, brother,” Benny told him.

“Love you, man,” Dean returned, giving Benny an affectionate punch on the upper arm.

Benny hauled himself up and headed to the floor. “Hope he don’t want me to carry him across the damn threshold.”

Jenna chuckled. “Come on, big guy,” she said to her husband, as she grabbed her purse. “Let’s not try and out-party the eighty year olds - we have nothing to prove.”

Dean stood up to give her and his brother a hug. “I’m really glad you came, man,” he told Sam.

“Me too,” Sam replied, giving Dean a bone-crushing squeeze.

Then he turned to Cas, who had got up next to Dean. “Goodnight, Cas.”

Cas put his hand out to shake Sam’s, and Sam raised a disapproving eyebrow at it.
“Absolutely not,” he said, and dragged Cas into a hug.

Dean smirked at Cas’ surprised expression, and he was way too drunk and joyful to try and fight the warm emotions he felt at seeing Sam and Cas behaving so familially.

“See you at breakfast, dickwad,” Jenna said, giving Dean a kiss on the cheek.

“Night, Sheriff.”

Once Mr and Mrs Winchester had gone upstairs, Benny went to tell the D.J. that the only way to get his husband off the floor was to kill the music. The man complied, but all that happened once the music went off was the two grandmothers decided to sing instead.

They only consented to leave once Cas and Dean agreed to escort them to their rooms.

“I always loved a man with dark hair and blue eyes,” Benny’s Nana told Cas.

“You behave yourself,” Benny warned, kissing her on the cheek.

“Ma’am,” Dean said, offering his arm to Balthazar’s grandmother, who was no doubt a fucking Duchess or some shit.

“C’mon, you old drunk,” Dean heard Benny say, and he looked over to see him lift B into his arms like he weighed no more than a pillow case.

“I’m not old!” B argued, wrapping his arms round Benny’s neck and tucking his head against his shoulder.

Dean watched them go, smiling affectionately.

“I’m so pleased Balthazar married Benny,” Catherine remarked. “So much more fun than if he’d married some awful girl.”

“You don’t like girls?” Dean asked, amused, as they headed slowly for the elevator.

“Oh, good lord, no,” she said, disgusted. “Far too giggly, and always make such dreadful decisions when it comes to interior decorating.”

Dean stifled a laugh at the odd generalisation.

“Men always have much better taste,” Catherine continued.

“Did you just say men have a better taste?” came the voice of Benny’s Nana behind them.

“Not a better taste!” Catherine protested. “They are possessed of a better sense of what is tasteful.”

“I’m extremely tasteful,” Benny’s Nana confirmed, and Dean turned to see Cas blushing furiously, the elderly lady on his arm nudging and winking at him suggestively.

Dean laughed. “Benny told you to behave, Pearl,” he said.

“Oh, screw him,” she replied.

Catherine guffawed loudly at Dean’s side. “Honestly, the language!” she giggled. “I’ve never heard anything like it. She’s an utter delight.”
Once the two elderly guests had been safely delivered to their suites, Dean and Cas walked hand in hand to their room, every now and then catching the other’s heated gaze.

Not a single word passed between them. The door closed, the clothes came off, and Dean led Cas over to the giant bed. Dean was true to his word, and silently kissed and licked all the way down Cas’ heaving body, before taking him into his mouth.

There was something so intense about the near-silence, and Dean focused on what he could feel. His own heart hammering, his breath high in his chest, Cas’s skin in his mouth and under his hands.

Cas made quiet little noises and released some ragged breaths, then came hard in Dean’s mouth. Dean crawled up on top of him, and worked himself against Cas’ thigh and hips until he was teetering on the edge. He stared into Cas’s eyes, and Cas petted his hair and the side of his face. Still no words were spoken, just a thousand untranslatable feelings exchanged through their eyes.

Cas took hold of Dean’s cock when Dean’s breath became erratic, and he stroked him slowly and firmly over into climax. Dean groaned against Cas’ neck, and felt his whole body shaking. He kissed Cas’ skin as he came down, then rolled over and pulled Cas in to him, tight.

They lay and breathed together in the dark.

As Dean started to drift away from consciousness, his mind flashed up fragmented images of the lovely day he’d just had, and his inner voice kept repeating ‘Cas’ over and over, until he fell asleep.
Glimpse Beyond This Illusion

The Rabbit and Hounds  
Sunday, June 30th, 2013

Charlie waited for Bela to finish pouring her very tall glass of soda water. For some reason, Bela couldn’t pour and talk at the same time. For a lady who owns a pub, she’d have made a terrible barmaid.

“Alright,” Bela said, once the glass was full. “So we’ll still have a quiz this evening, Gavin will play before it starts, and the trio will play once it’s over.”


Since last week, Charlie had had an epiphany about jazz night. Crowley’s drumming had been a big hit - a pun she had used with gusto when talking to her bosses about her idea - and she’d succeeded in convincing him to pick up his sticks on a more regular basis. She’d found a local chick who played the double bass, and with Gavin on keys, Charlie had created the ‘Rabbit and Hounds Jazz Trio.’

Crowley had feigned annoyance at having to participate, but Charlie had seen the glint in his eye during practise, and he’d even formed an actual genuine smile at times.

“I think it’s a wonderful idea,” Bela said, flashing that smile which made Charlie blush. “And it’s put my husband in a very good mood.”

Charlie grinned. “I knew he’d come around.”

“You’ve done very well this month, Charlie,” Bela praised. “Regular fixtures have been expertly executed, and you’ve managed the one-off bookings with enthusiasm and precision.”

Charlie looked down at the desk, tickled pink at the recognition, but still pretty bad at taking compliments.

“Thank you,” she muttered.

Bela leaned forward and whispered; “I think a pay rise might well be in order.”

Charlie’s eyes widened, but before she could respond, Bela’s office phone starting ringing.

Bela laid her elegant fingers on the receiver, and winked at Charlie.

“See you later,” she said to her, then, picking up the red phone; “Good morning, the Rabbit and Hounds Camden, Bela Talbot-Crowley speaking, how may I help you?”

Charlie left Bela’s office, and closed the door behind her.

Grinning at her boss’s words, and thrilled that she now had the afternoon off, she headed back to the tube station. Cas and Dean, and some of Dean’s family, were coming to her house for lunch, and she was really excited.

The relationship that Charlie had assumed to be a cute little romantic diversion, seemed to have become something else. Dean and Cas had been kind of inseparable for the last couple of weeks, and Cas being invited to all this wedding stuff with Dean’s friends spoke volumes.
Dean had been irrevocably inducted into Cas’ surrogate family - Charlie and Meg and Ash all fell for him straight away - and now, evidently, Cas was being welcomed by Dean’s nearest and dearest as well. Charlie gathered that Dean’s brother and sister-in-law were the closest family he had, and the fact that he wanted to bring them to meet Charlie was, she suspected, a huge deal for Cas.

No way was this the short-term fuck buddy arrangement that Cas had initially signed up for, and Charlie was as pleased as a Hobbit at second breakfast.

* * *

**Elsewhere in and underneath London**

Cas hugged Benny and B warmly, as if they were old friends, and thanked them again for letting him share their day.

Cas had woken curled up in Dean’s arms, and stayed there as long as he could before the call of nature forced him out of the gloriously comfortable hotel bed. He’d climbed back in it again a little later, with two cups of coffee, and he and Dean had slowly woken up together. Then they’d showered, and returned to the bed long enough for a steamy sixty-nine, before heading down to reunite with the rest of the wedding party.

The breakfast had been lush, and had certainly taken the edge off everyone’s hangovers. They’d all spent the rest of the morning chilling in the grounds of the hotel, talking and drinking more coffee, and laughing, and Cas had glowed watching Dean interact with his brother. It was lovely.

They were now bound for Charlie’s house, to have some lunch and hang out before Jenna and Sam had to get back to the airport.

“It’s a shame you don’t have time for any sight-seeing,” Cas said to Sam, as they sat down on the train.

“To be honest, Cas,” Sam replied. “I’m still kinda low on energy, so walking around doing tourist stuff probably wouldn’t be the greatest idea.”

Cas nodded, finding it difficult to imagine this guy, who was the very epitome of the word ‘strapping’, being ill and thin as a result of his treatment.

“I’d love to come back in the future, though,” Sam added.

“Well, you know where to find me when you do,” Cas said, with a smile.

He looked over across the aisle at Jenna and Dean, who were deep in conversation. The underground train was loud, so it was hard to hear anyone apart from the person right next to you, but Dean kept smiling, so Cas assumed it was a nice conversation.

“...ridiculously short trip,” Sam was saying. “I just - I love Benny, and we really wanted to come over for the big day.”

Cas looked at Sam. “He means a great deal to Dean, doesn’t he?”

Sam nodded. “ Definitely,” he agreed. “Every time Dean went through some bad shit, Benny was there.”

Cas saw a flicker in Sam’s expression, and wondered what he was seeing in his mind’s eye. Clearly, Cas hadn’t even scraped the surface of Dean’s past.
“I mean, I would’ve been there, too,” Sam clarified. “So would all the family, but - I guess Dean never wanted to burden us with his problems.”

Cas smiled, minutely. Selfless. *That*, he did know about Dean.

“Benny always seemed to show him a way out of the dark,” Sam said. “I really think I might have lost Dean if not for Benny. I guess I felt like I had to be here for his wedding as my small way of thanking him.”

Sam looked at Cas and smiled.

“Dean likes to think he doesn’t need people, but he does.”

Cas looked back over at Dean. “I get that,” he said. “I’m exactly the same.”

 Manhattan, New York
 March 5th, 1999

Dean hadn’t told Benny he was coming. He hadn’t told anyone. He’d just got in the Impala and driven for almost two days straight until he’d arrived in New York.

He hadn’t had the faintest idea where Juilliard was, and couldn’t remember where Benny fucking lived, cause all of this fucking city looked the same to him. He’d found somewhere to stop, and had to pick up his phone and call. The dozen missed calls from Bobby and Ellen went ignored.

Luckily, Benny had answered and come and found him, and was happy to put him up for however long he needed.

“I’m fucking done, man,” Dean swore, pacing up and down Benny’s tiny kitchen, swigging from the bottle of whiskey he’d brought with him.

“With what?” Benny asked, calmly, sitting on the counter, watching his friend.

“All of it,” Dean insisted. “Everyone.”

“Alright…” Benny said. “You wanna elaborate a little?”

Dean licked his lips and shook his head. “It’s a fucking joke.”

“What is?”

“Alright…” Benny said. “You wanna elaborate a little?”

Dean’s father, suddenly.

“My life,” Dean responded, curtly, then took another swig. “How’s your father?” he demanded of Benny, suddenly.

Benny frowned. “Uh, he’s good. Haven’t talked to him in a couple days, but -”

“My life,” Dean responded, curtly, then took another swig. “How’s your father?” he demanded of Benny, suddenly.

Benny closed his mouth, and nodded, slowly.

“He’s in prison, did you know that?”

Benny didn’t answer.
“In fucking prison for being a drunk, violent shithead,” Dean went on. “And I hope he fucking rots in there.”

