Harry Potter and the Winchester Brothers

by GeorgeOaks

Summary

Dumbledore said Harry had a choice. He could go back, go back to battle, end the war. He could go on, be with his loved ones in the afterlife. Somehow, he settled for in between and landed somewhere in America in the year 2010 with two guns pointed at him. Plucked from one war in one universe, Harry finds himself smack dab in the middle of another.

(Note: March 2019 - betas acquired, new chapters are coming soon!)
I'm not entirely sure what I've done...

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Notes

The opening is an edited and alternate scene taken straight from the book. I don't own JKR's stuff, nor SPN's.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

HP/SPN Crossover Opening Credits Sound Effect - Audio
Harry glanced again at the raw-looking thing that trembled and choked in the shadow beneath the distant chair.

"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love. By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say goodbye for the present."

Harry nodded and sighed. Leaving this place would not be nearly as hard as walking into the forest had been - but it was warm and light and peaceful here, and he knew that he was heading back to pain and the fear of more loss.

He felt an ominous chill run up his spine that was a sharp contradiction to his surroundings. It almost felt like something was behind him, anticipating his decision. Waiting with cold, bated breath, as though reaching for Harry and not sure if Harry would reach back.

Harry swallowed and rasped, "I'll go where I'm needed."

He stood up, and Dumbledore did the same. They looked for a long moment into each other's faces.

"Tell me one last thing," Harry said. "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?"

Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry's ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure.

"Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"
Harry blinked and watched as Dumbledore faded away with equal parts affection and frustration toward the man.

The chill that had run up his spine did so again, only this time seemed to spread out and encompass him. He shuddered as he went to clench his fists - only to realise something was already in his hand. As white surrounded what was left of his vision, he glanced down and saw that he was holding the Elder Wand, as though someone or something had lifted up his hand to set it there and curl his fingers around it.

It felt like a short drop and a sudden stop, during which he somehow managed to flail. His back landed hard on what could only be a barely carpeted floor, and a sharp shout of pain was pushed out of him. His head hit the floor as well, and his hands immediately came up to cradle it, fingers tight around the unfamiliar wood in one hand.

He groaned, dizzy and disoriented. "Why is it always my head?" he whined out loud, albeit softly.
Harry took a couple of breaths before sternly telling himself to get his bearings. Stifling another groan, Harry sat up, let his hands fall, and opened his eyes.

They landed right on the wrong side of two guns.

Instinct instantly taking over, Harry was on his feet at lightning speed, pointing his wand. He did a double take at it, though, having had to spare a quick moment to really recognise he was holding the Elder Wand.

Before him were two men with Merlin knew what kind of handguns. One was quite tall, but the shorter one still had at least four inches on Harry. He also quickly noted that they looked as though they could probably take him in hand-to-hand combat without the need of a weapon, making him take a couple of steps back to put some distance there.

What was more disturbing than the guns were that the men were bloody, their clothing soaked in red.

Harry took a swift moment to evaluate them further as well as the room. They seemed to be in an average - if not on the cheap side - motel room with two beds. The beds, however, had a significant amount of blood on them, and though Harry wasn't very familiar with guns at all, he could tell that the holes in the men's blood-soaked shirts were made by one.

If it weren't for the fact that the men were standing there, apparently alive and well, Harry would have guessed they were the ones who bled out on the beds - because someone had to have.

In those few moments Harry observed all this, the men had been observing Harry. They glanced at each other and seemed to decide not to attack, but obviously not willing to dismiss the option of shooting him.

"Who are you?" the shorter man growled. His eyes were sharp and suspicious, his aim true and steady.

"Who are you?" Harry countered.

"You first," the taller one said. His voice wasn't as rough, but his extra size seemed happy to do the intimidating for him.

"Sure, if we, y'know," he gestured to their guns with his wand in a silent suggestion to put the weapons down, attempting to diffuse the situation - if nothing else so he could think. Where the bloody hell was he?

"Not a chance," Gun One growled again. "And get that fancy stick out of our face."

Harry huffed and scowled, biting back the urge to ask the man if he was really afraid of just a stick to warrant staying behind a gun. Harry looked them up and down, trying to assess if Guns were muggles like they seemed and wondering which strength of Protego could stop a bullet.

After a moment of a silent and tense standoff, Gun Two slowly lifted his hands, making a show of putting his gun on a desk next to him. Gun One didn't waver though. Harry lowered his wand some to show Guns he was willing to cooperate if they were, but he was still ready to cast in a blink of an eye.

He tried to relax some, though, knowing that if Guns hadn't shot already, there was a good chance they wouldn't at all, but he couldn't. He had a feeling he was nowhere near where he should be, and he was having trouble processing his surroundings outside the guns.
"Who are you?" Gun One asked again, patience clearly running thin. 

"Harry," he decided to answer after a moment. "And you?"

"I'm Sam," Gun Two said, and though he sounded placating, Harry could see the suspicion in his calculating eyes. "This is Dean."

"Alright," Harry accepted. "Right then. Where are we?"

"You don't know?" Sam asked slowly.

Harry rolled his eyes, a part of him always defiant regardless of circumstance, and levelled him with a flat look. "Sorry, I always do forget to bring a map with me when I go dropping into random motel rooms."

A thought occurred to him, and his blood turned cold. "What... year are we in?"

"2010," Sam answered.

Harry's head snapped to him. He blinked. "No," Harry protested, heart rate picking up. "It isn't really?"

Guns were frowning at him, less suspicious now and more analytical. They nodded.

"'Fraid so," the Dean bloke said, finally lowering his gun but keeping it in hand.

"You're American?"

Dean raised an eyebrow. "Says the Brit."

"Are we in America? Like, the United States of?"

They both nodded again.

Harry let out a slow breath and used the back of his free hand to lift up his glasses and rub his eyes. "Okay... Okay..." he struggled to accept what these men were telling him. He was in the year 2010 in America? "I guess the war's over then."

"War?"

Harry ignored them and took stock of himself. He was in the same clothes as when he died, and they were in the same condition as well. So were his hands - bloody, cracked, and a bit burnt. He noticed the en suite's sink and mirror and walked over to take a look. He looked like he had been plucked from battle - blood coated in his hair, his clothes burnt in some places from the Fiendfyre, bruises making themselves prominent underneath the grime on his paled skin. He lifted the locks of hair lying messily on his forehead. His scar was still there, and even amidst the slight panic of his situation, he found himself disappointed. He was kind of hoping it would have disappeared. 

"Hey, Gussie," the deep voice of Dean broke through his musings. Harry turned to find the man still had his gun at his side. "Who are you and what are you doing here? Sammy and I died once already today, and quite frankly, I'm still a little pissed off about that. So, let's just say I ain't got the patience
"You died?" Harry asked curiously. He looked them over again, a little relieved to have an explanation for their appearance. "Yes, I suppose you did, didn't you? Me too."

The declaration got a sharper focus from the men, who spared each other a glance again. "You died?" Sam asked.

"Yeah," Harry confirmed, stomach rolling. "But... that was in 1998."

He rubbed his chin, unsettled. Why didn't he go back to the forest? How did he end up twelve years in the future? Merlin, Harry couldn't even die right. Technically, he supposed, he said he would go where he was needed, didn't he? 'Fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart', Dumbledore had said. How on earth could that be more of a concern in 2010 in America than in 1998 in Britain with an alive and powerful Voldemort?

The men had taken a step closer to each other and were having a hushed discussion, keeping Harry in their line of sight. He uncaringly interrupted, pocketing his wand. "Right, I need to find out how things turned out twelve years ago. Would it be alright if I use your loo? Perhaps borrow some clothing?"

Dean snorted, eyeing Harry with a clear thought that he didn't think anything they had would fit him. Harry privately agreed, but he could magically alter them. He didn't much fancy going out in public looking like he did then.

"Hold on," Sam said, holding up a hand. "I don't think anyone should go anywhere until we figure out what happened."

"Yeah," Dean agreed. He finally relaxed his shoulders and stowed his gun away by shoving it in the waist of his trousers behind him. "We weren't back long enough to say two words to each other before you came popping in."

Harry spared a look at the beds and bit his lip. "I suppose you two didn't time jump?" he asked the obvious, hoping maybe they did and somehow had answers.

They shook their heads.

"What, were you just waitin' for someone to hitch a ride back to earth on? Jumped our ship as we came back?" Dean asked.

"No," Harry answered honestly. "I... I was told I had a choice, to move on or come back. Admittedly, I thought I would return to the forest..." he trailed off, jaw and stomach clenching as he tried to wrap his head around not being dead, but not being home.

"Is that where you died? A forest?" Sam asked.

Harry nodded, remembering the streak of green rushing toward him. He shivered and closed his eyes for a moment.

When he opened them, the men were looking at him a little more softly. He cleared his throat, feeling suddenly awkward. He gestured to the beds, getting them back to the situation at hand. "You two were obviously killed. Murdered, like me. Perhaps that's the link?"

Dean's face hardened. "I'm going to kill them. Fuckin' Walt and Roy!"
"Wait," Sam said, holding up a hand again and looking Harry up and down. "You were murdered? I- is that how you looked when you died?"

Harry nodded again, holding out his arms a little and looking down. "Yeah. I look the exact same."

That apparently made the men frown harder. "Jesus, kid, what were you doing?" Dean asked.

"Fighting," Harry answered simply.

They didn't look like they thought that was a suitable answer but seemed to accept it.

"Let's, uh, let's get cleaned up, and then we'll try to figure out what happened," Sam suggested.

Harry took a breath and bit his lip again, running his options over in his mind. Eventually, he agreed.

It seemed like as good as plan as any, and he needed to do something – to move. He had a nervous energy slowly taking him over, knowing it was twelve years from when he died if the men were to be believed, and Harry felt like they could be. They seemed just as confused and troubled at his sudden appearance as he was.

What he needed was to send word to London, to Ron and Hermione.

Sam and Dean changed clothes and washed themselves up, then they offered the shower to Harry. Dean rounded up the smallest clothing they had, which turned out to be a pair of soft trousers and a t-shirt with some logo on it. Harry used the motel soap and shampoo, working quickly and not willing to relax. He wanted to cast what few healing charms he knew, but he thought it best not to tip his hand even more than he already had. He had no way of telling how the men would react to magic.

Harry figured they were muggles, mainly since they had muggle weapons and Dean had called his wand a stick. They didn't pay the wand much attention, however, and Harry genuinely couldn't tell if they knew it was a wand or not. Harry doubted it, but he got the feeling from the men that they wouldn't lose that slight advantage of Harry knowing one way or another.

It begged the question, though: why did he have it? The Elder Wand was in Voldemort's possession. Harry had already figured out that the wand wasn't going to give Voldemort its allegiance since Voldemort hadn't won it properly. Its allegiance was to Harry. Perhaps that was why? It came to join its master, probably because Harry was already jumping time?

He would have to try to find a magical community somewhere around where he was as soon as possible.

