Back from the Brink
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Back from the Brink
by DestielTheShipOfDreams

Summary

Castiel returned from The Empty without his grace, but unlike last time he's been welcomed into the bunker with open arms. All of the same issues remain; Mary is missing, most of their friends are dead and Jack is off drowning in teenage angst. But none of that horrifies Cas as much as finding out that Dean wanted to die. Freshly human and brimming with emotion, he's a little more insistent than he used to be about getting to the truth of Dean's feelings.

Notes

WARNING: this fic discusses Dean's canon suicidal behaviour and feelings during S13E05.

Hey! This is canon-divergent from the end of S13E05, imagining that Cas is human and that instead of killing a man and dramatically disappearing, Jack has simply had a normal identity crisis and has been shipped off to Jody's to get some space (and develop his inevitable crush on Claire). Cas didn't have to be human for this fic, I guess part of me just thinks that he's too closed off as an angel to meet Dean halfway emotionally. So I kind of want him to be human again. I want him to choose it, though, so I'm glad he came back as an angel (hopefully? still confused as to why he couldn't heal that security guard).
'Tombstone' was OK. Kinda underwhelming. Cas seemed slightly pissed off to me. The ep wasn't exactly 'no homo' but it wasn't far off. Idk. I still don't think it'll ever be canon, which makes the queerbaiting lately incredibly rude.
Castiel limped into the kitchen, wincing every time he tried to frown and frowning every time he winced. Human again for less than a week and already the Winchester lifestyle had gifted him a black eye, a split lip, a bruised knee and a sprained ankle.

“Gotta say, Cas, you really copped the worst of it from those demons,” said Sam sympathetically from the table. Dean turned from where he was cutting up pie at the counter.

“Oh, crap,” he sighed. “Looks even worse now you’ve washed the dirt off. I told you not to-”

“I am well aware of what your instructions were and I have already admitted that my current state is a direct result of my failure to follow them,” Castiel snapped, sitting down heavily and resting his elbows on the table. “Sam, do we have any painkillers?”

“Always,” replied the younger Winchester with a wry smile. “Hang on.”

He got up and left the room. Dean carried the pie to the table and dropped Castiel’s slice with a sharp thud in front of him, glaring. Castiel poked moodily at it with his fork before pausing and closing his eyes.

“I’m sorry, Dean,” he mumbled. The other man didn’t reply, but sat down quietly opposite.

“Eat your pie,” he said gently after several moments of silence. Castiel obeyed with his shoulders hunched, dark head bent low over his food. Dean watched him worriedly.

“Cas,” he started warily. The ex-angel looked up expectantly.

“Yes?”

“I just, um… is- is everything OK?”

Castiel blinked at him, his expression turning incredulous. Dean hastened to clarify.
“No, look, obviously it’s not. And I know you’re worried about Jack, even though I’m pretty sure he’s better off spending some time at Jody’s. But are- is there anything more we could be doing for you? I mean, I feel like I’m not… like we’re not dealing with this right. I- I know I haven’t screwed up as badly as last time, but-”

“Dean,” Castiel interrupted the other man’s increasingly bitter rambling. “You and Sam are being very kind to me. I’m very grateful. Really.”

“But you’re miserable,” Dean said miserably. “We’re your family. We should be able to make things better for you.”

“You have,” Castiel assured him as Sam returned brandishing a pack of painkillers. He accepted them with a faint smile and glanced back at Dean. “I know what this would be like without you, without a home or help. Without a… family. Believe me, this is infinitely better.”

Dean leaned back in his chair, frowning at his still-untouched pie. “You shouldn’t have to know what that’s like in the first place-”

“Dean, we’ve been over this,” Sam cut in, settling at the table with his own pie and handing Castiel a glass of water. “Cas wants to forgive and forget. You were trying to keep me alive. Yeah, you screwed up. Time to move on.”

Castiel nodded firmly. “And I’ll be alright. Honestly, right now it’s being in pain that’s bothering me more than the fact that I’m human. Although being human is, as you say, miserable. No offence.”

Sam laughed as Castiel took his painkillers. Dean, looking slightly mollified, shrugged and finally ate some pie. They all munched in silence for a minute or so until Castiel, forgetting his tenderised face, went to scratch his temple. He grunted in pain and Dean made an exasperated noise.

“OK, you know what? You need to discover one of the few upsides to bein’ a mud monkey like us.”

He pushed back from the table as he spoke and went over to a low cupboard off to the side. Sam groaned as Dean pulled out a bottle of bourbon.
“You want Cas to become dependent on the stuff like you?” Sam griped, a seriousness in his eyes. Dean scoffed as he brought three glasses to the table, bottle tucked under his arm.

“I ain’t dependent. Much. And he’s in pain, come on.”

Castiel eyed the bottle dubiously as Dean poured him several fingers. “I, uh… I’m not sure alcohol should be mixed with pain medication. And-”

“Shut up and drink,” Dean said firmly. Castiel hesitated and then shrugged, picking up the glass and downing a large mouthful. He coughed and then hissed as he tried to screw his face up in disgust.