“You really mean that, brother?”

“Yeah, I really fucking mean it. He walked out on me when I was five. My Mom died, and he fucking left. Chicken shit piece of… Left me and Sam with his fucking friends! Imagine if they didn’t want us? I’d be on the streets or in shitty foster care while he drove round the fucking country getting into fights cause he’s a dick.”

“Dean, stand still, you’re making me fucking dizzy.”

“I definitely inherited his anger,” Dean said, bitterly. “That’s all he ever fucking gave me. Oh, and apparently his alcohol tolerance.”

He took several gulps from the bottle.

“Maybe you oughta slow down, Dean.”

“I thought my life was gonna be shit,” Dean said, ignoring his friend’s suggestion. “Then, low and behold, I’m a fucking singer with albums and tours and a fucking fanclub.”

Benny sighed, but stayed silent while Dean continued to rant.

“And I get a girl. And she’s awesome. Then I break up with her for no fucking reason other than I’m a giant dick.”

More whiskey went down.

“Now she’s fucking super famous with a douchebag actor boyfriend, and I’m getting assaulted by creepy-ass fuckheads in hotel rooms.”

Benny rubbed a hand over his face.

“He thought I was gay,” Dean said, voice much more quiet.

He looked at Benny, noting with unease that his vision was a little blurry.

“I know,” Benny answered, matching Dean’s new volume. “You told me. I remember.”

“What if I’m gay?” Dean asked. “What if I’m one of those guys who’s been gay all along and didn’t realise?”

“Dean, you’re not gay.”

“How do you know?!”

“Because I fucking know, alright?”

“Do you know how much my Dad would kick my ass if he knew the drunken shit you and I have done?” Dean blasted.

He could only imagine the look of disgust on John’s face if he knew that Dean and Benny had kissed, never mind the time they may or may not have jerked off together while naked in lake Claiborne.
Benny shrugged. “Who cares what he would do or say, Dean? If he’s such a dick, why does his opinion even matter?”

“It doesn’t!” Dean yelled. “He doesn’t matter at all to me!”

“Calm down, bro…”

“Benny, I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing!”

Dean gesticulated so wildly that the nearly-empty bottle of whiskey flew out of his grasp and smashed into the window next to Benny’s refrigerator.

They both froze, looking over at the shattered glass and spilled liquid.

“Fuck.”

Dean slid down to the floor, hand in his hair, feeling like the biggest piece of crap.

“I’m sorry, Ben.”

Benny hopped down off the counter top and went to sit with Dean on the floor.

“It’s okay, brother,” he said, hands resting comfortably on Dean’s knees. “Look, whatever’s going on with you, we’ll fix it, okay?”

Dean looked up, tears escaping unbidden from his eyes.

“I’m a mess, man,” he told Benny. “I feel like there’s a storm inside me waiting to break, and I’m barely holding it back.”

“Come on,” Benny said, pulling Dean in for a hug.

Dean put his arms round his friend, feeling so tired, and so sick.

It was all going wrong. He felt like happiness and success were slipping out of his grasp just like that damn bottle. He felt like he didn’t know who he was, only knew that he was desperate not to turn into his fucking father. It seemed laughably inevitable, though. Emotional turmoil had struck, and what had he done? Grabbed a bottle of Jack, driven off across the country and not told his family where he was. Classic Winchester move.

The door of Benny’s apartment opened, and Dean heard a very English voice calling out.

This must be the rich douchey boyfriend I’ve heard all about. Great. Way to make an impression.

Charlie’s house
Sunday, April 30th, 2013

“Is Charlie alright?”

Charlie heard Dean ask the question, but didn’t hear Cas’ response. She wasn’t alright. She had been - she’d been on top of the world until she got home and decided to take a bath.

She shook her head, and went back to stacking the dishwasher.
Lunch had been very tasty and very fun. A while back, Tamara had shown Charlie the art of the British Sunday Roast, and she’d very nearly mastered it.

Dean’s brother was so sweet, and really handsome. He was very smart too; finally Ash had someone on his level to talk to. Jenna was absolutely lovely, and Charlie really enjoyed talking to her. She was great with Audrey, and Charlie hoped she hadn’t offended her by telling her that she’d make an awesome mom.

Listening to the laughter from the other room, Charlie decided she wouldn’t be missed for a while, and slipped upstairs. She sat on her bed, and stopped trying to fight off the blues that had descended. She could wallow for a few minutes. It was exhausting being everyone’s happy friend all the time. Awesome, sure. But exhausting.

“Charlie?”

Apparently her subtle disappearance hadn’t been as subtle as she thought.

Dean pushed the door all the way open.

“Hey, Dean.”

“Are you okay?” Dean asked. “I came to help you, but you weren’t in the kitchen.”

Charlie plastered on her signature smile. “I’m good,” she said. “Just needed some quiet, I guess. There’s a lot of people here today.”

Dean frowned. “Sensory overload?” he asked, stepping into the room.

Charlie shook her head. “No.”

Dean chewed on his lip a little. “Charlie,” he began. “We don’t know each other that well, but - if there’s something the matter, I’m a real good listener.”


“Hey, me too!”

Charlie laughed.

“Okay, I’m just a bit down on myself today,” she admitted. “I was feeling really good but then, I…”

She looked up at Dean, who was regarding her with what looked like genuine concerned interest. She trusted this guy. Whatever he had that had drawn Cas in, it was working on her too. Dean was one of the good ones. She believed that, absolutely.

“I had a really positive meeting at work, and Bela told me I might get a raise,” she told him, standing up and pacing a little. “And I came home and I took a bubble bath.”

Dean nodded, approvingly. “Good day, so far.”

“Right. So then I was thinking about Tamara, and how she’s gonna stay over later after work.”

“All good,” Dean said, with a smile. “She’s something else, huh?”

“Oh my god,” Charlie agreed, closing her eyes. “She’s so pretty I can’t stand it.”
Dean chuckled.

“I was getting out of the tub and I thought, ooh I’m gonna send her a naked pic of me all wet.”

Charlie briefly regretted inflicting that particular mental image on Dean.

“And I took like nine selfies and I deleted them all because no matter what angle I took them from I just looked fat.”

Charlie’s last word tailed off breathily as she suddenly started to cry. She covered her mouth with one hand and closed her eyes as she tried to stifle the sobs.

“Hey, hey,” Dean hurried over in surprise and grabbed her shoulders. “Come on Charlie, don’t cry,” he wrapped her in a warm hug. “Oh, sweetheart…”

“Sorry,” Charlie managed, once she’d got control of herself. She pulled out of Dean’s grasp, embarrassed. “Fuck, I’m so sorry Dean. Major mommy meltdown.”

“It’s okay,” Dean said. “I get it.”

“Do you?” she asked, more aggressive than she’d intended. “Do you get what it’s like to have your stomach muscles absolutely shot to fuck?”

Dean opened his mouth to respond but Charlie was nowhere near done.

“Do you have stretch marks all over that stomach, and all over your thighs as well because God decided you needed a little extra challenge? Did you have to do months of fucking kegel exercises to get your vagina back into shape cause it was fucking wrecked?”

Dean looked down at the floor, apparently happy to concede that he was not going to win this one.

Charlie put her face in her hands.

“Shit,” she said, voice muffled. She removed her hands and put them on her hips, looking up at the ceiling before shaking her head and looking back at Dean.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, again. “You don’t deserve to be emotion-vomited on. It’s not your fault I still have post-pregnancy body frustration four years after fucking childbirth. And it’s certainly not your fault that we live in a world where women are judged on their fucking shitting cocking selfies.”

She sat down heavily on the end of the bed.

After a brief silence in which he seemed to be gauging the safety of the decision, Dean sat down next to her.

“Charlie, I’m not going to give you some spiel about how ‘you are not your body’ and how ‘sexy is an attitude’,” he told her. “None of that crap. You feel what you feel and if you don’t feel happy in your own skin then there ain’t much I can say to change that. It’s your body, so your opinion is the one that matters.”

Charlie had no answer to that. She was pleasantly surprised at Dean’s honesty and understanding. She remained staring down at the floor, hands clasped between her knees, forearms resting on her thighs.

“However,” Dean went on, putting one of his hands on top of hers. “I will tell you that you are beautiful, and even though truthfully I have no real desire to see you naked...” - Charlie snorted - “…I
am certain that Tamara *does*, and no amount of bad angles or unflattering bathroom lighting is gonna put her off getting her hands on you.”

Charlie straightened up, and held the hand that Dean had offered.

“Thanks,” she said, quietly. “You’re sweet.”

Dean smiled. “Ain’t I, though?”

Charlie laughed and shook her head. “It’s just - Tammy’s so fucking firm! What the hell must she think when she sees what a train wreck my body is from the ribs down? Actually even higher than that, cause my boobs sure as hell aren’t as buoyant as they used to be! Damn breastfeeding.”

Dean let go of her hand to dig in his pocket.

“I wanna show you something,” he said.

“Show me all you like sailor but I ain't interested,” she quipped.

Dean answered her with an eyebrow, pulled his phone out and brought a photo up on the screen.

“Holy crap!” Charlie exclaimed, double-taking and then grabbing the phone off him for a closer look. “Is that you?”

“Yes ma’am, me circa ninety seven.”

“Oh my god, you were so cute!”

“ Damn straight,” Dean agreed, with a smile. “That right there was the cover of my album.”

Charlie grinned down at nineteen-year-old Dean, who was wearing nothing but blue jeans, a silver chain necklace and a white cowboy hat, which he was tipping up with one finger while smoldering at the camera.

“It was also ‘September’ in my official calendar,” present-Dean added.

“You did *not* have a calendar!” Charlie looked into Dean’s face to see if he was kidding.

“I did, and it sold better in Texas that year than Shania’s.”

Charlie laughed, and looked back down at the phone.

“But look at this guy, Charlie,” Dean said, his voice softening as he edged closer to her. “Smooth chest, abs to kill for and not a blemish anywhere on his skin. It’s all real too - no photoshop back in my day!”

Charlie looked at him, expression falling a little as she saw where he was headed.

“Sometimes,” Dean continued, tapping the face of his past self. “I look in the mirror and I’m genuinely surprised when I don’t see this guy looking back at me.”

There was a pause. Dean licked his lips and shook his head, but didn’t look up.

“It’s like, I’ll catch sight of myself and think - who the fuck is that? When did I get wrinkles round my eyes? When did I stop being able to eat whatever the hell I wanted and still have a flat stomach? When the *fuck* did I start to get grey hairs round my temples?”
He took the phone back from Charlie and closed the photo. He sighed.

“It’s everyone, Charlie,” he looked at her. “Inside everyone over thirty is a teenager wondering what the hell happened.”

Charlie looked at him a while, never having imagined him to be vulnerable or insecure. Inwardly she reprimanded herself for being so unintentionally sexist. Of course guys have body-image issues. Especially guys like Dean, objectified from such a young age.

“You’re right,” she said. “I know it’s not just me. And for what it’s worth - I think you’re way hotter now.”