He came back into the motel room to find the beds had been stripped and the sheets gone. All evidence of any violence had completely disappeared.

Harry could understand why Guns weren't calling the authorities - it would be a bit hard to explain how one was murdered, came back to life, and could identify their killer. Plus, these men had weapons of their own, he needn't forget, so there was a possibility they weren't precisely law-abiding citizens themselves.

It made him tense a little more, and he reminded himself to be cautious. After all, a big part of him was still in war-battle-mode - a nice, hot shower or not.

Sam was sitting at the desk, the chair turned to face the room. Dean was on the edge of one of the beds, and he gestured for Harry to sit down on the other. Harry hesitated just a moment, thinking of his options again. Thing was, he didn't really have any. He had no idea where he was, if he could
Apparate as far as to London, how to contact anyone, or even if anyone he knew was alive. Guns didn't seem to be hostile anymore at least.

Harry sat and turned to face both men. He noticed they seemed reasonably calm now - very calm, in fact. Which meant one of three things: they had experience in this, they had expected this, or they were merely very uniquely calm people who could rarely be roused. Considering their introductions, Harry highly doubted all but the former.


Harry blinked and frowned at the almost routine atmosphere. "I told you. I had a choice, and I chose to return. So, here I am."

"Do you know who killed you?" Sam asked gently, but with a practised air.

So, they had experience in this sort of thing, then. They were assuming Harry didn't (which, okay, he didn't, but he had enough experiences under his belt to not be rattled), and they seemed like they wanted to help him.

Harry decided to appease them a little. He figured it was better to stay on their good side until he had some things figured out for himself.

"Yes. He went by Voldemort. Do either of you know that name?"

They frowned, and Sam shook his head as Dean asked, "Should we?"

Harry shrugged. "He was a bloody psycho," was all he said in answer.

"Do you know why he killed you?" Dean asked.

"To finish what he started," Harry found himself mumbling, surprised to feel bitterness in him. He sighed and rubbed his forehead. He wanted to assume the war was over, but he hadn't even left the bloody motel room. He had nothing to go on. "He's wanted me dead since I was a baby. If he's still alive, he's not going to be too happy to know I'm back."

"Do you know why he was after you?" Dean asked, sounding serious.

"Yes," Harry said simply but didn't elaborate. Doing so would either give Guns leverage or pull two innocent muggles into something extremely dangerous.

After a few moments when it was clear Harry wasn't going to say anything else, Dean let out an impatient huff and said, "Care to share?"

"Not particularly."

"Listen, Harry - was it?" Sam started. At Harry's nod, he continued, "We would like to help you in any way that we can, but we can't do that unless we know everything."

"I assure you, your help might not be needed. I need to check some things out for myself first, if you don't mind."

Guns exchanged a glance, then Sam said, "Sure. We'll help." His tone left no room for argument and made it clear they weren't going to let Harry just walk out of there. "What do you need?"

Harry scowled slightly at Guns, wondering if he was actually trapped and in danger, and what the men would do if he did try to just leave and walk away. He wasn't too worried about escaping if he
had to, though, and meanwhile, he could use them. So, he answered, "A way to find out what happened after I died twelve years ago."

Guns nodded, and it was then decided they would take Harry to the library, start from there.

The first thing Harry did when he walked into the library was to search the archives and records for anything that seemed, well, magical, or gave hints to a magical community. There wasn't anything he could see, and there went the idea of trying to send Ron or Hermione an owl or finding Floo powder. Next, he was shown by Sam how to use their computers and went hunting through some old British muggle newspapers around the time of his death.

Nothing. No hint of anything magical or strange in the muggle community, which Harry wanted to take as a sign Voldemort was defeated.

However, as he was rifling through, he noticed some information he remembered during that time (as in, the killings and torture of some muggles by Death Eaters) wasn't there. He looked some more for other things he remembered, but nothing. He went further back still to the summer before third year where he knew for sure information about a particular escaped criminal was in the muggle news, but nothing. Sirius wasn't there.

"What's wrong?" Sam asked, who was helping him look through the history. He told Sam he died in Scotland, where Harry knew Hogwarts was, but that he lived in London, thinking of Grimmauld Place. Sam was currently trying to find his obituary, or if nothing else, him being reported missing. Harry knew it was a futile attempt, but at least it kept Sam busy and out of his way.

"The history - the reports, here - they aren't the same as they were before I died."

"Are you sure?" Sam asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Positive," Harry nodded. "My godfather was all over the papers the summer of 1993. All over Britain."

"That's not a good sign," Sam frowned.

After an exhaustive search of as many records they could get their hands on, they had to admit defeat. Sam left to call Dean to pick them up (Dean had gone to see if he could track down Sam and Dean's murderers, and though he was curious, Harry didn't ask what Guns were involved in) while Harry cleaned up after them.

Soon, Harry found himself sitting in a diner across a booth from, what he now knew, the Winchester brothers.

The diner was reasonably busy, and that made Harry more comfortable talking to the brothers - lesson learned from the Dumbledore's Army's meeting in Hog's Head. Still, he subtly cast a Privacy Charm, just in case, and tried to ignore the odd looks he was getting from the other muggles for being obviously injured and, frankly, unhealthy.

"So, nothing," Dean was confirming, "nothing from your old life at all?"

"There wasn't even a record of him being born," Sam informed. It was true, there wasn't, but Harry didn't know if that was because there wouldn't be a muggle record of his birth or if it was another clue. For good measure, however, he did try to find Hermione's birth certificate and couldn't. "It's like he never existed."
"And nothing I remember happening that was written in the papers are there either," Harry added. "Well, some things are, but nothing that was connected to me. As though my entire life disappeared."

Dean frowned, nodding.

The waitress came over to take their orders, and by the time they were mostly finished with their meal - Harry having completely inhaled his food (soup, to go easy on his stomach), Dean finally spoke up. "Maybe you're just not from here here," he suggested. Then he looked at Sam and said, "We should call Cas, have him look at Harry. He might be able to tell us more."

"Yeah," Sam agreed, shuffling some muggle cash to pay for their meal. "He might be able to get Harry back to his time, and if nothing else, confirm some things Harry remembers."

"He'd be able to get me back to my time?" Harry asked, perking up.

Was this Cas a wizard? It was possible, even if Sam and Dean were muggles, for them to know witches and wizards. If Harry could speak with another wizard, he'd definitely be able to confirm that Voldemort was defeated. Because, whether he liked to acknowledge it or not, Harry thought it might be likely that Voldemort did take over and just changed the papers and hid information or something.

He watched as Sam and Dean exchanged a significant look, Dean appeared to be silently chastising Sam for the previous admission. After a moment, Dean turned back to Harry, "We'll talk about it at the motel."

Mysterious, then. Secretive, too, he guessed since Sam looked like he hadn’t meant to say what he just did. It seemed very possible this Cas was a wizard.

"Alright," Harry agreed.

Back at the motel, Harry noticed a maid must have been in and replaced their sheets. Feeling more like the beds weren't his with clean sheets on them, Harry took the chair by the desk and waited as patiently as he could for the brothers who stepped outside for a private word. Finally, they came back to sit on their respective beds and regarded Harry seriously.

They exchanged one last glance, then Sam said, "Harry… I know this might be difficult to believe, even if you just, uh, came back to life - which is weird enough, I know, but we need you to hear us out."

"Okay."

"You know… things like vampires and werewolves?"

Harry nodded.

"Well… they're real."

"I know," Harry said readily.

The brothers blinked.

"You know?" Dean asked.

"Yes," Harry answered, relieved these muggles were obviously in-the-know about the wizardry
world. "Most of what muggles think are fictional are actually real. Have you ever met a mermaid?"

Harry asked with a small smile, feeling the need to prove himself against the brothers' disbelieving
stares. The brothers shook their heads, and Harry added, "Ugly as sin. Not at all like the beautiful
creatures tales depict. And their voices above water is like a shriek. Hurtful to the ears, honestly."

That punched a small laugh out of Dean, and Sam sighed in what sounded like relief. They both
seemed to relax some.

"I'm so glad we don't have to give you the speech," Dean smiled.

"Me too," Sam agreed. "That makes this easier. Cas, our friend, he's an angel."

Harry felt his eyebrows shoot up. It took a moment to process. "Now, angels I didn't know were real.
Does that mean demons are real too?"

"Unfortunately," Dean grumbled, pulling out a device from his pocket. He flipped it opened and
started pushing buttons. Harry leaned forward, interested.

As Dean stood and walked a little away to put the device to his ear, Sam said in a whisper, "That's
called a cell phone. It's a portable phone that runs on batteries."

"Really?" Harry asked, looking back to regard the phone as Dean talked softly into it. "So, you have
instant long-range communication anywhere you go?"

"Yeah, basically," Sam said.

"Brilliant," Harry grinned at him. "Is it a muggle thing?"

Sam frowned and opened his mouth, but then a man in a trench coat suddenly appeared in the room
out of thin air, distracting them both. Harry was used to people and things appearing and
disappearing, so he didn't even blink.

"Hey, Cas," Sam greeted, looking back at Harry, still frowning.

"Hey," Dean said as well, pocketing the cell phone. "This is Harry."

Harry stood and held out his hand. The man, Cas, took it and held it with both of his instead of
shaking it, studying Harry. Harry squirmed a little, uncomfortable with the intense gaze. But he also
studied Cas back, trying to decide if he believed he was an angel or not.

"Incredible," Cas mumbled in a deep voice after what seemed like forever. "You're a wizard?"

Harry nodded, wondering why this guy was being so… like he was being.

"Wait, this guy's a witch?" Dean groaned. "I think Sam and I have had our fill of witches, thank you
very much."

"No," Cas said. "Not a witch. This man here… Your veins are filled with pure, magical power. You
were born with it, yes?"

Harry nodded, wondering if he should be offended by being called a witch or not.

Cas let go of Harry's hand and turned to the brothers who were now eyeing Harry warily again.
"This man is not from our universe. Wherever he is from, magic is good. It would seem some
humans are born with it naturally. This young man certainly was."
"Okay, wait," Harry said, shaking his head. "So, I'm in a different universe? One that doesn't have magic?"

"Oh, we have magic," Cas answered. "The only magic humans can obtain here, however, is by making a deal with a demon and offering your soul. Most rituals usually require the life of an innocent."

Harry felt horrified by the news, and he knew his face was reflecting it. *Offering your soul? Taking innocent lives?* That sounded like something up Voldemort's alley. "That's sickening," he breathed.

"Yes," Cas agreed, tilting his head and considering Harry. "Then again, I suppose other supernatural creatures have their own magic in a way, like angels. I would equate your magic to those of our angels than any mere witch here. In fact, if you were to ever come across one of our witches, I'm sure you would be far more powerful. I suspect you're already more powerful than most demons, at any rate."

"So, what?" Dean cut in. "He's like an angel, but only in his world, they're called wizards?"

Cas shrugged. "I don't know. I don't know which universe he is from, let alone anything about it."

"How did I get here?" Harry asked next.