“It tastes awful,” he said flatly. Dean grinned and raised his glass.

“It’ll get better. Drink up, buddy.”

Castiel sighed before gulping down some more drink with a lopsided grimace.

Three bourbons later, Castiel was looking decidedly more relaxed. He nodded avidly at the story Sam was telling, leaning back in his chair, eyes bright and clear amongst the slight swelling and bruising marring his face. Dean watched him closely, fondly.

“... but that was when we thought you were dead, Dean was in a pretty dark place…” Sam was rambling, shaking his head morosely. Dean turned his head and frowned at his brother.

“Wait, what? Come on, Sam, shut up,” Dean said uncomfortably. Sam looked sheepish but Castiel leaned forward in his chair, expression concerned.

“What do you mean?” he urged the younger Winchester. Sam shrugged as Dean shook his head.

“Nothin’, Cas-”
“Wasn’t nothin’ to me,” Sam muttered at the table, slightly slurred. “Thought I’d lost you. You stopped your own heart, Dean, like it didn’t even matter!”

Dean was looking increasingly panicked, avoiding Castiel’s shocked gaze as the ex-angel exclaimed and sat upright.

“What?!”

“Sammy,” Dean said softly, leaning towards his brother, “we already talked about that. I know it was a dick move to pull on you, but we already had a big ol’ discussion about it and—”

“Exactly!” Sam said, increasingly upset now, voice raising. “You said you saw Billie and- and she made you come back. You would’ve stayed dead otherwise, right? Then you wouldn’t let me ask you any more. Said it was a- a moot point. But it’s not, I almost lost you! On top of everything else…”

Sam pushed back from the table at this point and stood up abruptly, eyes bright, swaying a little. Dean and Castiel gaped up at him and he blinked rapidly, suddenly confused.

“I… I just…” he mumbled, running a hand through his hair, frowning heavily at the table. Dean stood up too, face tight and pained.


Dean started tugging Sam around the table. Castiel watched in silence, eyes narrowed. When the brothers were almost at the door he said in a low voice: “Please come back here when you’re done, Dean.”

Dean paused, hesitated, nodded shortly without looking back. Then he was gone, tugging Sam along with him.

Castiel sat in silence at the table for almost twenty minutes, sobering up enough to start wondering whether Dean was in fact returning. He was just considering going and knocking on Dean’s door when the man himself ducked back into the room, looking like he’d rather be anywhere else.
“Sasquatch is sleeping,” he said in a tense attempt at a joking tone. Castiel nodded, watching him. Dean cleared his throat.

“So, I might head off to bed too—”

“What was Sam talking about?”

Dean fell silent, lips pressing together. He stared at Castiel for a moment and then sighed, deflating. He moved back over to the table and sat down, leaning his elbows on the table and running his hands back through his hair. When he spoke it was with his head in his hands, talking at the table top surface beneath his face.

“It wasn’t like suicide or anything. It was a… strategy. I needed to talk to a ghost, beyond the veil. I had the stuff to do it, to stop my heart, so I did. I told Sam to give me three minutes and then hit me with the adrenaline. So there was a way back. I wasn’t— I mean, it wasn’t some elaborate plan to off myself. Jesus.”

Castiel shook his head, looking nauseous. “No wonder Sam is still upset. He must have been terrified. What if it had gone wrong?”

Dean snorted, shaking his head and dropping his hands to rest clenched on the table. He glanced up at Castiel before looking down again.

“It did.” Dean sighed deeply, wearily, before continuing. “Adrenaline didn’t work. It, uh… I guess I knew it was an old batch. I just didn’t care. I didn’t think about whether it would work or not. It was stupid.”

Castiel gaped, apparently too horrified to speak. Dean coughed awkwardly and then continued.

“Lucky for me, Billie wanted to have a word. Turns out she’s alive, and she got a promotion. She’s the new Death. She sent me back even though it should’ve been too late. Sam was pretty shaken. Poor kid. It was a dumb thing to do, I get that. I’ve said I’m sorry.”

He glanced up and met Castiel’s eyes warily at that point. Castiel swallowed roughly. “But Sam said… he said that Billie was the one who chose life for you. That you would have stayed… stayed…”
“I wasn’t actually gonna stay dead,” Dean said, annoyed, leaning back and crossing his arms. “I knew she’d send me back. I was just being dramatic. Or… apathetic, or whatever. I told her I didn’t care, but if she’d tried to keep me dead… I mean, come on, I would’ve fought back. I would’ve.”

Dean sounded very much like he was trying to convince himself. He glared off to the side and huffed.

“I was just bein’ stupid,” he muttered. “I wasn’t going to leave Sam. Not… not really. I’m sure I would’ve come to my senses in time. And hey, lucky Billie kept me alive, huh? You called only a few hours later.”