Dean hummed a laugh, still looking down at his hands. “Thank you.”

He turned his face to look at her.

“You know she doesn’t care that you have stretch marks, Charlie. Your body isn’t perfect and neither is mine. You know why? Life. Life makes us older and flabbier and it leaves scars. And sure, everyone wants to be a model, and yeah maybe everyone wants to sleep with a model too, and we all got our fantasies. But you are still sexy, with all your flaws.”

Charlie started to answer but Dean interrupted her before she even started.

“You know what,” he said, suddenly impassioned. “Scratch that - they’re not flaws. You were pregnant and you had a baby and your body changed. Of course your stomach isn’t flat any more and so fucking what? The only reason you think your body isn’t attractive is because there ain’t no stretch marks on the cover of Vogue. Well there fucking should be, because people change shape and it leaves a mark. We’re not made of fucking marble.”

Charlie smiled, more fond of her newest friend than ever.

“Dean,” she said, sad frustrated tears turning to happy grateful ones. “You’re awesome. Thank you.”

She leaned in for a tight cuddle, which was enthusiastically returned.

“And hey,” Dean told her, as they broke apart. “I might get blue about my body, but I know Cas ain't with me for the tightness of my torso.”

“No, I’m not,” came a voice at the door. “It’s for the quality of your blow jobs.”

They looked up, and Charlie laughed.

“You okay, honey?” Cas asked from the doorway, looking at her with concern.

Charlie wiped her hands across her cheeks, flicking away all the stray tears.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she smiled. “Hey Cas, have you seen this picture of little twinky Dean?”

“Seen it?” Cas said, coming into the room. “I’ve got the calendar.”

* * *

_Hatfield_

Cas had never before wanted anyone so desperately that he couldn't at least get his pants off. Yet, here he was, fully clothed from the waist up, and with his jeans and boxers stuck round his knees.
They hadn't even made it upstairs. Dean was on all fours in the doorway between the living room and the hall.

“Fuuuuuck! Yes, yes, oh yeaahh!!” Dean cried, as Cas drove harder into him.

Cas kept hearing little alarm bells of guilt in his head, worrying that Dean wasn’t prepped enough for such treatment, but every time he moved to pull out or slow down, Dean protested by pushing back even harder. Happy that Dean was happy, Cas abandoned his higher brain functions, and just fucked.

He took hold of a handful of Dean’s hair, and gave it an experimental tug. The reaction was encouraging,

“Aaaaaaaahhhhh!”

“You like that, baby?” Cas asked, voice breathy.

He wasn't usually one for cheesy porn talk, but there was a time and a place for everything, and now was that time.

“Yes!” Dean cried. “Oh, yeah!”

"Yeah, keep screaming for me, Dean, love it when you scream.”

Cas pulled at Dean's hair again, and slapped his ass with his other hand.

“Aaaahh, Cas, CAS, Cas! Yes… yes … fuck me, fuck me!”

"Yes, yes, take it, Dean, take my cock, gonna make you come so hard for me..."

Cas put his hand round under Dean’s stomach and jerked him. The angle was awkward, but apparently effective, because it took Dean less than a minute to reach his peak.

“Fuuuuuckk!!!!!”

Cas released Dean’s dick, and put his hands back on his hips for the home straight. He hit his orgasm with an inarticulate shout, and stayed in Dean for about a minute after, just drawing lazy circles inside him while his cock twitched its way down from ecstatic release. They were both breathing heavily, and when Cas finally pulled out, they collapsed next to each other on the carpet.

“That was - sudden,” panted Dean.

“Are you okay?” Cas asked. “I didn’t hurt you?”

“No, man,” Dean replied, with a little chuckle. “Not at all. It was just what the doctor ordered.”

He rolled over and put his arm across Cas’ chest.

"And congrats on the filthy talk," Dean added. "Hot as fuck!"

Cas blushed a little, cringing a little at himself now the pheromones were wearing off.

He was still surprised at how desperately he’d wanted this today. Certainly it was partly to do with the fact that he had recognised in Dean the need to be distracted, having delivered his brother to Heathrow. He'd wanted to help Dean get out of his head, but also he craved him so fucking much it was practically tangible. No doubt the lingering wedding vibes, the slight hangover, and the beautiful
way Dean had dealt with Charlie had all contributed to Cas’ desire, but he couldn’t get inside Dean fast enough.

They lay there until their heart-rates and breathing went back to their default settings.

“Oh, hey,” said Dean, tapping his fingers against Cas’ chest. “I’ve got something for you.”

He rolled back over and heaved himself up. Cas watched him from the floor as he walked towards his bag, and even having just come, Cas could think of nothing but sinking his teeth into Dean’s buttcheek.

Dean returned, and knelt down. Cas sat up, and took what was being offered to him in Dean’s outstretch palm.

“Grape jelly!” he exclaimed, a huge smile cracking his face. “Oh my god - real, actual Welch's grape jelly! I could cry.”

Dean laughed. “I had Sam bring it over.”

Cas tore his eyes away from this blessing in a jar that he’d been gifted, and looked at Dean.

“Thank you, Dean.”

He kissed Dean on those big bastard lips, and that familiar tingle went straight down his body. God, he was really going to miss that feeling.

“I should maybe put my pants back on,” Dean suggested.

“That’s a terrible idea.”

“You should pull yours up too, Mister Novak. You look very debauched.”

Cas put his jelly down, and pushed himself up off the floor. He pulled up his jeans, and watched Dean do the same while he fastened his belt. Dean flinched a little as he moved to sit down on the couch.

“Are you okay?” Cas asked.

“Yeah,” Dean replied, with a slight wince. “My ass just isn’t used to so much attention.”

Cas flopped down next to him. “Never been with a guy long-term?” he asked, even though he already knew the answer.

Dean shook his head.

“Did you ever sleep with Benny?” Cas enquired, not quite sure why he wanted to know.

“Nah,” Dean said. “Got a little frisky back in the day when we'd had too much to drink, but never slept together.”

Cas let his head fall back on the couch. It had been a long weekend. Too much to drink, very little sleep, and more external emotions than he was used to.

“Are you okay?” Dean asked, rubbing his hand soothingly up and down Cas’ thigh.

Cas rolled his head to look at Dean. “Yes, I'm okay, why?”
“After what happened Thursday night, and everything we talked about Friday morning - just haven't checked that you're alright, that's all.”

Cas gave him a smile. “I'm good,” he said, and he really was.

Dean’s opinion of him hadn’t demonstrably altered since his revelation about what had gone down in Boston. Cas didn’t think it had made Dean think any less of him; in fact it felt like they’d got closer.

“I literally never share my crap with anyone,” he added. “I don’t like to inflict it on people. I feel - I guess I feel like it diminishes me when I reveal my past failings, you know? But with you, I…”

He tailed off. He didn’t want to come on too strong; didn't want to accidentally deliver a you're-the-best-thing-that-ever-happened-to-me speech. But fuck it, surely they’d still be friends when Dean went home? They’d shared a lot recently, they would still talk, whatever happened. He wanted Dean to know how he felt about him.

“I find speaking to you very cathartic,” he finally said. “I feel better having told you about Hannah.”

Dean gave Cas’ thigh a squeeze.

“I’m pleased that you trusted me with it all,” he said.

Much to Cas’ pleasure, Dean then leaned his head down on Cas’ shoulder. Cas put his arm round him, and thought that it would be no bad thing if they fell asleep like that.

“My dad has been in and out of prison since I was a child,” Dean suddenly said.

Cas didn’t respond. He just stroked down Dean’s arm, and let him share whatever it was he wanted to get off his chest.

“Losing my mom made him angry, and bitter, and drunk, and violent,” Dean told him, voice measured and calm. “It scares me to death to think I might turn out like him. The only other thing that scares me is losing someone I love, like he did.”

Cas closed his eyes. So maybe this was the truth about why Dean could never commit. Maybe the core of the relationship aversion was the fear that if Dean found the perfect person, they’d be taken away. He expected people to leave him, so he was saving them the trouble by not entering into relationships in the first place.

“If Sam had died,” Dean continued. “I have no idea how I would’ve dealt with it. I think it would've destroyed me.”

Cas pulled Dean into him a little closer.

“I don’t like dumping my crap on other people, either,” Dean admitted. “And I have a lot.”

“Well,” Cas began. “Shall we agree to be each other’s international crap-dump? You show me yours and I’ll show you mine?”

Dean wrapped his arms round Cas’ middle. “Awesome idea,” he said.

Cas smiled, and reached for the remote control. They both ended up dozing off in front of a documentary about bees.
Monday, July 1st, 2013

Of all the things to do on a Monday, helping a friend finalise the details for their mother’s funeral was not on the top of Cas’ list.

Which is why he was relieved to be working today, and not with Gavin and the other guys at the bar, agreeing the finishing touches for Thursday.

He had a short break in which to talk to Charlie, though, to see how it was going and if there was anything he could do. Charlie put him on speakerphone so everyone could hear him.

“So, are you singing as you, or as Cher?” Cas asked, after they’d run down the order of service for him.

“Cher,” she confessed, with a chuckle. “It’s what she would’ve wanted!”

“Right,” Cas agreed, smiling.

Rowena had always tried to get Charlie to do Cher one more time and sing “Love Can Build a Bridge” with her, but Charlie had always declined. Cas knew it was just a crisis of confidence, and that Charlie missed doing her act. He was pleased she was going to revisit it for their departed friend.

“I was going to ask Dean to accompany me. Is that weird?” Charlie asked.

They all knew that Gavin didn’t want to play at the funeral; he’d said he didn’t want to start crying at the keys like a ‘wee soft jessie’. Cas had assumed Charlie would sing to a backing track, but having Dean play for her would be kind of nice, actually.

“No, I don’t think it’s weird,” he told Charlie. “She’d be thrilled. She thought he was delicious.”

“Well, she wasn’t wrong,” Meg interjected. “Is he with you?”

“No, he’s driving Benny and Balthazar to the airport.”

“Driving what?” Charlie asked. “Did he take Becky?”

“Balthazar let him drive his Bentley,” Cas said, remembering the look on Dean’s face when B told him. “They left extremely early so that he could drive very slowly.”

“Where are the prince and the pauper going on their honeymoon?” Ash enquired.

“St Lucia,” Cas answered.

“Lucky fuckers,” Meg said. “I haven’t had a tan since the nineties.”

“You mean you can be in direct sunlight and not crumble into ashes?” Gavin jibed.

Cas laughed, glad that Gavin hadn’t lost the sense of humor that he clearly inherited from his mother.

“It’s so sweet that Dean extended his trip for you,” Charlie said.

Cas frowned. “He didn’t do it for me.”
“Oh, please,” Ash protested. “Of course he did. He’s not staying to hold *my* hand, is he?!”

Cas opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out, so he closed it again. He must have stayed silent for long enough to worry Charlie, because after a while he heard her concerned voice.

“Cas?”

She sounded close, meaning he’d been taken off speaker.

“Sorry, zoned out.”