"I'm not sure," Cas said, studying Harry again. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"I was in some limbo place, I guess. I met with someone who told me I had a choice to either move on or come back. I chose to come back."

"But you didn't go back," Cas pointed out. "You went to a different place entirely. How did you choose?"

"Er," Harry scratched the back of his neck. "I… just chose?" He was a little embarrassed that he was just told he was equated with angels here, and then went and sounded like a complete moron.

"But chose what exactly?"

Harry sighed, shoulders slumping a little. He figured this already. "To go where I was needed."

Cas nodded in understanding.

"So, that's it then, isn't it? For whatever reason, I'm most needed in this universe, at this time."

"If ever there was a time we could use a natural born, powerful wizard, it would be now," Cas answered. "There is a war going on."

Harry couldn't help it. He let his head roll back and groaned. "I was just in a war. I just died in a war."

Then an idea hit him. Cas was an angel, which Harry thought he could believe since Cas figured out so much about Harry in such a short time. Being in a different universe kind of made sense to him, judging by the similarities and differences in the muggle papers and the glaring absence of any magical communities. So, Cas, as an angel, might be able to travel between universes, right?

Looking at Cas, he asked, "Could you send me back?"

Cas shook his head. "I am not nearly powerful enough to accomplish such a feat."
Harry didn't let himself be disappointed. Throwing caution to the wind, he asked, "Could you find out what happened? Could you find out if my sacrifice worked? If my friends killed the other Horcrux; if they were able to kill Voldemort?"

Cas frowned, but after a moment, he said, "Perhaps. I could make some inquiries. What are Horcruxes, and who is Voldemort?"

Harry bit his lip, but he had to know, which meant he had to tell this angel what he knew, as much as he could.

"Voldemort, otherwise known as Lord Voldemort, the Dark Lord, or his original name, Tom Riddle, is a Dark wizard who's basically trying to take over the world," Harry began, talking quickly. "Horcruxes are what make him near impossible to kill.

"A Horcrux is an item, any item of your choice, where you can store away a bit of your soul. It's Dark Magic, really revolting. To store away a piece of your soul, you have to split it and to do that you have to kill someone. Killing people, especially innocent people, wrecks your soul, you know. Voldemort did that seven times, leaving seven pieces of his soul about.

"I've spent the last year searching for them all. There was only one left when I died, and of course, Voldemort himself. My friends knew of the Horcrux, though, and hopefully was able to stop him."

Cas nodded, fully accepting the information. "I shall see what I can find out. For now…" he turned to Sam and Dean, both of whom had carefully arranged unreadable faces. "Sam, Dean... Harry could be extremely useful. We must keep him a secret for as long as possible. If neither side knows of his existence, we stand a much better chance at winning."

Sam gave a sharp nod, and Dean looked over at Harry, giving him a once over, then nodded as well. Cas then stepped up to Harry, touched his forehead with two fingers, and Harry felt a shiver run down his body. He blinked then looked down at himself, checking himself over, and he realised Cas just healed him.

"Brilliant," he mumbled. Doing that just helped give proof to Harry that Cas was an angel and those three were telling him the truth.

He wasn't to be too distracted though.

"If I'm to be kept hidden, how can you find out about my universe without giving anything away?"

"I've been searching for… for something. It will come as no surprise to anyone that I'm asking after an alternate universe and making inquiries of the people there."

"About that…" Dean interrupted, his voice hesitant and cautious.

"Yeah," Cas agreed. "I've been waiting for your call. Did you find the garden in Heaven? Did you talk to Joshua?"

The brothers looked at Harry, as though they weren't sure if they wanted to share whatever information they had with him there. Which was fine by Harry; he needed to think. He politely volunteered to leave, and once outside the room, he walked around the motel parking lot for a while, letting everything he had just learned sink in.
By the time Harry was called back into the motel, Cas had gone, and Harry had decided two things.

One, he would do what he could here, Dumbledore's warning of maimed souls and broken families still fresh on his mind, and two, he was going to find a way back to his universe. He was going to think of his world as suspended in time, waiting for him, because if he could go back, he would make sure he landed exactly where he fell in the forest, right after Voldemort killed him. He would help with this war while he was here, yes; the others sounded like they needed help, Harry having not missed the suggestion of what 'either side' that Cas said could mean, as if they were fighting two fronts. He said he would go where he was needed, after all. But he would do that as he tried to find ways back because he would go back to his universe and finish what he started.

"Alright," Dean sighed, sitting down. Harry was sat back in the chair, but Sam was standing by the window now, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed. "First things first, we gotta make you up some IDs, get you your own credit cards, clothes, the works. We can do that tomorrow. Then you're going to show us what you got, understand?"

Harry raised an unimpressed eyebrow at the command. "Maybe," he said defiantly. "Meanwhile, you're going to tell me what this war of yours is."

"No maybe," Dean ordered, voice going a little deeper. "You are. Because God's a douche, Cas and Sam think you might be our last chance. Might be our only chance. No offence, you look like you're in your early twenties and sound like you have experience, but you're still just a kid, and I ain't riskin' the world on some random kid."

Harry bristled, deciding not to tell Dean he was actually seventeen. Here he was starting to like the Winchester.

Harry, though, didn't miss the implications of fake IDs and credit cards. He had spent the last year on the run, after all. It wasn't like they could just waltz into a store and go shopping either. He, Ron, and Hermione learned and often cast several spells that Harry thought might give the Winchesters a good show that should shut Dean up. Taking Dean up on the challenge in his eyes, Harry pulled out the Elder Wand and wordlessly waved it, being so practised at these charms he didn't need to say an incantation.

Both duffle bags of the Winchesters zipped open, and one by one, their clothes folded out, levitating in the air. Silently casting, he parsed through the clothes, then silently made copies of several trousers, most of their t-shirts and some Hensley's, as well as some pyjama bottoms, though he left the flannel alone. The clothes vibrated before cloning themselves; then Harry immediately began spelling them to size, changing the colours of some t-shirts, spelling away logos, and with half of them, making the sleeves long. He preferred long sleeves, especially because of his scars.

Meanwhile, he magicked Dean's toiletry bag open, levitating out what was in there. Harry transfigured the floss container into a toothbrush, transfigured a pen on the nightstand into a tube of toothpaste, and then transfigured the two water glasses by the pen into soap and shampoo containers. He couldn't copy the toothpaste, soap, and shampoo, of course, but he did make a show of stealing half of Dean's.

While he was doing this, his new clothes were still making themselves. They were almost finished, however. So, Harry levitated a pair of Dean's socks. He transfigured one into a toiletry bag and spelled his new toiletries in it and transfigured the other into a bag, similar to their duffels but much nicer looking, he thought. He copied another pair of socks to replace the one he stole and spelled them to neatly fold themselves, along with the rest of the Winchesters' clothing, back to where they belonged.
As his clothes and toiletries organised themselves in the air, he stood and whispered an incantation at the desk, transfiguring it into a bed. He silently levitated three towels from the loo, transfiguring one into a fitted sheet, one into a blanket, and one into a pillow, and spelled them to make the bed themselves. The bed made, he sat on it, cross-legged, just as his new clothes and bags finished neatly packing themselves and settling on the floor by the end of his bed.

Both brothers were gaping at Harry, Sam looking a little impressed and Dean looking between him and his bag as though he didn't know whether he could trust his own clothing now.

Dean recovered first. He cleared his throat and said, "Y'know what? Touché."

"Thank you," Harry nodded. "If you provide me with the identification and credit cards, I can spell them to say whatever we want on them. However, as I have no idea about your American muggle set up with currency, the connection between the credit cards and actual money will have to be up to you."

"You keep saying 'muggle'," Sam pointed out, sitting on his own bed. "What is it?"

"Muggle? Muggle is the term for non-magical people. Likewise, witches and wizards born from muggles are called muggleborns, and those born from a magical family without any magical ability are called squibs."

The brothers nodded, and they both seemed very interested.

"Are there a lot of you?" Sam asked.

Harry shrugged. "I don't know the exact number. We've hidden in secret ever since muggles started burning us."

Dean winced. "Yeah, I bet."

"How do you learn spells?" Sam asked. "Do you become an apprentice or something?"

Harry smiled a little. "We go to school just like everyone else, we just learn magic instead. I went to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, in Scotland? It's where I died," Harry reminded him. "We were battling Voldemort and his followers there at the castle - the school."

Harry had to blink away sudden images that flashed through his mind, thinking back to what, to him, occurred just hours ago.

Softly he said, "That'll be my last memory of it, won't it?"

The silence that followed was thick, as though the brothers didn't know what to say. Harry wasn't really paying them much attention anymore though.

Something else was occurring to him. An idea.

He sat up abruptly, looking back at them. "My magic travelled with me! The wand's magic too! That means other magical things retained their powers, too, right?"

"Uh," Sam said, frowning and looking at Dean, who glanced back and shrugged.

He didn't need their answer though. He pulled out the small pouch Hagrid had given him that was still around his neck, opened it, and pulled out the Marauder's Map. Pointing the - his, now, he guessed - wand at it, he said, "I solemnly swear I am up to no good."
Immediately, the map began spreading across the parchment, and Harry jumped up to his feet, excited.

"It works!"

Desperately, he began flipping through it, searching. There they were, the little dots moving like they usually did. It took a moment for him to focus. He looked into the Great Hall, and he saw a large crowd of people. Eyes urgently hunting, Harry quickly found what he sought. The name Tom Riddle was there, in the Entrance Hall, unmoving with a group of other names he recognised as Death Eaters. Two of whom he knew to be dead. He watched it for a few moments as names of those he knew - who were on their side - passed by the clump of names, apparently walking by and not paying it any mind. Which meant… Which meant Tom Riddle wasn't a threat. It meant…

"They did it!" he exclaimed, bouncing a little. "They killed him! Look!" He pointed, barely glancing up at the brothers, more focused on the map. He searched it again, a wide grin on his face, and he sought out his friends. Hermione, Ron, Ginny, George, Molly, Arthur, Bill, and Charlie were huddled together. Neville was there. Luna was there. The professors were there. They were moving, walking, standing close together.

His smile began to slowly slip off his face as he started noticing the names in the centre of the Great Hall. He saw Remus' name first. Then Tonks'. Then, between Remus and Fred was: Harry Potter.

He fell back onto his transfigured bed, feeling his blood run cold again. His lifeless body laid there, at Hogwarts, at that very moment.

"I really am dead," he whispered.

He felt his bed dip on either side of him; the brothers were looking over his shoulders. He ignored them, though, as he watched Hermione come up beside his name. He couldn't be sure from the dots, but it looked as if she was touching him in some way, probably holding his hand. After another few moments, Ron approached her and led her away, but Ginny had followed and looked to have collapsed on top of him. Bill and Charlie quickly came on either side of her and led her away as well.

A heavy hand was placed on his right shoulder for just a moment, and Sam's gentle voice said, "Would that be your body? Your name, where it says Harry Potter?"