Castiel’s eyes were bright and angry. “You made yourself die and almost let it become permanent. You threw yourself recklessly into Death’s arms and you admit it was luck alone that made her throw you back. What were you thinking?”

“I just wanted it all to go away, OK?” Dean snapped, eyes flashing like twin shards of peridot. “I was drowning, constantly, tryin’ to breathe and just get a moment of feeling OK but it was just there, all the time. Always drowning and never dying. I tried hunting, tried drinking, tried women, tried focusing on Sammy. Nothing got me a moment’s peace. So sue me if eternal sleep started looking more appealing than usual.”

Castiel scrambled to his feet, chest heaving, throat tight. He was so much more easily provoked as a human and the thought of Dean ending his own life, no matter how convoluted the circumstances… no. No.

“I know your mother meant a great deal to you,” Castiel said in a hoarse, shaking voice. Dean blinked up at him. “But you mean a great deal to me. I have already stated how much. I fought my way back to you and I will learn to embrace this human existence, because you and Sam and Jack are my family. I love you. I will always choose you. So I’m sure you can appreciate that hearing you talk about giving up on your own life is intolerable for me. I need to know that you will protect yourself and- and fight for yourself, Dean. I need to feel secure in that knowledge if nothing else; that I won’t lose you, because you will fight too hard to be lost. I cannot lose you. Do you understand?”

Dean gaped up at Castiel in clear disbelief. “Do I… Jesus Christ, Cas. Yeah, I understand. I understand that completely. How do you think I—”
“We will find Mary if she’s alive, Dean,” Castiel interrupted, the words an impassioned promise, eyes shining with desperate conviction. “I know it’s hard not to feel hopeless. But you must not let yourself get that low again. Even if- even if we can’t get her back, you have other things to live for. If not yourself, or me, think of Sam-”

“You stupid son of a bitch,” Dean said loudly, rudely. Castiel stuttered to a halt, eyes wide and incredulous.

“Excuse me?”

Dean shoved back from the table and stood, movements sharp and pissed off. He pointed at Castiel.

“You seriously think this was about Mom?”

Castiel frowned at the hunter. “You love your mother, Dean.”

Dean pressed his lips together, glaring at Castiel. “Yeah, I do. And maybe she is out there, and maybe we will get her back. Personally, I don’t really believe it. And yeah, that’s been hard. I won’t say that wasn’t part of it. But I was... I was a wreck. This time last week, I was hollow. Pretending to be me, and doin’ a piss poor job of it too. Yeah, maybe I was hoping the adrenaline wouldn’t work. And fine, I did tell Billie it didn’t matter whether she sent me back. Hell, the way I was, it didn’t! Sam had lost his brother either way. I was past saving. Billie told me, right to my face, she said I wanted to die. Did I argue back? Nope. It was true. I wanted out, I wanted to quit, I wanted it all to just stop. This time last week, I looked Death in the face and thought, fine, I’m past saving. Hell, the way I was, it didn’t matter whether she sent me back. Hell, the way I was, it didn’t! Sam had lost his brother either way. I was past saving. Billie told me, right to my face, she said I wanted to die. Did I argue back? Nope. It was true. I wanted out, I wanted to quit, I wanted it all to just stop. This time last week, I looked Death in the face and thought, fine, go ahead, have me. And then you came back, Cas. You strolled back in like you’d never left. And I- I could breathe again. Now, OK, I’m still not great. We still lost Crowley. Kelly. Hell, even Rowena. And yeah, thinkin’ about Mom hurts a hell of a lot. But I can breathe again, and if Billie turned up for me right now, I’d tell her to stick that scythe right up her ass ‘cause I don’t wanna die. Mom’s still gone, everyone else is still dead, but you’re alive again. You’re here. So I want to stay right here too. Unless you’re as dumb as I’m startin’ to think, Cas, do the goddamn maths. You really think it was ever about Mom?”

Castiel stood thunderstruck, staring wide-eyed at the other man. Dean was breathing hard, fists clenched by his side; he’d been half-shouting for most of his speech. Castiel blinked and his lashes were wet, his throat thick, his head spinning.

“Me?” he finally whispered, like it was the most insane notion imaginable. Dean threw his hands up and swore savagely.
‘You stupid goddamn son of a bitch,” he snarled viciously, furiously, flushed and trembling with apparent rage. He moved abruptly forward and Castiel flinched, half-expecting a fist to the nose, but instead Dean grabbed handfuls of his shirt and yanked him into a bruising, angry kiss.

Castiel made an instinctive noise of pained protest; his lip had split back open and was bleeding slightly again, as well as the general unpleasant jarring to his teeth as their mouths collided. Dean immediately broke away with a gasp, all fury gone from his anxious expression.

“Sorry! Are you OK? Crap, I didn’t mean to- I mean, I didn’t mean to do that at all, but I really didn’t mean to-”

Castiel dragged his sleeve across his mouth, watched Dean babbling for a moment and then leaned in and kissed him again, gentle this time, effectively cutting him off mid-sentence.

There was a lot less talking after that.

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