“Are you okay?” she asked him. Then added; “I’m in the office - no one else can hear.”

Cas sighed. He seemed to be constantly off-loading his stupid problems onto Charlie. Like she didn’t have anything more important to be doing than listening to him whine.

“I’m fine,” he attempted to persuade her. “I’m sorry I’m not helping today.”

“That’s okay,” Charlie said, sounding genuine. “We’re all set, don’t worry.”

Cas sat down at his desk, closed his eyes, and pinched the bridge of his nose with his fingertips. He sighed down his nose.

“Hey,” Charlie began, quietly. “What’s wrong, seriously?”

Cas opened his eyes, and sat back in his chair.

“It’s really stupid,” he said. “I don’t want to trouble you with it.”

“If you don’t know by now that you could never cause me trouble...”

Cas smiled a little.

“Spit it out, Novak,” Charlie commanded. “It’s Dean-related, right?”

“Yes,” Cas said, after a short pause.

Charlie didn’t say anything, because she didn’t need to. Cas always spilled to her eventually, and he knew that she knew that. He was grateful for the patient silence while he ordered his thoughts into a meaningful sentence.

“I think he’s it,” he finally said. “And - I never expected to find one of those. And - I don’t really know what I’m supposed to do.”

He could hear Charlie breathing, but she didn’t offer any comment. She clearly thought he had more to say. And, apparently, she was right.

“I’m still scared of having a real relationship,” he found himself saying, no longer trying to order his thoughts; just letting them make a break for it while the gate was open. “I still feel like I’m pretty broken and unstable. But, I think he is too, and we don’t have to try and fix each other because I don’t want him to change and it’s not like I want to marry him and I feel like maybe he could like me as I am with all my shit, even though I haven’t earned that from him but I just...”

Cas ran out of coherent english words, and closed his mouth. He pushed his hair back, and licked his lips, feeling a little nervous.
“It can’t be love,” he said, more to himself than to Charlie.

“Why?” came Charlie’s equally soft voice.

“Because it can’t be love after three weeks,” Cas reasoned. “That’s not love.”

“Who says?”

“Everyone.”

“Romeo and Juliet fell in love after a day.”

“Yes...” Cas said, slowly. “...and it worked out great.”

“Yeah, okay, maybe I should’ve thought of a better example.”

“Plus, they were like fourteen years old,” Cas added. “I’m old enough to know better.”

“Listen,” Charlie said, and Cas did. “I thought that this thing with Dean would be something cleansing and transitional to get you back into wanting to share your life with someone.”

Cas still slightly panicked at the idea of that. Most days he was more than happy with the thought of it being just him and his fish. He really wanted to fit Dean in somewhere, as well, though. But would Dean even want to be 'fit in'? 

Fuck, why can’t I just pick a lane?


* * *

Dean: Have a good flight! Honeymoon hard, guys!

Benny: Thanks bro, love ya, safe journey back to states x x x

B: Don’t scratch my fucking car.

Dean drove the beautiful burgundy Bentley cautiously back to its home in Kensington. After returning the keys to the front desk of Benny and B’s building, he hopped on a bus and headed north to Cas’ school.

He had stayed at Cas’ the previous night, then got up crazy early to get to Benny’s and play chauffeur for the day. Driving on what felt like the wrong side of the road through city traffic then down a hugely busy freeway was not a terribly relaxing way to spend a Monday morning; he wouldn’t have done it at all had it not been for the promise of driving that sweet car. Still wouldn’t trade Baby for it, but damn, it was like being James Bond.

He and Cas were going to the theatre after Cas finished work, and Dean was really looking forward to it. He had five days left to get as much of Cas as he could.

Austin, Texas
August 21st, 1987
Dean hated crying. But he couldn't help it. He'd broken it. It was ruined.

Dean felt the anger bubbling inside him, and he wanted to throw something. Hard.

“Hey, hey,” Bill suddenly appeared in the garage. “What's the matter, Dean?”

Dean sniffed, and wiped his nose with his sleeve.

“I broke it,” he said, voice shaking with frustration. “I was trying to fix it but I broke it even more.”

Bill stepped towards the bench, and picked up the blue toy car.

It was one of Sammy’s, and the door would never close properly. In trying to bend it so it would fit, Dean had accidentally snapped the door clean off.

“It's okay, Dean, don't be mad,” Bill said, gently. “I bet we can fix it together.”

“It won't ever be the same,” Dean protested.

“No,” Bill agreed. “It won't.”

Dean took a deep breath, like Ellen had told him to do every time he felt the red rage.

“But sometimes things are better when they're not brand new,” Bill added. “When they're a little battered and worn - gives ‘em character. Makes them unique and original.”

Dean frowned.

“Look here…”

Bill went over to one of the tall metal work units, and took down an old clock. It was one of those dumb old ones where the bird pops out of a door every hour.

“This hasn't worked for decades,” Bill said, bringing it over to Dean.

As Dean watched, Bill unscrewed the thin green wooden door, from which the bird was supposed to emerge, and removed it from the clock.

Bill then did something to one of the door’s hinges that Dean didn't quite understand, and picked up the car again.

Bill turned the bird door on its side, and measured it against the car.

He grinned at Dean. “Perfect,” he said.

A little more hinge-adjustments and some screwing in later, Sam’s car had a perfectly functioning new door.

“You see?” Bill said, holding it up. “Two broken objects, but fit the right parts together and you get something that functions just fine.”

Dean took the car back as it was handed to him.

“But it's not the same color,” Dean told his foster-father, even though he knew he should just say thank you. “Should we paint it?”

Bill put his hand on Dean’s shoulder. “You can if you want to,” he said. “But I think it looks kind of
cool like that.”

Dean studied the car until he'd made his mind up about whether or not he agreed.

Eventually he quietly echoed Bill’s words;

“Unique and original.”

_________________

Tottenham Court Road, London
back to Monday, July 1st, 2013

We Will Rock You fucking rocked. Dean had never been an advocate of musical theatre or any glee club nonsense, but rub some Queen on that shit and he was more than on board.

“Dude, that was so good,” he kept telling Cas on the train home.

“I'm glad you liked it,” Cas smiled. “At least you sang along in key, which is more than Ash did when I saw it with him.”

“Man, I fucking loved it,” Dean gushed. “The costumes rocked, the band was unreal and the fucking lighting effects for gods sake!”

Cas chuckled.

“What?”

“Sorry,” Cas said. “You're adorable when you're fangirling.”

“Excuse you, I'm adorable one hundred percent of the time.”

“You're right, my mistake.”

Dean took a swig from his bottle of absurdly overpriced concession-stand water, then leaned his head back on the train seat and looked at Cas.

Cas was gazing at him with a soft smile on his face. It was the type of expression ordinarily found on leading actors in romantic movies.

“What are you staring at me?” Dean asked, a teasing smirk tugging at his mouth.

“I'm counting your freckles,” Cas answered.

“No, you're not.”

“Okay, I'm not. I gave up at four.”

Dean snorted. He shifted his body round so he was angled more towards Cas in his seat.

“Then, I repeat,” he whispered. “Why are you staring at me, Mister Novak?”

Cas did not reply, just smiled a bit more and kissed Dean on the lips.

When Cas pulled back, he ran a finger down Dean’s cheek and said; “I’m going to miss you.”

Dean licked his lips, having apparently forgotten how to speak. The absence of a response clearly
made Cas think Dean was having a relationship-related panic, cause he shifted away uncomfortably, looking very sad and rejected.

*Speak, you moron!* Dean’s brain yelled at him.

“You don’t have to miss me for long,” he finally said. “We’re gonna have a vacationship, remember?”

Cas looked sharply back at Dean. “You really think we could pull that off?”

“I think I could pull you off…”

Cas sighed, but smiled.

Dean laughed. “I don’t know, man, why not?”

Cas narrowed his eyes a little in that scrutinising, considering way, like Dean was a conundrum he was trying to puzzle out.

“I mean, look,” Dean continued. “Neither of us want to be tied down, we like our lives and our space… I like, well, girls and stuff…”

Cas frowned.

“What’s that face for?”

“Sorry, I just - it’s weird,” Cas said, shaking his head. “The idea of you with a woman. I can’t decide if I’m jealous or intrigued.”

“Intrigued?”

Cas chewed his lip, and definitely blushed a little.

“Wait,” Dean said, grinning. “You mean you're irritated cause it turns you on!”

Cas looked around him like Dean had just said something scandalous, and the church elders might be listening.

“No, I…,” he let out a rather exasperated sigh. “I don’t know.”

“C’mon, Cas,” Dean said, pushing him playfully on the leg. “Admit it. You like picturing me all naked and macho and pleasuring a beautiful woman.”

Cas looked away and forced his mouth closed, tight, like he was trying not to smile.

Dean leaned into him and whispered in his ear. “Would you like to watch?” he asked, wondering if he was pushing it too far. “What about watching me with another guy?”

He punctuated his question with kisses to the soft, fragrant skin of Cas’ neck. “Is that why you asked me about Benny?”

Dean saw and felt the movement of Cas’ adam’s apple as he swallowed.

“You ever had a threesome, Cas?”

Cas nodded.
“Mmmm,” Dean hummed, approvingly. “You big city boys are way too kinky for a simple cowboy like me.”

Cas laughed, and pushed Dean away affectionately.

“I’m weird, okay?” Cas said, sounding frustrated. “Sometimes I guess I do like the pervy kinky shit. But other times I just want to hold hands over the table at a romantic restaurant and talk about poetry.”

Dean laughed again. “You’re not weird, Cas,” he said. “You’re a human being. You’re allowed to have mood swings and hormones and be a bit fluid about shit.”

Cas raised his eyebrows. “I thought you were meant to be a simple southern boy,” he observed. “Now you’re championing fluidity?”

Dean smiled and shook his head. “I’m just saying, go with whatever, man,” he told Cas. “You feel something one day; do it that day. You don’t feel it the next day; don’t do it again! Simple.”

Cas put his hand, palm up, on Dean’s thigh. Dean put his down on top, and knitted their fingers together.

“What if you go home,” Cas said, quietly. “And you don’t feel like seeing me again?”

Dean didn’t answer. He couldn’t imagine that, but didn’t wanna be cheesy and say it out loud.

“What if one day you feel like sleeping with someone else and you fall in love? And I’m waiting by myself in a hotel in Mexico or something?”

“Well, given what you just told me, I’ll just bring them with me!” Dean joked.

“Dean.”

Dean sighed, and stared at their interlaced fingers.

“I’m still worried that it’s too much of a risk,” Cas admitted. “I’m not sure I could live with the uncertainty.”

“I get that,” Dean agreed.

But we’re meant to be together. However it pans out. You and me. Somehow. Please.

“It’s cool,” he said, smiling at Cas, and hoping it looked genuine. “I’ll just have to see how many of your kinks I can uncover before the sixth. Got a blindfold?”

* * *

Tuesday, July 2nd, 2013
Hatfield

Cas had been staring at Dean for way too long. He needed to get to work.

It was just that Dean looked so wonderful lying there in Cas’ bed with the sun hitting his cute little sleeping face, it was hard to tear himself away.