"Yes," he said numbly. "Laid out with the dead. That's my friend next to me. Fred Weasley. And on the other side? Remus. Next to him is his wife, Tonks. I'm supposed to be godfather to their son…"

He couldn't do this. He couldn't watch them mourn him. Shakenly, he pointed his wand back to the parchment and whispered, "Mischief managed." The ink began to disappear, and Harry let the map slip from his fingers onto the floor.

"I need to be alone," he announced, and Apparated to an alleyway he had seen earlier that day, away from muggle eyes.

Harry didn't return until the wee hours of the morning. The motel room was dark, and the brothers woke a little by his sudden appearance. He ignored them and quickly crawled into bed. He laid his glasses beside him and put the wand under his pillow.

He wondered if he could use the Elder Wand to fix his old one still in his pouch. If he did, if he could, he figured he shouldn't tell anyone. There apparently were some witches and wizards here. Even though they used disgusting ways to get their magic, they might still use wands. If he and his
magic were more powerful than them and theirs, he didn’t need to give them the advantage.

Which also meant he really shouldn’t let anyone know about the Elder Wand.

He wondered if they would give Teddy his Cloak. He hoped so.

Exhaustion, grief, sadness, and loneliness weighed on him, and it didn’t take long for him to drift off to sleep, however sad and scary his dreams were.

He didn’t know how long he was asleep, but he was awoken by someone touching him. Acting on reflex, he jumped up with his wand in hand, pointing it at the person.

It was Sam, who jumped back, palms up. "It’s okay. It’s just me."

Harry sighed and slid back down onto the bed. "What?"

"It’s getting to be the afternoon," Sam said.

"So?" Harry snapped.

"So, your war might be over, but ours isn’t," Sam said gently. "We have a lot to go over. We thought we could drive to Bobby’s, a friend of ours. It’s about a day’s drive from here. You can sleep in the car, but we have to get going if we want to be there by tonight."

Harry sighed, rubbing his eyes, but nodded. He showered, dressed, and loaded up his things in the car with the Winchesters. Harry had transfigured the motel things back to their original states before they left, and he didn’t miss how intrigued Sam looked. Thankfully, though, he didn’t ask any questions and let Harry be.

Harry did, indeed, sleep in the car. He got uncomfortable at one point, levitated one of Dean’s cassette tapes to him, and transfigured it to a pillow. Dean was very unhappy with that, but Harry ignored him. As neither brother could transfigure it back, they let him have it, and he slept more comfortably after that. He knew he was being rude to them, but he was still emotional from everything that had happened. It wasn’t like they were giving him time to adjust, anyway.

They woke him when they arrived at wherever they were. Harry didn’t speak much except to greet an older man in a wheelchair with a beard and ball cap and say his thanks when Sam showed him where he could sleep. He fell back asleep immediately.

He awoke to the distinctive smell of breakfast. Realising he slept in his new day clothes, he didn’t bother dressing. He followed the scent, only stopping when he passed a toilet to relieve himself, and found a good sized kitchen. There was a spread on the table, and Harry made a beeline for it. He immediately began picking up bacon strips, stuffing them in his mouth, as well as some orange slices. Not exactly a pleasant combination, but it was still so good to Harry. He was so very hungry.

"Sorry," he said softly, sitting down and pulling the plate to him. "I didn’t notice you."

"It’s fine, boy," Bobby gruffed. "Eat up."
Harry gave the man a grateful smile and turned his attention to the food. He loaded up, and, as was habit growing up with Dudley, hunched over his food, wrapping a protective arm around his plate as much as he could, while he shoveled bacon, eggs, sausage, and fruit into his mouth.

He started loading up his plate for seconds when Dean from beside him got his attention. "Ease up. You're going to make yourself sick."

Harry blinked, then blinked down at his food. "You're right," he agreed. The Dursleys had starved him enough times for him to know that the longer he went without food, the harder it was going to be on his stomach to eat. He realized then that he hadn't eaten anything since the soup at the diner the day before yesterday.

Keeping his hunched over stance, he ate a lot slower but had to force himself to stop eating when his stomach made an unpleasant squirm. So, he released his plate, drained his juice, and leaned back in his chair.

He noticed the other three were still watching him, and he tried to smile.

"Compliments to the cook?" he offered.

"Thanks," Bobby huffed. "How are ya feelin'?"

"Er," Harry frowned. His mind was completely on food before then. He assessed himself quickly and shrugged. "Fine, I guess. Much better, now that I've slept and eaten."

"What happened between the last time you slept and ate and you dyin'?" Bobby asked bluntly.

Harry heaved a sigh. Dean poured him some more juice, as though it could make him as loose-lipped as alcohol. He nodded a thanks and took a gulp.

"Well, let's see..." he began, looking at the table. He felt a bit numb and at a remove. What all had happened?

Too much, he decided. Too much had happened.

"We robbed a bank for a Horcrux, snuck into Hogwarts for another one, destroyed them, pretty much led Voldemort and the Death Eaters right to there, really, now that I think about it."

He repressed a shiver as his stomach twisted at the memories. Harry had been a Horcrux. It was something his mind was still wildly trying to process but couldn't.

"I had to die," he said flatly, emotionless, eyes glazing over and seeing only the approaching trees of the Forbidden Forest as he went to hand himself over. He was saying it more to confirm it for himself, remind himself, reassure himself that he had done the right thing. "I had to die. I had to. Voldemort had made me a Horcrux, so I had to die. I snuck out of the castle - told Neville to make sure to destroy the last Horcrux somehow, though, just to be safe. Just in case. Ron and Hermione knew about them, and Snape, well, he was how I found out about me. I didn't tell anyone, I just... I walked to my death."

He closed his eyes, forcing memories back, and finally looked up at them. They all were wearing unreadable expressions. Yeah, he probably shouldn't have gotten lost in his head, remembering. He said way too much.

Bobby tried to speak first, but Harry held up his hand. He wasn't ready to deal with it. The map showed him his friends finished the war, so it was settled.
It was done. It was over.

"Well, I told you some of mine. Tell me about your war." The three men exchanged a look like they weren't sure, so Harry added, "I said I'd go to where I was needed. I'm needed here." He looked at Dean. "You mentioned risking the world. I assume this is important."

"I need a drink," Bobby announced.

Harry followed the three into what looked to be a study. Bobby put himself behind a desk and did indeed pour himself a glass of a rich looking amber liquid. Sam and Dean sat on a cot that had been pushed against a set of bay windows; a sofa lain with high stacks with books was shoved in a corner, and though there was another chair there he could use, Harry sat on the floor with his back leaning against the wall opposite of the brothers. He felt a bit more comfortable making himself smaller.

Both brothers had their elbows on their knees, and Dean clapped once and said to the other two, "Well, where do we want to start?"

Sam looked at Harry and asked, "How much do you know about Christianity?"

"Not much," he answered honestly.

"Well, do you know about the angels Lucifer and Michael?"

Harry thought about it. "Isn't Lucifer the devil?"

"Yep," the three said.

"But he's technically an angel," Bobby corrected. "Angel turned bad."

"Here's what's been happening on our end," Sam began. He shot Dean a look, as though ready for a fight. "We'll start from the beginning."

"Yeah, yeah," Dean waved a hand but looked guarded. "Spill all your secrets, Sammy, let's have girl-hour."

Sam shot Dean one more glare, then focused on Harry, turning very serious. Harry fleetingly wondered why he was still with these men, but then reminded himself that he decided to help them. For now, at least, until he could get home. He would listen; he would help.

"Angels and demons are real. So is Heaven and Hell. A demon named Azazel had this long-term plan to break Lucifer out of his cage. I -" Sam sighed and paused a moment, "- was one of his pawns. Azazel opened up one of the gates to Hell, releasing we don't know how many demons, including a demon needed to free Lucifer. I was tricked into killing that demon, which was the last seal to break to open the Devil's cage. So, basically, he's loose, and the apocalypse has started. What it comes down to is, it's fated that Lucifer and Michael, both archangels, fight for control of the earth. They want me to be the vessel for Lucifer, and Dean to be the vessel for Michael."

Harry nodded, taking that in. He briefly wondered if these men were completely insane, but then he remembered the 'angel' Cas - who, unless there was some kind of con at play here, was an angel since he appeared out of nowhere, figured out what Harry was, and healed Harry with just a touch of his fingers. Deciding to just go with it, he asked, "Vessels? As in they would possess you?"

The brothers nodded.

"What's stopping them from just taking you?"
"Well, you see," Dean picked up, "demons can possess you anytime they want. Angels need your permission."

"That's odd, isn't it?" Harry frowned. "Helpful, but odd. Why do they want you specifically?"

"They say it's our fate," Sam said.

"I see… And what happens if either of them wins the fight?"

"Well," Sam started, "the angels brought on the apocalypse on purpose. They want to create a new earth. They aren't too fond of humans and think they can make earth a better place if they're the ones running it."

"If Satan wins," Dean added, "he'll take over the earth, too, and it's goodbye to us humans completely."

"So, we need the fight not to happen, don't we?" Harry summarised. "Wouldn't that be accomplished if neither of you permits to be a vessel?"

"The fight's the endgame," Bobby informed him. "Right now, shit's goin' haywire, and the angels and demons are doing whatever they can to get them to say yes. They might come to blows even if these boys say no."

Harry nodded. "I see," he hummed, thinking about all the damage the Death Eaters and Voldemort did before Voldemort's and Harry's 'endgame.' Harry rubbed his eyes, forcing himself to stop thinking about his war. "They're both archangels, you said?"

"Yeah," Sam answered.

"Any leads on stopping them? I assume it isn't easy?" he asked, dropping his hands and looking at them again.

The brothers shook their heads.

"If Lucifer's been caged this whole time, what has Michael been doing?"

"We don't know," Bobby said. "I would bet he was makin' sure Azazel freed Lucifer and fulfil their destiny."

Harry frowned again. "That's quite odd as well, isn't it? If Michael and the angels want control of the earth, wouldn't it had been smarter and easier to seize it while Lucifer was caged?"

The men nodded.

"The winged bastards run on destiny, though," Dean said. "They probably think the only way to secure control would be to kill Lucifer."

Harry sighed, heavy, his shoulders slumping. "Destiny." he repeated. "Voldemort believed in that too. It led to both our deaths, didn't it? Whereas, if he left it alone, he would have had control of the entire wizardry world by the '90s." Harry shook his head. "Well, what's done is done. Voldemort's dead; Lucifer is free…" Harry looked around, not really seeing anything, thinking. "Outside of looking for a way to simply kill both of them, our best option is to find a way of blocking their 'destiny,'" he used finger quotes. Looking back at the brothers, he said, "How was Lucifer caged the first time?"
The men looked at each other, then Bobby answered, "We don't know."

"Let's look into that, then. If we can't kill them outright then the next best option would be to cage both of them, wouldn't it?" He looked back at Sam. "You mentioned seals? What are they?"