Cas wasn’t sure if he regretted telling Dean that he couldn’t agree to the whole seeing each other every few months thing.
He hadn't meant to dismiss the idea. After his talk with Charlie, he'd been ready to tell Dean exactly how he felt. But when it had been brought up again, Cas had felt nervous and negative for some reason.

In theory it sounded like the perfect relationship, but in practice Cas wasn’t so sure. It wasn’t really that he minded the thought of Dean seeing other people. Trust is more important that monogamy after all, and he could probably live with it as long as Dean didn’t get anybody pregnant.

Sure, he would likely get a little jealous, but jealousy can be libido-inspiring, and as he’d recklessly revealed yesterday, tales of Dean’s adventures might well get him kind of hot if he was in the right frame of mind.

It certainly wasn’t that Cas thought that he himself would meet someone else, either. As he'd told Charlie, he was pretty sure that Dean was it for him now; the yardstick by which everyone else would forever be measured. Cas would rather have six weeks a year with Dean than seven days a week with anyone else.

If Cas was honest, the real cause of his emergent reluctance was the notion that he just wasn’t worth Dean’s time and affection. Cas was odd and indecisive and introverted and slightly fucking psychic, and he had a whole cocktail of issues that could resurface at any given moment. In addition, a lot of his favorite people in the world tended to drop dead without warning.

He truly didn’t deserve to have this fantastic adventure with Dean, however much he might want it.

* * *

“You know he thinks he’s cursed?”

Dean looked at Charlie like he could smell something bad. “What?”

“Cursed,” she repeated. “He tell you about his dreams?”

Dean nodded.

“Well he thinks that’s a curse, and he thinks everyone he’s close to is fated to die until he’s left all alone.”

“What the fuck?”

“He told me that once when we were high,” Charlie explained. “It was the most candid he’s ever been.”

Dean shook his head. Poor Cas.

“Is that why he keeps his circle kinda small?” he asked. “He’s scared of causing too much death with his curse?”

“Pretty much,” Charlie confirmed.

Dean finished tuning Ash’s guitar, frowning at the idea that Cas thought he was some sort of ticking time bomb of doom.

*I’ll still have him*, he thought. *Cursed or not.*

Out loud, he asked; “Okay, ready?” as he smoothed out his chord chart.
He was glad to be playing at Rowena’s funeral; pleased to be useful. He’d headed to the bar to meet Charlie after he’d left Cas’ this morning.

Cas hadn’t woken him up, but he’d left him some pancakes and a cute little note. Well, it had been cute on one side, but with a very explicit sketch of their late-night antics on the other. It had made Dean laugh, then made him sad cause fuck it all he was going to miss Cas so much.

As Charlie sang, Dean found that only half his brain was concentrating on accompanying her. The other half was desperately wondering how he could change Cas’ mind about their potential future.

“What’s up?” Charlie asked, and Dean suddenly realised he’d stopping playing.

“Shit, sorry, my mind wandered off.”

Charlie tilted her head to the side, just like Cas when he was being inquisitive and confused.

Dean took a breath, and blurted everything out to Charlie. His conflicted feelings, the vacationship, all the stuff Sam and Jenna and Benny said about Cas, his concerns about missing being with girls, his commitment shit - everything.

When he was done, he was surprised to find that she was smiling.

“What?” he asked. “Why the grin?”


“Well, I know that, sweetheart, but what’s your point?”

She tutted and flicked him on the arm.

“You’re perfect for him and this meeting in a random country relationship thing is perfect too!” She flapped her hands, excitedly. “Oh my god, you guys are going to have the best life!”

Dean laughed a little at her reaction. “Okay, but he’s not feeling it,” he told her. “He thinks it’s all too uncertain. I don’t know if I’ll ever see him again after this week.”

Saying it out loud made Dean want to throw up in his mouth.

“We’ll convince him,” Charlie said, determinedly. “Don’t worry.”

Dean smiled, and started to feel hopeful again. He believed her. She was tiny and cute but she was tough as balls.

“Now, come on,” she said. “Forget about him for ten minutes and let’s nail this shit.”
Cas: you still at r & h?

Dean: Yeah man you coming? Got a surprise for you ;)

Cas got to the Rabbit and Hounds just before seven. Stupid Tuesday meetings and stupid crowded underground trains.

He went straight to the bar, desperate for a drink, but looking around anxiously for Dean.

“Hey!” Charlie called to him, practically skipping over to him. She leant on the bar next to him and nudged him with her shoulder. “You are just in time.”

“For what?” Cas asked, as Tamara started pouring him a gin and tonic without even having to ask.

“You’ll see,” Charlie answered, with a secretive little smirk. She looked up and winked at Tamara, who stuck out a cheeky tongue at her.

“What’s going on?” enquired Cas, as Charlie disappeared again.

“Like the lady said,” Tamara answered, as she set the glass down in front of him. “You’ll see.”

Cas shook his head, but focused on getting the cool, crisp drink down his throat. Once he’d had a satisfying mouthful, he turned towards the stage, as Charlie began speaking.

“Good evening, everyone,” she said into the mic. “Welcome to the Rabbit and Hounds Poetry and Prose night. Please welcome our first reader - Dean.”

The crowd, such as it was, clapped politely, and Cas watched Dean take the stage.

“So, that’s where he is,” Cas said, surprised, and he heard Tamara laugh from behind him.

“She didn’t even have to bully him into it,” she said. “It was all his idea.”

Dean stood at the mic, holding a paperback book in one hand, pages folded back so he could read the one he wanted, and his other hand in his pocket.

He coughed, nervously.

“This is, uh, this is a poem by an English guy called Craig Charles. He’s, uh, he’s an actor, and a poet, and, uhm, he’s from the same town as the Beatles, so he’s already alright in my book.”

Cas pushed off from the bar, intrigued, as Dean continued.

“I, um, I don’t have much experience with this kinda stuff, so forgive me if I mess up, but, uh, I’m dedicating this to Cas.”

A few people in the pub, who recognised the name, turned to look at Cas, and he went red as Dean caught his eye. Dean gave him a warm smile, and seemed to settle a bit when Cas smiled back.

Dean cleared his throat again and began to read Mr Charles’s poem.

“I want rosy days, dozy days, that start in the mist and the morning haze, and finish with kisses and
cuddles, and you, with eyes of no other blue.”

Cas felt a lump in his throat, and he was certain he was now sporting those ‘heart eyes’ that he was always being accused of having. He smiled at Dean, but Dean was focused on the page in front of him.

“I want lazy days, daisy days, chaffinches, churchbells and songs of praise, that finish with kisses, and cuddles, and you, with skies of no other blue.”

Cas wanted to move closer to the stage, but he felt frozen. Dean was reading poetry. For him. Cas honestly thought he might cry.

“I want spring in your step, and a kiss on your lips. Bad weather could never ever eclipse those rosy days when I love you to bits, when I reach out and give you a great big beautiful kiss.”

Dean licked his lips, and Cas sincerely hoped he was imagining all the kisses the two of them had exchanged. God, but he wanted to kiss Dean right now.

“I want funny days, sunny days, when colours collide like a birthday bouquet. I want lily and lilac, violet and jade, a golden brown sky at the end of those days, that finish with kisses, and cuddles and you…”

Dean looked up and locked eyes with Cas.

“...whispering words of no other blue.”

***

Cas couldn’t stop kissing Dean.

Even though the train back to Cas’ house gave them ‘cooling off’ time by definition, it had done nothing to dampen Cas’ desire.

He’d successfully undressed himself without needing to remove his lips from Dean’s face, and now they were standing at the end of the bed as he unbuttoned Dean’s shorts.

As the denim fell down to Dean’s ankles, Cas managed to get some words out in between kisses.

“I still - can’t believe - you did that - for me.”

More passionate kissing ensued, then Cas made his way to Dean’s neck. He couldn’t believe this beautiful man, who didn’t even like poetry, had chosen a special poem for him and read it to him in front of everyone in his favorite pub.

Dean wriggled out of his boxers, and pulled Cas down onto the bed. He pushed him onto his back, and straddled him. Cas propped himself up on his elbows and strained upwards, desperate to keep kissing.

Dean smiled down at him, cradled his face with one hand, and gave him what he needed.

Cas moaned in gratitude.

After another long kiss, Dean slid down Cas’ body to take his cock into his mouth. Cas whined in pleasure, but also Dean was far too far away down there. Cas indulged in the receiving of head for a little while, but then really couldn’t take the distance from Dean’s lips any longer.
“Dean, Dean…” he begged. “That’s so good, but please come back here.”

Dean looked up, and Cas met his gaze.

“I need you,” Cas breathed.

It was a dirty trick; Cas knew what that word would do to Dean, but it was worth it. Dean was back within reach of Cas’ mouth in seconds.

They lay there for what felt like hours, making out and grinding as if that were the very pinnacle of sexual activity. All the hundreds of hot and adventurous things they could be doing, and Cas couldn’t think of any of them right now. He could do this all night.

Evidently, Dean had other plans, because he was reaching over to the bedside cabinet. Cas watched, hungrily, as Dean pulled out and uncapped the lube. He took hold of Cas’ hand, and held it up. He poured lube all over Cas’ fingers, then knelt up and compelled Cas’ arm through his open thighs and under his pelvis. Cas felt for Dean’s hole, and gently massaged around it. Dean sighed and closed his eyes, leaning forward to prop himself up on the mattress either side of Cas’ head. Cas kissed Dean’s shoulder, neck and upper arm, as he slowly pushed first one, then two of his fingers inside him.

“Cas…”

Dean let his head fall forward, and circled his hips as Cas worked him open. Cas was so hard, and every time their lower bodies made contact, he felt a lightning bolt of extra arousal.

Soon, Dean sat back, and shuffled down Cas’ body a little so that he could put on a condom. Once Cas’ dick was safely covered and sufficiently lubed, Dean started to lower himself down into it.

Cas closed his eyes as the ecstasy of being inside Dean took over. They’d had sex a whole lot these past few weeks, but every time was as mind-blowing as the first.

He put his hands at the top of Dean’s thighs, and stared at his gorgeous face while he set a rhythm.

The sight of Dean riding him was enough to make Cas come right then, but he grit his teeth and held back as long as he could.

“You look fucking amazing,” he told Dean, reaching out a hand to stroke Dean’s cock.

Dean gasped, and gripped onto Cas’ sides for balance, fingers flexing against Cas’ ribs.

“Fuck, Cas, you feel so - aaahhh! Fuck!”

Dean was starting to speed up, so Cas raised his knees and started to thrust into him. He didn’t care if he didn’t last all night, quality was more important than quantity. They could always do it again in the morning.

“Yes, Dean,” Cas praised. “Yes, come on, baby, I wanna hear it… tell me…”

“Fuck,” Dean sobbed. “Oh my god, aaaaahhhhhhh! Cas! Holy shit, baby, yes, fuck me, fuck me! Oh my god, ohmygod! FUCK!”

Cas hoped his neighbours were enjoying their free porn. He bit his lip, and pulled Dean’s dick harder and faster as he fucked him.

“I’m so close, Dean, fuck.”
“Yeah, come - come in me, Cas... come hard inside me, baby, aaaaahhh! Oh shit! YES!”

Cas thought he had a few more seconds to spare, but he was wrong. Orgasm hit him like a breaker, and he cried out, almost matching Dean’s decibel level. His grip tightened involuntarily round Dean’s cock as he came, throwing Dean over the edge of climax right along with him.

Dean fell forward and Cas put his arms round him as they came down together. Dean’s skin was hot and smooth and a little bit sweaty, but Cas could’ve held him like that for the rest of the week if he’d been allowed.

“Your neighbours must think you’re a serial killer,” Dean murmured. “All this screaming.”

“No, they know it’s cause I’m a demon in the sack,” Cas said, sleepily.

Dean hummed; amused. He kissed Cas lazily on the neck, making Cas shiver. “Angel in the street, devil in the sheets?”

“Something like that,” Cas said, turning his head to catch Dean’s lips again.

Dean rolled off him, and Cas instantly mourned the warmth. Dean took it upon himself to remove the condom, and headed out to the bathroom, presumably to have a quick clean-up. Cas hoped he would bring him in a washcloth, cause he really didn’t want to move, which meant that he may well have to spend all night with dried spunk clogging in his chest hair.

Fortunately, thoughtful and beautiful Dean did bring Cas a washcloth, and the two of them curled up together, free of too many extraneous bodily fluids.

Cas laid his head on Dean’s chest, and let Dean stroke his hair until he found himself right on the edge of sleep. His last two thoughts before surrendering to unconsciousness were firstly wondering whether he’d set his alarm, then deciding he really didn’t care.

____________________

Wednesday, July 3rd, 2013  
Hatfield

Dean cradled his coffee while flicking through the channels on the T.V.

Because he had originally been going to fly home today, he had no plans. Cas had gone to work, and Dean had come back to his apartment shortly after. His apartment, which was thankfully available until the end of the week. Although, he was certain he would’ve been given a bed at Cas' had it not been.

He’d planted himself on the couch and not really moved since. He did need, at some point, to practice Charlie’s song one more time before tomorrow, but he could do that later. He was cooking again for Cas tonight, and he fully intended for the evening to end with some kind of hot sexual activity. Maybe not penetrative, cause he really did need to give his poor ass the night off, but maybe some mutual oral wouldn’t go amiss.

He smiled to himself, still so pleased with how his poem had gone down with Cas yesterday. He’d picked up the blue book from the shelf in his rented living room by chance; he’d just wanted something to read. Some of the poems inside it he didn’t really like, and some seemed to be quite England-specific so he didn’t really get it. But then he’d read that one about blue eyes and all he could think of was Cas.
Sighing because of the true world-class suckiness of daytime television, Dean shut off the damn thing and put down his coffee. He reached to pick up Ash’s guitar, and started noodling around and humming.

He suddenly stopped, and grinned as he thought of the perfect song he could sing to Cas at Open Mic on Friday.

He grabbed up his phone to text Charlie to see if she would sing it with him.

It would be the perfect way to say goodbye.

*Jesus, I don’t wanna say goodbye.*

They hadn't really talked much last night, but Dean hoped the poem and the world-bendingly good sex had made Cas think again about trying to make it work between them.

While he waited for Charlie to reply, Dean fired off another message. This time with two recipients.

**Dean: Hey Ellen/Bobby - I think I already know the answer to this but what are the chances of me cutting another record? Got some ideas for some acoustic shit. No big deal if yr not interested, just wanted to put it out there.**

He hovered his thumb over the ‘send’ button for a full twenty-three seconds before tapping it. He tossed his phone down on the couch and went back to work on Charlie’s song.

______________________________

*Boston, Massachusetts*

*April 18th, 2002*

“You know, you’re the only person she likes,” Cas remarked, referencing the cat currently curled up on his brother’s lap. “She won’t even let Pamela near her.”

“That’s cause witches only get along with black cats,” Gabriel said, tickling the white fur of Portia’s neck.

“Pamela is not a witch,” Cas frowned.

“Hey, didn’t say there was anything wrong with it,” Gabriel said. “I think it’s hot.”

“You think everything’s hot.”

Cas liked his brother, but he was a little twitchy about anyone being in his space for too long. Gabriel was going home that afternoon, though, so he only had to deal with it for a few more hours. He’d arrived yesterday morning to invite Cas to his wedding, though why he couldn't do it via post or email was a mystery to Cas.

“So, you like your new job?” Gabriel asked.

“Yes,” Cas answered. “I think it’s going to be very rewarding.”

Gabriel snorted.

“What?”

“Rewarding for your bank balance, bro, not so much for your soul!”
Gabriel had a few very definite opinions on lawyers, possibly because he’d been the wrong side of the law one too many times.

“Lawyers don’t have souls, so I’ll be fine,” Cas shot back.

Gabriel laughed, and looked up at Cas’ wall calendar.

“Nice,” he commented, raising an eyebrow at Robert Downey Junior being cute in a suit. “Crush still going strong, huh?”

Cas shrugged. “You can’t fight true love.”

“He’s trouble, Castiel,” Gabriel warned. “You should find yourself a nice, wholesome young man who’ll treat you right.”

Cas turned his nose up. “Robert would treat me right,” he insisted. “He’s learned the errors of his ways.”

“Possibly, but you’d never see him,” Gabriel added, regarding the calendar. “He’d always be off filming or some shit, and you’d be home with your cat.”

“That’s okay,” Cas said, with a smile. “He’d come home eventually, and he’d make it up by singing to me and just generally being beautiful around the house.”

On Gabriel’s lap, Portia stretched out and made a small chirrupy purring noise, before tucking herself back into a little contented ball.

“Well, I sure hope you find your R.D.J. somewhere in that shitty corporate nightmare you’re entering, Cassy,” Gabe teased. “You’re gonna need a good fantasy to offset your terrible, terrible reality.”

“Fuck off,” Cas said, and if he hadn’t been worried about disturbing his cat, he would’ve thrown something at his sarcastic pest of a big brother.

_____________________

Thursday, July 4th, 2013
The Rabbit & Hounds

Funerals were always bizarre things. The crying, the laughing, the strange camaraderie of the attendees, the nagging reminder of one’s own mortality…

Cas always considered that he had been to far too many in his life, and it occurred to him that, by contrast, he’d actually never been to any christenings. He’d also been to very few weddings. The proportionate amount of time he’d spent lamenting the end of people’s lives compared to celebrating the start was kind of depressing.

Walking into the crematorium had thrown up all the memories of his mother’s, father’s and Pamela’s funerals, and Cas had had to stop for a moment to take a deep breath before continuing to his seat. The warm grasp of Dean’s hand round his own had comforted him immeasurably, and just sitting next to Dean for the duration had made the whole thing far more bearable.

Rowena’s funeral was as fabulous as she would’ve wanted. Charlie had even gone so far as to borrow the pub’s smoke machine and disco floor-lights, in order to give their favourite diva the send-off that Gavin had insisted she’d always dreamed of.
True to her word, Charlie sang Love Can Build a Bridge - fully Cher’d up - with Dean accompanying her on the guitar and throwing down a harmony or two. They sounded very good together; Cas could imagine that they’d put together one hell of an act if given the chance.

The wake was of course back at the pub. Charlie, having changed back into her normal clothes, locked the door and put a sign up advising the public that musical theatre cabaret night was cancelled for a private party.

‘Party’ wasn’t quite the word; it was mostly just everyone sitting around, drinking. Ash had expressed a desire for them all to get stoned, and ‘smoke away the blues’, but Crowley’s rules on drugs had been clearly defined the last time Ash had been caught smoking pot outside the pub.

“If you bring that shit into my establishment, I will insert it into your body in the most unpleasant way imaginable, tape all your orifices closed, and then have your hippy arse arrested.”

“What do you think, Cas?”

Cas blinked, and looked at Tamara.

“I’m sorry, what?”

They were all sitting around the table nearest the bar. Bela, despite her husband’s disapproval, had supplied them with a few free bottles of wine. There hadn’t been that many people at the funeral, and those that had travelled down from Scotland had already left, including Gavin’s grandmother and uncle. Rowena’s other friends had stayed a little while at the pub, but had now gone.

So it was just Cas, Dean, Gavin, Ash, Meg, Tamara and the Talbot-Crowleys that remained, though the landlord and landlady had excused themselves to Crowley’s office. Cas didn’t really want to dwell on what they were doing in there.

“About Dean,” Tamara clarified, though Cas still had no idea what she was talking about. Clearly he’d zoned out and missed a whole conversation. “Do you agree he should record a new album?”

Cas looked at Dean, who was sitting next to him, shaking his head insistently.

“Of course I do,” Cas said, smiling, wondering whose idea that had been. “I’m his biggest fan.”

Charlie clapped. “Yay,” she cheered, clearly a little drunk. “Oh my god, it’d be so cool, Dean - you could do a comeback tour!”

Dean laughed. “Sure; I’d sell out at least four community centres and one old people’s home.”

“You really could release another album,” Cas told him, contemplatively. “I bet people would love it. Chester Dean’s new, mature, sound.”

“Yeah, it’s the sound of me not being able to hit any high notes any more.”

“That’s what your backing singers are for!” Charlie said, with a wink.

Dean rolled his eyes and smiled. “I did like recording,” he admitted. “You can turn up to work in your pyjamas, and if it goes wrong you can just start over.”

“Nothing like playing live, though,” Gavin countered. “I love the thrill that comes with having an audience.”

“I bet you do,” Meg interjected, before swigging a big gulpful of wine.
Gavin smirked. “You can’t be trying to seduce me, Megan, surely? Today of all days?”

Meg shrugged. “It’s as good a day as any, pumpkin.”

“Leave him alone, Meg,” Ash said to her, swatting her on the arm. “He’s emotionally compromised.”

“We’re all emotionally compromised,” she said. “I’d be a wonderful distraction, wouldn’t I, Gavin?”

Cas shook his head, incredulously, but actually he admired the fact that Meg’s personality wasn’t defined by her circumstances. She was who she was, regardless. He envied the simplicity.

“Speaking of emotional compromises,” Meg was saying. “What’s up with you two?”

She wagged her finger accusingly between Cas and Dean.

Cas looked at Dean, then back at Meg.

“What do you mean?” Dean asked.

Meg smirked at them with a ‘you know exactly what I mean, you losers’ kind of expression.

“I mean,” she said, with exaggerated patience. “Are we still pretending that we’re not a couple, or….?”

“We’re not a couple,” Cas told her.

There was something of an uncomfortable silence. Cas looked at Charlie, who had done that thing where she filled her cheeks with air, like she was trying to stop herself from saying something.

“What?” Cas asked, defensively. “We’re not. We’re seeing each other, we’re having a great time, but Dean’s flying home on Saturday. That means we are not and cannot be - a couple.”

Cas reached for his gin, aware that his voice had been getting steadily more manic as that little commentary had gone on.