Sam nodded. "Sixty-six seals had to be broken to release Lucifer. Dean broke the first; I broke the last. We didn't know they were seals though."

Harry waited for Sam to say more, but when nothing came, he rolled his eyes. "Okay, but what were they?"

"Well," Sam glanced at Dean, "the last one was the death of Lilith, the demon that got out from the gate of Hell Azazel opened."

"The one you were tricked into killing?" Harry wanted to confirm.

Sam nodded, scowling. "Yeah. By a demon named Ruby."

"Awfully common names, these demons," Harry commented. He looked at Dean. "The first seal?"

Dean took a breath, as though preparing himself, and said, "During my time in the pit. The first seal was a righteous man had to pick up a weapon in Hell."

He was in Hell? Harry supposed he shouldn't be surprised. Apparently, anything was possible. He could almost taste Dean's shame, though, and it wasn't exactly productive, so he said, casually, "Proof that you're righteous, then. If Lucifer is the devil, then no doubt Michael thinks himself the saviour, which would be why he would choose a righteous man." A thought occurred to him, and he looked back at Sam. "So, what did they do to you to mould you into the devil's vessel?"

Bobby chuckled. "Damn smart kid."

Harry felt a little proud at that - he was sure Hermione would have already come to his conclusion, but still. He didn't react, though, just politely waited for Sam to answer, who had an equal amount of shame as Dean at the question, he noted.

"When I was a baby, uh, Azazel… killed our mom and dripped demon blood into my mouth," he said that last part in a rush. Harry winced a little. "It… changed me. Ruby had me… had me drinking demon blood to be more powerful. I've kicked it," he added hurriedly, "but the demon blood did make me stronger. Probably strong enough to hold Lucifer."

Harry hummed and nodded. Again, Harry was still trying to come to terms with just the idea of being a Horcrux for Voldemort, so he felt and showed no judgment. Instead, practically hearing Hermione's voice, he said, "Makes sense. The demons tried to groom you for Lucifer; the angels tried to groom you for Michael," he added toward Dean. "I wouldn't doubt they allowed you to be sent to Hell and made sure you returned, kind of like a Hercules trial. If Sam needs strengthening for an archangel, you would too. A trial like that would do it - which would probably have to be from an act of willingness since angels need permission to possess a vessel."

It reminded him of several spells and curses he had studied. Another thought hit Harry, and he looked back to Sam. "Which would be why the angels needed demons to affect and groom you. They can do that without your permission, right?"

Dean was frowning, though Sam looked attentive, and Bobby mumbled, "I haven't thought of that."

Getting back to the point, Harry said, "So, the first and last seal was staged, most likely. What about
"We don't know all of 'em," Bobby said. "Random things, like the return of vengeful spirits."

"Spirits, death, and Hell, huh? Then the seals were cosmic acts," Harry said, nodding to himself and remembering a few lessons in Astronomy, wishing he paid more attention in class. "That's no guarantee that cosmic acts would be needed to reverse it. It would imply…” he trailed off, thinking. He added quietly, "If there were sixty-six cosmic acts to unlock the cage, then that means it had to be a combination of great power." He looked back up. "Were they really random or were they specific sixty-six seals?"

Dean answered, "There were lots of seals, but any sixty-six did the trick."

Harry could already feel the tension setting on his shoulders. "So, it didn't have to be a specific power to unlock the cage, just a significant one. If we gather enough power equal to, or more than, that, we could open the cage back up and shove them both in."

"You mean, break sixty-six more seals?" Sam asked.

Harry shrugged. "Not necessarily. The angels and demons used the seals to generate the power needed. We just need equal power. If opening the cage didn't require specifics, just cosmic power, then I would assume the opposite would hold true. It's a standard law of physics, isn't it? For every force of nature, there is an equal, yet opposite, reaction. Not to mention," Harry added, raising his eyebrows as he recalled some muggle physics he knew that actually applied to magic, "all energy is still, stasis, at rest until a force of equal strength gets it to move. It is likely that the cage is a metaphysical one, forcing Lucifer into a state of stillness. Which would make sense if the cosmic energy regenerated by these sixty-six seals worked up enough energy to force onto the cage, breaking it from its state of rest."

The three men were looking at Harry wide-eyed, which made Harry very uncomfortable. It reminded him of how he and Ron often looked at Hermione. He squirmed.

"That's all theory, you know. I only know small details from, like, the last ten minutes. Not to mention, I'm from a different universe, aren't I?"

"We have the same laws of physics, though," Sam said, sitting a bit straighter. "Is… Is that how you do magic? Physics?"

"A bit," Harry answered. "I haven't studied too much magical theory, though. I've kind of been too busy trying not to die." Harry tried to smile, but it fell flat.

However, for once, that didn't get the reaction he was used to. Instead, the three men actually nodded in understanding. Merlin, what have they been through?

"So basically," Dean said, getting more comfortable where he sat, "you're saying if we can't find a way to kill Lucifer, we could find a way to lock him back up."

"Both of them," Harry corrected. "Take it from me… If someone is obsessed with destiny, they'll keep trying to create it. If you just locked Lucifer up, Michael will find a way to let him loose again."

He saw the brothers shudder, but the dawning realisation of that truth was on both their faces.

"Yeah," Bobby agreed. "We've known the angels had a hand in all this from the beginnin'. They'd just start over."
"Now we have to kill two archangels?" Dean groaned.

"Or lock them up," Harry added. "What are the differences between angels and archangels?"

"Archangels are hella more powerful," Dean answered.

"That's all?" Harry asked, surprised.

"Well..." Sam said. "Yeah."

Harry laughed. He couldn't help himself. It felt good, though.

"There are always ways to become more powerful," he told them. The three of them looked slightly offended at Harry laughing at them. Harry shrugged. "If not training, surely there are artefacts here that are powerful?"

"Of course," Sam nodded.

"Then let's look for them," Harry shrugged again. "We can round up as many as we can and combine their power. We'd be bound to find enough to help lock them away, wouldn't we?"

"Smart," Bobby nodded. "Let's get to crackin'."

Harry sort of felt like he was in a really long dream and like nothing and everything was real.

He helped in their research over the next couple of days, but he also focused on trying to find something about other universes or space/time/universal travel. Bobby had a lot of books and material, but nothing that could help him, apparently. He was plagued with questions of not just why, but how.

Once again, he found himself looking at the Marauder's map every night. The majority of the school had emptied. He had missed whenever his body was carried off, and he found himself having nightmares of his funeral. Worse still, nightmares of returning to his universe, into that body, and having to find a way to climb out of his grave. Not to mention, what if he was cremated? What if he didn't have a body to return to? Would he just die again if he tried returning, or return as a ghost?

One afternoon, Dean came into the study where the other three were and announced there had been a lot of demon activity a couple of states over. Sam and Dean decided to go check it out, and Harry demanded to go with them.

"I haven't met a demon, have I? How will we know how I fend against them if I don't meet one?"

Sam seemed wary but agreeable. Dean, on the other hand, didn't seem to like it at all. He complained the first hour of their drive about Harry not getting enough rest, needing to recover, and the lack of research on how the demons would affect him. Harry found it very amusing that for someone who didn't want to lower his gun when they first met would seem so attentive now.

He had gone over a bunch of demon lore at Bobby's, as well as asked the others lots of questions, and he had several ideas of spells and things he could try. Personally, he wanted to capture a demon and test his magic out on them, and the brothers agreed to do so if it were possible.

They stopped overnight at some motel then arrived in the small town the next morning and started their investigation immediately. Sam and Dean asked a few questions around the town, not allowing
Harry to join, and eventually, by nightfall, they were led to a warehouse in which Sam and Dean were positive some demons were hiding.

The term 'hiding' didn't settle well with Harry, considering the state of things. If they were hiding, that must mean the other side of the war was around. If not, why would they hide? He kept quiet, however, since he wasn't this universe's expert. Still, he knew immediately when they walked in that it was a trap. There wasn't very much light, mostly just from the moon that beamed through the broken and busted windows. The majority of the warehouse was in the dark.

"Get down," he hissed at them, crouching a little.

"What?" the brothers asked.

Before he could answer, five black-eyed people ran at them.

Reacting on instinct, Harry pointed his wand at the closest demon and yelled, "Stupefy!" The demon was Stunned and fell. He shot two Shooting Spells at the next two closest demons, sending them back some. He yelled, "Stupefy," to the other two, then cried, "Immobulus!" as three more joined the two he shot back. The five froze, but four more demons came into the light.

Quickly, he cast a Shielding Charm, repelling two, then Stupefied the others. More came, and Dean and Sam were firing what they had told him earlier were salt rounds. He cast Immobulus once more to get others frozen, and as three more demons ran into the light, Harry cast a Binding Spell on one, cast a larger range Shielding Charm, then yelled toward the ceiling, "Lumos Maximus!"

A ball of light burst from his wand, rushing upward and hovering above the rest of the large room, illuminating what had to be hundreds of people - demons.

Dean swore, Sam yelled to run back, and then every single demon charged at them. The three of them ran, Harry casting Shielding Charms, Stunning Spells, Binding - Full-Body and non, Jelly-Legs, Merlin, anything he could think of, over his shoulder.

The demons were fast, however. And strong. They had them surrounded and pinned quickly.

It was like he was back in battle, but so much more intense with dozens of things trying to kill him at once.

*Locomotor Mortis*

*Stupefy*

Stinging Hexes, Shooting Spells, hell, he cast three Tickling Charms just to distract some. He could barely keep up, and Harry realised the other two weren't doing so well either.

They were going to die at this rate.

Swearing under his breath, he shot Stunning Spells at the demons immediately around the three, then pointing his wand toward the direction of the car, he cried, "CONFRINGO!"

The curse efficiently blasted through the demons, giving them a direct path out. Sam and Dean didn't need to be told to run, and the three of them sprinted. Harry threw what he could over his shoulder - several Stunning Spells, two *Immobulus*, a few *Descendo*, and even one *Deprimo* that he sincerely hoped didn't break any hosts' bones.

They made it to the car, and as Sam and Dean climbed in, Harry turned and cast the strongest
Shielding Charm he could. Several demons ran into the invisible barrier, crying out and scratching at it, but it was enough to allow them to start the car and take off.

"Jesus fuck!" Dean yelled.

"Those are demons, then," Harry breathed from the backseat.

"Yeah," Sam confirmed, clutching his arm where it was bleeding.

The car's engine roared as Dean sped, but it quickly became apparent the demons were following. They were impossibly fast. Too fast for humans. Unless the demons were controlling and protecting their hosts' heart rate and body, the hosts were dead. Given what he had read about demons, it was unlikely they were protecting their hosts. Demons, nor angels, needed a living host. An angel required permission, sure, but once the host died, unless the person expressly detracted permission, the angel still had access.

Too fast. The demons were coming too fast. No way any of their hosts were alive.

"Drive faster, Dean," Sam said, also looking out the back window.

Dean bit out, "Can't."

Harry spared a glance at the dashboard and saw Dean was pushing 100 mph.

Sam made a pained sound then, strengthening his hold on his arm.

Dean and Harry asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay," Sam grunted, but Harry didn't miss the sarcasm.

Dean looked out the back window briefly, making Harry do the same, before he asked, "Ever seen that many?"

"No - no way. Not in one place."

"What the hell?"

Dean turned abruptly then, causing Harry to slam into one of the car's doors. He moaned, his shoulder having already been injured by a demon grabbing his arm and twisting it at one point. Harry barely had a chance to right himself before Dean was slamming on the brakes, forcing him forward and having to use the front bench seat to keep from flying through the window, his knees slamming against it painfully.

He looked up to see what made them stop and was surprised to see a giant barricade alit in flames.

The three of them seemed frozen for a moment before Dean swore, threw the car into reverse, and attempted to turn around quickly.

They didn't make it. No sooner had Dean gotten the car at a right angle to take off again did two quick demons break the front windows, trying to grab the brothers. Harry yelled a Shielding Charm to push them back, and he was about to Stun each one when-

Water.

Water began pouring over them, making the demons scream in pain. Other demons had also caught up with them and were being attacked by the water - holy water, he realised - as well. Harry
followed the powerful stream to find a big truck with a man on top, directing a large hose at the
demons. A voice came from a speaker, a megaphone he realised once he could see who was
speaking and was chanting in a language Harry didn't recognise. After whatever incantation was
said, thick, impenetrable looking smoke exploded from the mouths of the demons' hosts. It was quite
a sight that came with a lot of noise like a storm was erupting around them. So much so that the
silence that followed was thick as the hosts fell, unconscious or dead.

Harry looked back around to see who saved them. The truck was obnoxiously red, and there were
three men around it - one with the hose, one with the megaphone, and one with a shotgun.

Dean, Sam, and Harry were breathing heavily, but Dean still managed a, "Well, that's something you
don't see every day."

Sam and Dean began to get out of the car, but Harry was much more hesitant, only resting his hand
on the door's handle and pocketing his wand.

"You three alright?" the man with a shotgun asked as he approached them.

"Peachy," Dean said after a moment.

"Be careful," Shotgun said. "It's… dangerous around here." Then he began to walk away.

"Whoa- whoa- whoa- wait, wait," Dean rushed, shutting his door and chasing after the bloke. Sam
did as well.

"No need to thank us," Shotgun called over his shoulder with a nonchalant hand wave, sounding
way too practised.

"No, hold up a sec - who are you?" Dean asked.

Shotgun turned back to Dean and Sam and considered them a moment. "We're the Sacrament
Lutheran Militia."

There was a pause, and then Dean said, "I'm sorry, the what?"

"I'm sorry to tell you this, but those were demons, and this is the apocalypse," Shotgun said in return.
Getting Harry's interest, Harry quietly and slowly made his way out of the car as the man continued,
"So… buckle up."

Dean and Sam exchanged a glance, then Dean said, "We know."

The five got into a discussion with both sides barely believing the other as Harry took a calculating
look around.

There were so many demons, but only a handful caught up with them? He looked around at the
bodies and began approaching each one, trying to check their pulse.

Dean and Sam brought the others around to their car's trunk where Harry knew they had their
collection of weapons. He heard the trunk open, then after a moment, Sam said, "Looks like we're in
the same line of business."

"Yeah," Dean agreed, "and among colleagues."

After another pause, wherein Harry tried to find the pulse of another dead body, Dean continued.
"That's a police-issued shotgun. That truck is, uh… inspired. Where'd you guys pick up all this
crap?"

Harry moved on to another dead body.

"Y'know, you… pick things up along the way," Water Hose said.

Another pause wherein Harry confirmed two more dead bodies. "Guys, come on," Dean chuckled, "this whole corner of the state is nuts with demon omens. We just want to help, that's all."

"We're on the same team, here," Sam added, and Harry confirmed the last dead body. "Just talk to us."

Harry straightened and made his way over to them carefully and slowly, not wanting to compromise whatever negotiation Dean and Sam were weaving. The men seemed to have a silent conversation, then Shotgun said, "Follow us."

... 

Harry was quiet as he observed. There was a part of him that started to seriously wonder if this entire week really had been a dream. Regardless, dream or not, he wasn't about to let his guard down.

They drove a long way and arrived sometime in the morning in a town that looked fortified.

They parked by the red truck at a white church. The three of them had been passing around rags, trying to get off what blood and sweat they could. They got out, and as Dean stored the rags in the trunk, Sam put back on his jacket, and Harry looked around, making sure his wand was secure. The town seemed mostly deserted, and Harry noticed what he recently learned was a demon trap spray-painted right before the pathway that led to the front doors of the church. On either side were low concrete barriers with barbed wire, and Harry wondered what stopped demons from just jumping over them? Even he could find a way to get over them, and for a demon, the barriers should be nothing.

They were led into the wooden panelled church. It was full, and a group of people were gathered at the front along with a priest.

"Who would have thought the apocalypse would be so romantic?" the priest asked the room as Harry, Dean, and Sam filed themselves politely against the back wall. "Marriage, family, it's a blessing. Especially in times like this. So hold onto that," the priest went on, and Harry looked at the two brothers to see what they were thinking, noting Sam was suspiciously looking at all the shotguns the muggles had. He eyed them, too, and despite American stereotypes, knew this wasn't normal in the slightest.

"Wedding?" Sam huffed quietly. "Seriously?"

"Why not?" Harry answered just as quietly back. "End of the world, the prospect of dying a horrible death, war… It's natural for people to want to find happiness where they can, even in good times, isn't it? War is so lonely," he added. "When you have someone, sometimes, the lonelier you feel at the prospect of losing them. It's only natural to try to bond where you can."

Bill and Fleur had a big wedding right before they had to go on the run, and Harry could remember and appreciate the break it provided from the constant stress, worry, and fear.

After a moment, he realised Dean was staring at him. When he looked over, Dean merely shrugged at getting caught and looked back toward the front. Harry rolled his eyes.
They hovered in the back for the rest of the wedding, watching as the couple promised each other until death did them part, then politely hung back as they followed the couple out of the church, the congregation throwing rice and rose petals.

As they watched the couple get carted off, the priest came to stand beside them. "So, Rob tells me you boys hunt demons."

Harry chose not to answer as the brothers looked at one another. After all, they made it clear they were in charge while they pretended to be law enforcement and questioned locals the day before. Stood to reason that still applied, which to Harry, hey, have at it.

Sam answered, "Uh… yes, sir."

Dean opened his mouth like he was going to add to that but quickly closed it, accepting Sam's answer. Harry eyed the priest a moment, sizing him up, and he noticed a gun was strapped to the priest's leg. Harry was willing to bet that wasn't the only weapon on the priest's person. He felt very fortunate just to need a wand, he thought.

"You missed a few," the priest said, obviously attempting good humour.

Sam gave a small laugh. "Yeah, tell us about it. Any idea why they're here?"

"Strange times," Preacher-Priest mumbled, pushing through a set of double doors that led to… to a room converted into a muggle weapon's assembly line, by the look of it. There were two lines of tables with several muggles surrounding them, putting together guns, gunpowder, some sharpening knives.

"Is that a twelve-year-old packin' salt rounds?" Dean asked incredulously. Harry snapped his head around to where Dean was looking, and yes, that was indeed a child packing shotgun shells.

"Everybody pitches in," Preacher-Priest said casually as he continued to lead them inside.

"So, the whole church?" Sam questioned.

"The whole town," Preacher-Priest confirmed.

"Well, the demons were killing us. We had to do something," Preacher-Priest said seriously.
"So why not call the national guard?" Sam fished, causing Harry to raise a brow. Harry had been
around the Winchesters enough already to know how muggles usually reacted to the supernatural.
Calling the national guard would have only served to get the town laughed at. Sam was digging at
something, and Harry wondered what he was thinking.

"We were told not to," Preacher-Priest answered simply. Harry frowned.

"By who?" asked Sam.

Preacher-Priest looked at them with an open expression, but it was clear he wasn't going to answer.

"Come on, Padre," Dean tried. "You're as locked and loaded as we've ever seen. And that exorcism
was Enochian -" ah, that was what that was "- someone's tellin' you something."

The man considered Dean, hesitated, then looked down. "Look, I'm sorry. I, uh," he looked back up
and to something over Sam's and Harry's shoulders, then said with conviction, "I can't discuss it."

"Dad, it's okay," came a female voice from behind them. They turned to find a young woman with
blonde hair and a grey sweater slowly nudging forward to join them.

"Leah," Preacher-Priest warned.

"It's Sam and Dean Winchester," she announced. "They're safe."

Harry noticed both brothers tense on either side of him.

"I know all about them," she continued.

Sam frowned, and Dean blinked a couple of times then met Sam's gaze over the top of Harry's head.
It wasn't hard for them to do, but Harry definitely felt shorter whenever they did it. He really needed
to learn to stop standing between them.

Dean turned back to the woman, Leah, and asked, "You do?"

"Sure," Leah said easily. "From the angels."

There was a quick pause, then Dean said sarcastically, "The angels. Awesome."

"Don't worry, they can't see you here," Leah reassured them. "The… marks on your ribs, right?" she
asked, gesturing towards her own ribs.

Dean and Sam both looked a little creeped out by that, and Harry wondered what in the world Leah
meant. She made it sound significant, and Harry bookmarked it in his mind to ask the brothers later.

"So…" Sam started. "You know all about us… because angels told you?" Sam didn't quite sound
like he believed her.

"Yes," Leah smiled, then added, "among other things."

"Like the snappy little exorcism spell," Dean supplied.

"And they show me where the demons are going to be before it happens," she nodded. "How to
fight back."

"Never been wrong. Not once," Preacher-Priest interrupted, moving to stand by the woman. "She's
very special."
Preacher-Priest went to pet her hair, but she moved her head away a little, smiling. "Dad," she whined fondly.

"And let me guess," Dean pressed on, "before you… see something, you get a really bad migraine and see flashing lights?"

"How'd you know?" Leah asked, looking at Dean curiously.

"Cause you're not the first prophet we've met," Dean said, then added with a smirk, "but you are the cutest." Leah blushed some and smiled back. When Dean caught Preacher-Priest's eye again, he quickly amended, "I mean that with total respect, of course."

Harry snorted again, and it seemed to get the others' attention.

Leah frowned at him. "Hello," she said. "I don't know about you."

"I'm no one," Harry tried to dismiss her. "Sam and Dean saved me from a bunch of demons a few towns over. Didn't really have anywhere else to go, so I'm sticking with them for now."

Both Preacher-Priest and Leah nodded, accepting that story. "In that case," Preacher-Priest said, reaching over to lay a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Take a look around town, see how you like us. You're welcomed to stay as long as you'd like."

Harry smiled at him. "Thank you, sir."

Taking a look around seemed like an excellent idea.

... The town was in the throes of autumn, and Harry noticed what seemed like a permanent fog had settled around the buildings. It was properly gloomy and bleak. Almost as if it were… enchanted.