Dean coughed, and Cas looked at him. Dean licked his lips and met Cas’ eye. He looked a combination of amused and sad.

“What?” Cas asked him, quietly, worried he’d upset him.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake,” Meg said, emphatically.

They all looked at her.

“Why do you idiots make everything so needlessly complicated?” she asked, addressing the whole table. Or maybe she was addressing the whole human race. “If you find the key to your lock, you just gotta roll with it.”

“That’s - oddly graphic,” Gavin remarked.

“Look,” Meg said, leaning forward. “I’ve never encountered my missing puzzle piece - he probably doesn’t even exist - but I can see when two people fit together.”

She turned to Charlie and Tamara. “You two do, and it’s so adorable I could puke in my mouth.”
Tamara raised her eyebrows, but smiled lovingly at Charlie, who blushed and bit her lip.

Meg indicated the office door. “Those two sociopaths somehow found each other, and defy all laws of logic and common sense to make that marriage work.”

Then she turned back to Dean and Cas.

“And you,” she said, smiling that cobra-like smile. “For whatever cosmic reason, you two damaged morons made a connection, and from over here it seems to be holding.”

Cas flicked his eyes up to Dean, feeling nervous. Dean was looking at Meg as if she were delivering a particularly fascinating and eye-opening lecture on the history of the Chevrolet Impala.

_Fuck. Of course I memorised his fucking car._

Meg wound up her speech, staring right at Cas. “So, Clarence, I suggest you navigate your way out of that little forest of denial, and out into the blessed open air of true fucking love.”

There was a brief silence.

“YEAH!” Ash hollered, applauding and whistling like Meg had just delivered the Braveheart call-to-arms.

Cas’ heart was racing, and he felt weird. He looked at Dean, who was laughing at Ash. The office door opened, and Crowley appeared, to tell them all to go home. His suit and what was left of his hair both looked slightly dishevelled, and Cas fought to dispel the mental images of Crowley and Bela doing it on his desk.

The assembled gang raised their glasses to Rowena one more time, Gavin led them all in a rousing chorus of O Flower of Scotland, then they all departed.
Peace When You Are Done

Wood Green
Friday, July 5th, 2013

Dean had accompanied Cas to work, insistant on spending every possible minute of his final day in England with him.

He had a little tour around the school, but then had to vacate the premises so that Cas could actually do his job. Apparently strange unauthorised Americans aren’t allowed to just roam the halls of a high school just because they happen to be banging the resident psychologist. Dean had suggested holing up in the staff room, but that wasn’t permitted either, unfortunately.

“Besides,” Cas had told him, with a lascivious look. “Knowing you were sitting just a few doors away from me all day would be extremely distracting. I wouldn’t be able to stay away.”

So, Dean had been relegated to the streets of North London, and had been aimlessly window-shopping and sitting in various cafes for the past few hours. At lunch time he’d called his brother, and then Jo, but now he had nothing to do but wait for Cas to finish so they could go for dinner then to the bar for Open Mic.

Dean sat on a bench outside the school, and looked down at the messages on his phone.

Ellen: Sounds interesting, honey, let’s talk about it when you get back.

Bobby: If you think you still got it boy, maybe play us somethin next week

Okay, so it wasn’t two resounding ‘hell yeah’s, but it wasn’t two deafening ‘no’s either. Dean sighed.

Maybe.

Maybe was good. Maybe was exciting. Maybe was full of promise and possibilities.

On the other hand, ‘maybe’ was also a cop out when you were too chicken shit to tell the truth. As in; “will Daddy be home for Thanksgiving?” “Maybe.”

Ah, well. He was prepared to wait and see what happened.

He and Cas hadn’t really said much last night after Meg’s little oration. They’d stayed at Dean’s, and jerked each other off while kissing in the shower. Shower sex as a rule had never quite lived up to Dean’s porn-inspired expectations, but that had been very fucking sexy, and he’d come really hard.

They’d avoided discussing Meg’s comments, but it had definitely been hanging over them. Cas kept staring at Dean when he thought Dean wasn’t looking.

Dean couldn’t shake Sam’s advice about following his heart. Surely it was simple enough. And the ink on his skin had been urging him to keep things simple for years.

Cas’ problem - and it was a fair point -was that however simple it was to go; ‘okay we like each other let’s do this’, the situation would not remain simple. Other factors and other people would complicate and ruin it.
Or maybe they wouldn’t.

“Fuck,” Dean cursed, out loud, startling two nearby pigeons.

Dean had, unfortunately, been somewhat conditioned from a young age to pre-empt the worst case scenario. He didn't mean to be a pessimist; it just saved disappointment if you were already prepared for the worst.

But he felt like it was time to stop being like that. Perhaps the expectation of disaster was the very thing which brought it about. If he went into this thing with Cas with heart and eyes open, they could both feasibly find what they've been missing.

They should both just take the advice being hurled at them from all sides. They should stop fucking worrying about what might or might not happen and just fucking take life as it came.

Simple.

* * *

The Rabbit and Hounds
later that day

Cas sat in between Dean and Tamara at the same table they’d been at when Dean had come to Open Mic that first time. That utterly unexpected Friday night when Cas had looked up from his chair and into the eyes of this amazing man. This man who had somehow dropped out of Cas’ dreams and into his life.

“It’s fitting that you’re ending your trip the same way you started it,” Tamara told Dean. “Open mic bookends.”

Dean grinned at her.

Cas knew that Dean liked Tamara. He seemed to like all of Cas’ friends. It was sweet that they were going to miss him, too. Cas had no idea how much money country music producers made, but he hoped it was enough that Dean could afford another flight to London in the not-so-distant future to come see them all.

Cas had been pretty moved by Meg's words last night. It had almost convinced him to change his mind, and chase the fairytale. But the fact remained that Dean was too good for him. Dean deserved love. And this - this was not love. Couldn't be. This was infatuation, and they would both move on.

Didn't mean that Cas wouldn't treasure what they'd shared, though. This had been a truly wonderful episode of his life, and Dean would always mean a lot to him. He planned for them to have a phenomenal final night together.

It was still pretty early, but the acts had already kicked off, and Dean was next up. He’d told Cas that he was only singing one song, and that it was especially for him.

“You keep giving me things,” Cas told him, feeling guilty. “Aquarium animals, grape jelly, a poem, and now a song? I haven’t given you anything.”

“Well, now, we both know that ain’t true,” Dean said, leaning in to put his mouth on Cas’ neck. “You’ve given it to me a lot, Cas. Given it to me hard…”

“Yo, Deano!” Ash yelled, from the bar. “You’re up, man!”
Cas made a disappointed sound, as Dean pulled away from him.

“Oh, don’t worry, baby,” Dean said, with a cheeky smile. “You’re gonna love this.”

“Where’s Charlie?” Cas asked, swallowing down the rising lust. “Isn’t she gonna introduce you?”

Before he got his answer, Dean had already headed off towards the stage.

Cas frowned in confusion, then decided to just settle in and bask in the glow of being serenaded by the beautiful boy.

“Good evening,” Dean said, into the mic. Cas smiled at how much more confident he sounded compared to three weeks ago.

*God, was it only three weeks?*

“So, I’m goin’ back to Texas tomorrow,” Dean told the crowd.

There were a few drunken ‘awwww’ s, some from people whom Cas was certain Dean hadn’t even met.

Cas chuckled a little, and picked up a handful of chips from the bowl that was on the table in front of him. God bless Charlie and her understanding of the importance of bar snacks.

“Everyone has been so nice to me,” Dean said. “So I wanted to wish you all a fond farewell with this song.”

He coughed, and sat down on the stool. He strummed the same chord four times, then started to sing.

> *Chances are you’ll find me somewhere on your road tonight…*

Cas nearly choked on his chip.

Dean looked at him, and smirked as he started the next line.

“That fucker,” Cas said, almost under his breath.

Tamara looked at him, with a wide grin.

> “He’s singing Robert Downey fucking Junior for me,” Cas told her, though clearly she’d been party to Dean’s plan, judging by that smile.

> “Just when you thought he couldn’t get any more perfect,” Tamara said.

> “…I long to see you in the night,” Dean sang, proving that his comments about not being able to hit high notes any more were a load of shit. “To be with you til morning light…”

As Dean changed chord, he announced into the mic; “Ladies and gentlemen, Cher!”

Cas looked to one side of the stage, as Charlie appeared. She had a handheld mic, and was in full Cher regalia. Cas joined the cheers of the crowd, the loudest of which was from Tamara. They were both so pleased that Charlie had found her confidence to perform again. She sounded awesome singing this song.

> “I remember clearly how you looked the night we met - I recall your laughter and your smile…”
Cas looked at Dean, and found that his smile was mirrored in Dean’s face. Of course Dean had chosen this song. It couldn’t be more perfect. Cas blew him a kiss, as Charlie’s verse continued.

“I remember how you made me feel so at ease, I remember all your grace and style, and now you’re all I long to see, you’ve come to mean so much to me....”

As Charlie and Dean launched into the chorus with flawless harmony, Cas couldn’t resist singing along. He grabbed Tamara’s hand, and they swayed their arms in the air.

“Chances are I’ll see you somewhere in my dreams tonight, you’ll be smiling like the night we met. Chances are I’ll hold you and I’ll offer all I have, you’re the only one I can’t forget, baby you’re the best I’ve ever met.”

* * *

Cas hadn’t wanted to be selfish. He would’ve stayed at the pub longer, if Dean had wanted to hang out with the gang and say goodbye.

Luckily, Dean had seemed just as eager for the two of them to be alone, and after his and Charlie’s performance, they’d only stayed another half hour or so.

Dean had hugged everyone goodbye, and even Meg looked a little bit emotional. Charlie had promised Cas that she’d be over to his on Saturday afternoon, after Dean had got on the plane. Cas didn’t even bother trying to tell her there was no need. They both knew he’d be a total mess and would need a friend.

Cas had jumped in the shower as soon as they got in, and Dean was now doing the same. Dean was mostly already all packed and ready to go, so it would only take an hour or so in the morning to get everything together and ready for the airport.

The flight was at three in the afternoon, and Cas was going to drive him, to save him the stress of the underground train.

Cas felt really sad. There was no other word for it. Well, there probably was, but he couldn’t think of any right now. He was just sad.

After Dean’s beautiful job at Open Mic, Cas had been sorely tempted to go full-out romantic movie; jump up onto the stage, kiss him uninhibitedly and declare that they would be together forever.

He couldn’t do it, though. He was forcing himself to hold onto logic. He could still hear Pamela’s voice in his head telling him not to ignore that dream - the dream that foretold that he’d fall for Dean. But Cas had decided to take the dream as a warning, like all his other dreams. Love didn’t necessarily equal happiness.

On the table next to where Cas was sitting, Dean’s phone buzzed. Cas looked down at it automatically, and saw Charlie’s name pop up on the screen. Dean’s message settings were such that the first part of the message was visible before one actually opened it.

Charlie: I'm so sorry honey, I really thought he'd ch...