He walked the forests and neighbourhoods, wand tucked cleverly under his sleeve, his fingers curled around the base. Casting through his shirt sleeve and jacket (leather, as he copied it from Dean) wasn't the most pleasant experience, but it was the most discreet way he could run diagnostics. He wasn't liking what he was finding either.

Around the town square, he saw the man who had the megaphone the night before. Harry jogged to him and stopped him.

"Hi," Harry smiled. "I'm sorry to disturb you. I was just wondering what that phrase was that you shouted at the demons last night? The one that saved our lives," he added for good measure.

"Bra de gah ra ma," Megaphone informed, not looking happy for being stopped and not taken to Harry's attempted flattery. "It expels demons."

"Bra de gah ra ma," Harry repeated. "Thank you!"

Megaphone nodded, making a face at what was probably Harry's accent. He wondered if he would get that a lot.

Harry snuck back into some woods and attempted the 'spell' with his wand. Nothing happened. His wand didn't react to it at all. Harry had tested some exorcising phrases with his wand at Bobby's, and he felt the effect the words had. He had no doubt those words coupled with his wand would be powerful enough to exorcise many demons, probably at once. This phrase, however…
Eventually, Harry found Dean and Sam in the town's pub at one of the tables, drinking beer and looking serious. Well, Sam was looking serious. Dean was just looking tired and fed up.

"Hey," he said joining them.

"Hey," Sam greeted. "You find anything?"

"Yeah," Harry nodded, then discreetly cast a Privacy Charm around them.

"What was that?" Dean asked.

"Privacy Charm," Harry told him. "So we can't be overheard."

"Huh," Dean nodded, looking at the tip of Harry's wand sneaking out of his sleeve. "Awesome."

"Listen," Harry began, "it's fake. All of this," he gestured around, "is fake."

The brothers looked at each other, then they both crossed their arms on the table and leaned closer. "Come again?" Dean asked, and Harry was beginning to recognise that expression as a sarcastic Oh-I-can't-wait-to-hear-this. Harry would consider it rude, if he cared enough to consider it anything.

"It's fake. Something, or someone, is manipulating the atmosphere of the town. They're creating the fog and the bleakness, and they're using some kind of force to manipulate people's emotions. Not dissimilar to dementors, actually," he realised.

"Dementors?" Sam asked.

"Yeah. They're these… Dark creatures in my universe that feed on human happiness. They leave only despair in the air around you, forcing you to relive your worst and darkest memories. They've almost killed me a few times," Harry added. "Not to mention, there's a thing called the Dementor's Kiss where the dementor sucks out your soul leaving a still-alive-but-empty body. Demons would love them, I suppose, wouldn't they?"

"Hold up, Clive," Dean barked. "What are you getting at? There's something like your demoners here."

Harry shrugged. "Dementors, and yeah. Something dark is here with power quite similar. They're using the fog. It's odd, the fog is giving out a false sense of security as well as feeding into the fear of everyone, making everyone convinced they're all about to… die, I suppose. That the world really is ending. With that fear coupled with the false sense of security, I feel like they're setting this town up for something."

"Emotional manipulation," Sam nodded, then looked pointedly at Dean for some reason. "Exploiting the townspeople."

"But why?" Dean asked, ignoring Sam. "What's the point?"

Right then, a loud bell started ringing. The pub became quiet, and abruptly, people began to make their way out.

"Something I said?" Dean asked, watching them in bewilderment.

"Paul," Sam got the attention of a man walking out behind the crowd. Harry recognised him as Water Hose from the night before. "What's going on?"

"Leah's had another vision," Paul answered.
The three of them let that sink in, Dean and Sam looking over at Harry then one another.

"Wanna go to church?" Sam suggested.

"You know me," Dean said, lifting his beer to take a last swig, "downright pious."

Leah's vision was of several demons huddled together five miles from town.

"So who's going to join me," Preacher-Priest said, or Pastor David Gideon, as Dean had informed Harry when they stepped into the church. The whole town was there. Sam, Dean, and Harry were once again hovering in the back.

A man Harry recognised as Shotgun raised his hand. "Wouldn't miss it."

Paul raised his hand next. "Someone's got to cover Rob's ass," he said, grinning at Shotgun.

"We're in, Padre," Dean volunteered them. Harry wanted to elbow him. How was Harry supposed to help and keep his wizardry a secret?

"Thank you," Pastor David nodded toward them. "I'd like to offer a prayer."

Harry respectfully lowered his head, but he kept his eyes opened. He noticed Rob and Paul exchange a significant and not exactly friendly look, which was very different from just moments before, and Harry turned his head to see that Dean and Sam had noticed it too.

Once the congregation was dismissed, Dean herded them into a corner.

"What do you think is up with Rob and Paul?" Sam asked.

"No clue," Dean shrugged. "Harry, you comin' with us?"

"Sure. But how can I help?"

"We need to be careful. If something's out there causing this, we don't need it knowing what you are."

"Yeah," Harry agreed.

"You'll have to go… muggle?" Sam ended the sentence questionably.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, muggle. Shotguns and swearing, then," he added peevishly. "Shall we?"

Dean scowled at Harry's attitude but let it go. They joined Pastor David, Rob, Paul, and two others to hash out a plan. They agreed to head out the first thing the next morning. Rob didn't seem to think Harry had it in him to fight demons, said he looked too 'scrawny,' but apparently, Rob's wife and son were going as well. Sam made the argument that if Rob's son was good enough, Harry was too. Dean also defended Harry, and it was Pastor David that ruled that they should give Harry a chance.

As they left the church, Harry quietly reminded the Winchester brothers he didn't know how to shoot a gun.

"If you can aim that stick of yours, you can shoot," Dean grunted.

Harry supposed that was true, but one look from Sam told him there were enough differences to
warrant some pause.

"Brilliant," Harry sighed.

Chapter End Notes

Attention new readers!! 21 March 2019
This fic is not abandoned, just due to personal reasons, not updated. I am thrilled to tell you that, though this fic is a big undertaking, I am no longer doing it alone! In addition to the fic's official artist who's joined me, myrkky, two others have recently joined me as betas!

What this means for you is that there may be some edits in what's already posted. There has already been one embarrassing peddle to petal correction >.>

It also means more chapters are coming soon! I really do hope you enjoy this, and thank you so, so much for reading.

You can go to This fic's official Tumblr blog to get recent updates, meet amazing people, and even check out some audio I made for this. Thanks again!
The Whore

Chapter Summary

Harry's denial of his situation begins to fade, but the Gryffindor in him is alive and well. Dean is losing faith. Sam is holding onto loose threads of hope. Cas goes on a bender.

(Ch 2 being edited start of April 2019 - some changes made 3 April)

Chapter Notes

I do not own HP or SPN anything.
shotguns. Harry had spelled the guns and targets (watermelons, three to be exact, that he kept spelling to repair themselves on the rare occasion he hit one) to be silent so they wouldn't disturb the town. He noticed the brothers shiver a little about half an hour in, and, though he himself was used to a colder climate, he cast a blanketing Warming Charm around them.

"Whoa," Sam straightened up. He was standing by Harry, instructing, while Dean sat on a pile of crates, sharpening some demon-killing knife – too important for Harry to touch, though he thought he could recognise some of the runes on it. "Was that you?"

"Yeah," Harry answered. "It's a simple Warming Charm. Should keep away the chill."

"That's useful," Sam commented.

Harry refocused on his watermelons with the shotgun. He closed one eye as he aimed, double checked his stance, and pulled the trigger. He almost hit the target, and again, Harry wasn't ready for the kickback. He groaned and rotated his shoulder, wishing Madam Pomfrey had been around to fix whatever the demons did to it. "There has to be an easier way."

"Maybe you got another useful spell," Dean sneered. "Like that heater one. Or the flashlight one. Or the one where you stole my fuckin' floss."

"Would you like me to buy you more?" Harry snapped. Dean had been in a bad mood since they left the church, and the less Harry hit the watermelons, the worse his mood got. Sam had already whispered to Harry that he thought the fake fog was getting to Dean, but he wouldn't elaborate more than that.

"Buy? Nah," Dean sent him a sardonic smile. "Why waste the money when you just spell that rock there," he pointed to a small rock on the ground, "into it. It'd be useful."

"Dean," Sam sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Harry, though, thought that was a good idea. He pointed his wand, transfigured the rock into a small ball of floss, then spelled it to hit Dean upside the head. Repeatedly.

Maybe the fog was getting to him a little too.

"Hey," Dean complained, swatting at it.

"Stop it, both of you," Sam chastised, coming up to try to catch the ball of floss. It eluded him, of course, coming to whack on the other side of Dean's head. Dean made a noise, standing to swat at it with both hands. Sam turned to Harry and gave him a pleading look. Harry sighed, waved his wand, and the floss unravelled and fell to the ground.

Dean, jaw clenched, turned to Harry. "Cute, but how 'bout you try to hit your actual targets," he snarled, pointing to the watermelons.

Annoyed, and with his eyes fixed firmly on Dean's, Harry pointed his wand to the middle watermelon and snarled back, "Reducto."

The watermelon burst, and although that spell was usually meant to just break objects, Harry could tell by the brothers' faces that he had accidentally put a bit extra power behind it and completely disintegrated the melon.

Dean eyed him warily, huffed, then spun on his heels and left. They heard the squeak of his car's door that was parked on the side of the building before the loud engine started, and Dean tore away.
Sam sighed heavily. "Sorry about that."

Harry didn't say anything. He pocketed his wand then aimed at the last two watermelons. Apparently, being annoyed helped his aim, and he hit both targets dead centre. "Huh."

"Looks like we just need Dean to piss you off before we go tomorrow."

Harry let himself snigger, albeit a bit bitterly, then walked over, handed Sam the gun, and took Dean's vacated spot on the crates. Sam was quiet for a moment before he sat next to him and propped the gun up beside them.

"I know this is probably unfair for you…" Sam began.

"I'm used to it," Harry said automatically.

After all, he was used to it. Dean might have been a grumpy git, but Harry had six years' worth of experience with Malfoy. Not to mention Snape. Dean, though, seemed more irritated with the whole end-of-the-world thing than at Harry himself. Harry had to admit his attitude wasn't helping the situation either, as his patience had been wearing thin even before he died and his nerves seem to have been all but torn to shreds. He wasn't so much annoyed at Dean or Dean's attitude, at the moment, than he was frustrated at how much harder shooting a gun was than he wanted it to be.

"Listen, Harry, we've been trying to leave you alone the last few days. Y'know, give you time…"

Harry raised an eyebrow at him.

"Well," Sam shrugged apologetically, "as best we can. We haven't wanted to bug you about, y'know… Your last life. But, maybe you need to talk about it? I can't imagine you can just drop your… everything and pick up here like nothing happened."