Cas frowned, and despite himself, he picked up the phone to read the rest of the message, feeling guiltily grateful that Dean had no pin or other security device needed in order to unlock his phone. There were a few messages preceding the one that had just arrived. Dean must’ve started this conversation while Cas was in the shower.
Charlie: Please tell me there's been a declaration of love?

Dean: Fraid not! I don't think it made a difference. Definitely getting a 'goodbye' vibe :( :(

Charlie: Have you told him how you feel?

Dean: He knows I don't want this to be the end. But the last thing he said about it was that it's too much of a risk. He hasn't said anything else and I'm not gonna beg. Still got a tiny shred of dignity left lol

Charlie: I'm so sorry honey, I really thought he'd change his mind. I know he's scared, he's listed all the negative consequences in his head and decided they outweigh the good ones. BUT hang in there, not over til the fat lady sings! Still time for him to decide that losing you is a worse risk than giving it a shot could ever be.

Cas heard the bathroom door open. He locked the phone again and tossed it down, hoping he didn't look suspicious.

Dean came down the stairs and into the living room. He had on one of Cas' robes, and looked as gorgeous as ever.

*Losing you is a worse risk than giving it a shot could ever be.*

“You okay, angel face?”

Cas nodded.

“Hmmmm,” Dean responded, clearly not convinced.

He looked over to Cas’ iPod dock, and walked towards it.

“Let’s see if we can’t cheer you up,” he said.

“I’m fine,” Cas insisted, mad at himself for getting melancholy. Typically feeling sorry for himself instead of thinking about someone else. God, but this hurt.

“Really,” he said. “I’m fine, Dean, come here.”

Dean disobeyed, staying by the speaker.

“Jesus, Cas, your playlists are something else… Celine Dion, Puccini, Nirvana, Eminem??”

Cas shrugged. He was too miserable and conflicted to smile at being teased.

Dean scrolled through the iPod before settling on the song he wanted.

“I knew it!” he declared. “I fucking knew it must be on here somewhere!”

He dialled up the volume, and turned back to Cas.

Cas recognised the intro immediately, as any true Ally McBeal obsessive would, and he smiled a little. He kept his face to the floor though, for some reason anxious about looking into Dean's eyes.

Dean held his hand out.
“Dance with me,” he requested, looking into Cas’ eyes as Cas lifted his head.

Cas wanted to decline, but how could he say no to that face? The opportunity to be held in Dean’s arms was, as always, beyond appealing.

Vonda Shepard started singing, as Cas let himself be pulled up out of the chair, and put his arm round the back of Dean’s shoulders.

*See the pyramids along the Nile
Watch the sunrise on a tropic isle*

Dean held Cas round his waist, and pressed Cas’ hand against his heart as they started to sway together.

*Just remember, darling, all the while,
You belong to me.*

Cas let his head fall onto Dean’s shoulder, face turned into Dean's neck. He closed his eyes.

*See the marketplace in old Algiers
Send me photographs and souvenirs
Just remember, when the dream appears,
You belong to me.*

Dean was forever grateful for songs. They said all the things he was unable to articulate. He used to make mix-tapes for his girlfriends for Valentines Day, or play them songs on his guitar when he'd fucked up and didn't know how to apologise. He wanted right now to tell Cas how much he was going to miss him, and how his heart ached at the thought of being so far away, and how much he'd fallen for him. But his throat felt like there was a rock in it. So he let Vonda say it all for him.

*I'll be so lonesome without you
Maybe you'll be lonesome too - and blue.*

*Fly the ocean on a silver plane
See the jungle when it's wet with rain
Just remember, ‘til you're home again,
You belong to me.*

As the instrumental verse began, Dean kissed Cas’ head, nudging him to look up. When he did, Dean kissed him gently on the lips - once, twice, then again and again until they stopped dancing and just stood there lost in each other's mouths.

Dean changed his grip on Cas’ hand, and led him silently to his bedroom.

After some quiet and tender foreplay, and very gentle prep, Cas was lying on top of Dean in the dark. He gazed into Dean’s eyes, and tenderly kissed him as he slid inside him.

Dean gasped as Cas filled him, and drew his legs back even further. He wanted Cas as deep inside him as possible.

Cas moved his hips slowly, staring into Dean's eyes and kissing him sweetly on various parts of his face.

Dean wrapped his legs and arms tightly round Cas, pleasure zinging up every nerve, and emotion deepening with every heartbeat. He was struck by the dichotomy of how physically good it all felt
and yet, emotionally, how searingly painful. This could be the last time Dean would get to have this.

Meeting Cas had been like being thrown into a river. Calm at times, rough and too fast at others, sometimes with some very beautiful scenery, but above all never stopping and never staying the same.

Since their first night together, Dean had known this was different. He couldn’t explain it, and he never expected or wanted it, but - this was it. Somehow, Cas was it. There might be others, and god knows, even if they did end up together, it wouldn’t be conventional, but - Cas was it. If only Cas would just trust this. It would work. It would, it would.

“Cas,” Dean breathed, as if he could telegraph all of that through one syllable.

Cas looked just as emotional as Dean felt, and Dean wasn’t sure how much longer he could take looking at him before it all became too overwhelming.

After kissing Dean again, Cas dropped his face down to settle against the point where Dean’s neck connected with his jaw.

Dean closed his eyes.

“Oh my god, Dean.”

Burying his mouth and nose in that spot, Cas inhaled deeply. Dean smelled so fucking good, and the idea of soon having to deny his senses the experience was making Cas ache. To not be able to smell or taste or hear or touch this man after tomorrow was going to hurt so badly.

“I… Cas, I…” Dean stammered. “I think I…”

Cas raised his head to look into Dean’s eyes again. They were wet.

“Oh, baby,” Cas said, in sympathy, and punctuated his next words with soft kisses. “Don’t cry, Dean, it’s okay.”

Even as Cas said the words, tears prickled his own eyes.

“It’s not fair,” Dean whispered.

“I know,” Cas breathed back, still thrusting deeply and slowly into Dean.

Making love, his brain supplied. You’re not fucking any more. You’re making love. This is what love feels like, you idiot.

As Cas gazed down into Dean’s face, everything Charlie and Meg had said came rushing to the forefront of his mind. It was true. It was fucking true. He’d fallen in love. Fallen really fucking hard.

I love you, he thought, and his brain glitched and got stuck. I love you, I love you, I love you...

“I love you.”

The words, when finally spoken aloud, had not come from Cas.

Dean looked as though he couldn’t believe he’d said it, and Cas hurried to erase the fear that was creeping into his lover’s face.

“I love you, too,” he confessed, voice strained.
“Oh, god, Cas!”

“Please don’t go,” Cas begged, as he continued to move steadily inside Dean. “Don’t - leave me… please.”

Dean held Cas’ face and kissed him like it was the last thing he’d ever do. Cas moaned, and his rhythm started to stutter.

“Come for me, Cas,” Dean pleaded, brokenly. “Come on, baby.”

Cas’ face tightened and distorted as he hurtled towards climax.

“Uuuhhhh, Dean… Dean, I love you, I love you Dean… Dean, DEAN…!”

Dean’s orgasm tore out of him, and he didn't bother trying to hold back his scream.

* * *

That night, Cas had a dream.

It wasn't one of his foresight visions, but just a normal dream. In it, he was standing next to a river with Dean, and they were holding hands. Cas lifted his other hand - his left - to his face to closely inspect the ring he was wearing. Then he turned to look at Dean, who smiled broadly at him.

“You ready?” Dean asked.

Cas smiled back.

“I'm ready, Dean.”
“Hey, you’re back!” Michael said, sitting down next to Dean on their regular bus.

“Hey, man,” Dean smiled, shaking Michael’s hand.

Since that first conversation last year when Michael learned of Dean’s brother, the two had spoken most days up until Dean left for his friend’s wedding in England.

“How was your trip?”

“Awesome,” Dean answered, with a wide smile. “I had an amazing time.”

“Speech go well?” Michael asked.

Dean laughed. “Hell yeah!” he said.

Michael grinned, and recalled a conversation they had had about the Best Man always getting laid at weddings. “So, were there any obliging bridesmaids or groomsmen?”

Michael had been a little bit taken aback by Dean’s initial revelation some months ago that he was bisexual. It occurred to Michael that he must’ve been more prejudiced that he realised, cause he’d definitely assumed, given Dean’s demeanor and rather macho exterior, that he was straight. Michael had given himself a mental slap for the unintentional bigotry.

He really didn’t give a shit either way who Dean dated, as long as he started every day being the smiley guy that Michael had come to rely on to cheer him up on gray days.

“Actually, I did meet someone,” Dean reported, happily.

“Yeah?” Michael smiled. “That’s cool, tell me everything!”

“Well, he lives in England, so it’s kind of a bummer,” Dean said, pulling a face.

“That’s too bad,” Michael commiserated. “Are you gonna try and do a long distance thing? Is he gonna come visit, or…?”

A smile filled Dean’s whole face, and his eyes glazed a little, like he’d gone somewhere else in his mind.

“I’m meeting him at the end of September in Egypt,” he grinned.

Then he looked right into Michael’s eyes and announced, triumphantly; “We’re gonna have ourselves a Vacationship.”
Chapter End Notes

This is where the main story ends, thank you for seeing it through xxx

Next chapters are acknowledgements and art.

I'm not very good at leaving things alone, so it's highly likely I'll be back to adjust/add stuff... do please subscribe if you're interested to see any future amendments/additions.

This was my first longfic, and I welcome any and all honest and respectful feedback.
Acknowledgements

I put a LOT of myself into this story; anyone who knows me in real life will instantly know I wrote it, which kind of makes me nervous, but I figured you have to throw your heart and soul into anything you create if it's going to mean anything.

I really enjoyed the process of writing this, and it's a real joy to be able to use existing characters that have been so well crafted by the writers and actors of Supernatural. I'm now happy to hand them back unscathed to their rightful owners :)  

EDIT: I have had feedback from a couple of people who found the ending too abrupt and too ambiguous. To those people; I appreciate your honesty and I thank you for the positivity and compliments that you included in your constructive criticism.

I possibly would have made the story a bit longer had I not had the megabang deadline, but I do prefer open-ended final chapters sometimes, and even if I add some more to the story, I will still more than likely opt for ambiguity in this case.

I considered writing some timestamps or a mini-sequel, and while I still may (never say never), honestly this was the ending I wanted to write. I know it's not for everyone, but I don't think everything needs to be wrapped up in a Happy Ever After ribbon. (though I hope the Destiel eventual bliss was heavily implied lol)

Extra warm thanks to the following lovely people:

Cassondra (prompting me to do it and being the first to read it and general cheerleading)

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My husband for letting me disappear for hours on end into fantasy land
Accompanying art for this fic is by demon-eyes-angel-skies, who made me three very sweet drawings. They have their own chapter, after this one.

Thank you again for reading :) :) x x
Art (by Demon-Eyes-Angel-Skies)

I embedded photobucket links here but they've broken... bear with while I try to fix! Meanwhile please visit her tumblr :) (link in opening notes) xx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!