Harry sighed, looking down at the ground. Sam was right, he couldn't. He wasn't. At most, he was using this universe as a distraction. He couldn't deny every night he would watch the Marauder's map, wondering where everyone was, how they were, if he could go back, if he should go back. They won; it would be stupid to try to go back to the forest right after he died. He could ruin everything. Besides, would he even have a choice? As he would watch the map, he noticed everything seemed to peck along at the same pace as this universe. If he spent, say, three years here before he figured out a way back, would that mean it would be three years in the future there as well? Was that universe just a decade behind this one?

"Harry, Voldemort killed you, right?" Sam asked, breaking his musings. Harry wasn't surprised that Sam remembered names and terms Harry had just thrown out there in his quick rehash to both Cas then them at Bobby's. Harry, though, didn't really answer him, and Sam got the hint pretty quickly.

Harry nodded to Sam's question now, though.

"Can you tell me why he was after you since you were a baby?" Sam asked hesitantly.

Harry was silent a moment, looking up at the stars, collecting his thoughts. He knew this was a major factor the brothers seemed to have latched onto. Harry knew most of the brothers' hushed arguments were about him and his trustworthiness. Not that he blamed them. He'd be wary of a stranger who bluntly told him a psycho had been hunting them their whole lives too.

"Tom Riddle was a lost child," he opened. "I've wondered over the years if he got just a little bit of affection, or some nurture here or there if he would have turned out different. But… He became
Dark as he grew up. Corrupted himself. Rose in power, determined to take over the wizarding world."

He paused, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes then clean the lens on his shirt.

When his glasses were back in place, he continued, "One of his followers, Death Eaters they're called, overheard a prophecy. Well, part of it. He didn't know all of it though. Voldemort just decided to kill whichever baby born at the end of July he thought would be who the prophecy was about. It was between me and my friend Neville." He stopped again to scratch his ear.

"Neville? The one you told to destroy the Horcrux before you died?"

Harry nodded again.

"And the others you mentioned before, Ron and Hermione? Were they all your friends? Who was Snape?"

Harry picked the ground with his shoe, pushing away images that threatened to pop up with Sam's words. He so wasn't ready for all of that.

Instead of answering, he said, "My mum, though. She sacrificed herself for me. Both my parents did, really, that night when I was a baby. The love it takes to do that, it cast its own magic, so when Voldemort tried to kill me, it bounced off me and hit him."

"What bounced?" Sam asked gently, though with a lot more curiosity back in his voice.

Harry spared him a glance. "The Killing Curse. *Avada Kedavra.*" He lifted up his hair to show Sam his scar. "It left this. Killed me last week though," he added, softly but bitterly. "Well," he amended, frowning to the ground, "third time's the charm, right? Second time didn't work either, but that had to do with our wands. Anyway, yeah," he shook his head, trying not to get too far off track. "The Killing Curse bounced off me and hit him instead, leaving a piece of his soul behind, which latched onto the only living thing left in the room - me."

"Turning you into a … Horcrux, right?"

Harry nodded. "It didn't kill him, of course, like most of the wizarding world wanted to believe."

Harry sighed again, this time heavy and long. "I was eleven when I met up with Voldemort again. Met his first Horcrux at twelve. When I was fourteen, he, well, kidnapped me, for lack of a better term. That's a long story. Anyway, he used some Dark Magic to restore his body." Harry gestured to himself, "Blood of the enemy was needed."

"He used your own blood?" Sam asked, sounding not horrified like Harry thought he would, but just a little sad.

Harry shrugged. "My mum's sacrifice didn't matter much after that." He realised that wasn't really an explanation since he was leaving out the whole Voldemort couldn't touch him before part, but he figured he could explain later if it was brought up again. "Anyway, it was all because of the prophecy."

That was explanation enough, after all, right? He figured it answered any immediate questions. His life… his old life, he reminded himself, seemed so convoluted and complicated to him, especially, somehow, in a world where no one flinched at Voldemort's name. Like he wouldn't be able to get them to understand.

"Jesus," Sam breathed. Harry could tell he wanted to say something, probably a million more
questions, but instead, after a few moments, he just asked, "Harry, how old are you exactly?"

Harry chuckled, looking back at Sam. "Technically, in this world, I would be thirty."

Sam blinked, and Harry could see the quick calculation in his eyes. "July… So, uh, you're seventeen?"

Harry nodded.

"And you said the other day you died in May, right? So, that would mean, basically, you'll be eighteen in a couple of months, even though it's almost November here."

"I suppose. Does it really matter?"

Sam shrugged, "I don't know." He considered Harry a moment, then added, "It doesn't sound like you had much of a childhood. Dean and I didn't either - not really. I keep waiting for it to get better."

He sighed this time, heavy and meaningfully. "Maybe adulthood will be better for you. Maybe… I don't know - if we pull this off, save the world, maybe you'll find some peace here."

Fred was yelling at him, yelling at him to grab Ginny and go, run, and he sounded an awful lot like Mr. Weasley. They were at the World Cup, but as he led his friends into the woods, it was suddenly the Forbidden Forest. Voldemort stood there, thin lips twisted into a disgusting grin, red eyes glinting in excitement.

"Come back for more, Harry?" he wheezed. "My, my, death suits you well…"

Harry jerked awake. He blinked rapidly for almost a full minute before his breathing calmed down. He wiped some sweat from his forehead, flopped onto his back, and began rubbing his right hand up and down his left side, slowly, counting the ribs he could feel there. It was a habit from his time on the run. Count his ribs, count what they had left to eat, count how many more days they could make it last…

If he closed his eyes and tried hard enough, he could almost smell the cold from the snow and the embers from their fire, almost hear the tent's slight flap in the wind, the light tinkling from one of the tent's small metal rings hitting against one of the poles that he could never find to make it stop. It was peaceful, now, almost meditative.

One of the Winchester brothers sucked in a grunting snore, pulling Harry back to the present. He turned on his side, facing out into the room. Sam was huddled underneath his blankets; whereas, Dean was sprawled out, blankets tangled around his legs, one foot off the bed. This motel room had a couch, which was what Harry was sleeping on. (Even if it didn't, they still would have gotten just a two-bed room as Harry could transfigure his own.)

'But, maybe you need to talk about it?' Sam's phantom voice played in his head as he watched the sleeping brothers.

This was his eighth day here. Eight days. Officially over a week since he died.

For some reason, that time marker solidified things for him. He hadn't really let himself think about it awfully much. He kept telling himself, I will find a way back; It doesn't matter, I'm going back to my world; Don't worry about that, worry about finding a way back. So matter-of-fact, simple as that, over and done with.
Apparently, that delusion only had a week-long shelf life.

He huffed quietly and turned around, his back to the room, hand softly rubbing his ribs again.

A week of relative rest and three-square meals a day had done him some good. It reminded him a little about the effects of having shelter at the Shell Cottage. Unfortunately, the events after they left the cottage seemed to have undone all the good it did.

Battle. Harry had begun to feel a little silly using that word, but there wasn’t any other word appropriate for what it was. It made him feel a bit like a fraud, though, or at least the way Dean looked at him sometimes did, with that little worried expression that would turn into a scowl if caught. Battle made it sound like he was a warrior, a soldier, someone who should be fit, strong. Like, well, the Winchesters, who were broad with muscles that could be seen even through layers of clothing.

He wasn’t though. A year of barely eating and on the run had its toll. After he had gotten out of the shower at Bobby’s the first time and really studied his reflection, he kind of reminded himself of Sirius when Sirius was on the run. He was thin, pale to the point of almost being grey, and his face was a little sunken in. He had some muscle – by-product of Hermione making sure they stayed as fit as they could, though he was mostly lean as they mainly stretched for exercise because any cardio or the like would have burned too many calories that their food supply couldn’t replace.

Now that he really thought about it, the energy he had to do all the running and fighting he did in his last days was from mostly adrenaline. No wonder he slept so much after he arrived here.

He was no closer to finding out how he got here than he was a why – because the longer he was here, the less he felt like he was needed. He was needed there, with his loved ones. He tried his best not to think about the others who had died. Were they given an option too? Or was this actually the afterlife, like a type of reincarnation. If he searched this earth hard enough, would he find Fred? Sirius? His parents?

If he killed himself here, would he return to the great King's Cross in the sky and be able to take a train back to Hogwarts?

Next great adventure, his arse.

He felt his eyes sting a little, and he let two, maybe three, tears fall before he roughly swallowed and gulped down his emotions.

He never realised it before, but he had always thought of death as simply a reunion with his parents. This though? He was the one who died, but it was like he was the one who lost everyone, including the people he already lost once, while everyone else was still together in a way. The only thing he was reunited with was war. A seemingly hopeless hunt for objects that could stop an evil takeover.

Mr. Weasley had stopped by Hogwarts, he saw earlier. He had met with McGonagall and walked the grounds with a few people whose names Harry didn’t know. It looked like they were assessing damages. He wanted to find a way to contact him, all of them, ask them for help in finding a way home. He wanted to have faith they were doing that already – like they knew he didn’t die, not really. He could feel his heart beating. He was breathing. He was alive, yet he was mourning his own death.

He rubbed his eyes again, twisting around on his back to stare at the ceiling.

“We haven’t wanted to bug you about, y’know…” Sam’s voice echoed in his head again.
That bit was true. While at Bobby's, the three of them left him alone unless to talk about the problems here or to ask the occasional question about his magic. Sam seemed to trust him. Sam kind of reminded him of a gentler Hermione, or a more grounded - much more grounded - Luna. He was respectful and accepting, thoughtful, but not without a critical eye. He was curious, and Harry could tell he had a million questions for Harry. A sad ping hit his heart, and he smiled a little to himself, thinking of the Hogwarts Houses. Sam would be either a Ravenclaw or Gryffindor.

Sam was pretty easy for Harry to read, but Harry knew it was because Sam was allowing it. Watching him the day before with the townspeople, like Paul or Pastor David, Sam was much more guarded, only letting them see what he wanted and never showing his hand.

The brothers and Bobby had that in common, he noticed.

Bobby was the second easiest to read (or second hardest, whichever way one looked at it). He was a duality, that was for sure. It reminded him a bit of McGonagall who was always so strict and no-nonsense, until you got to know her and could tell, even though her outside demeanour didn't change, when she was joking, found something amusing, was actually being supportive and encouraging while handing out detention. He thought of McGonagall having his back when discussing career options with Umbridge… How was McGonagall handling his death? He knew she cared, but he didn't much see her as one to lose her composure over him.

Harry shook his head to push away those thoughts. That wasn't what he was thinking about. He was thinking about Bobby.

Bobby's house was cozy in its own way, much like the Burrow, he realised. He had heard the Winchesters talk about Bobby's 'supernatural panic room' down in his basement, but Harry had restricted himself to the first floor and a guest room on the second floor. He smiled a little thinking about all the different phones in Bobby's kitchen, each labelled with a different legal branch of the US. He had the happy opportunity the second day there of witnessing Bobby play an FBI agent on one of the phones, confirming the 'assignment' of a couple of hunters, or so those who fought the supernatural called themselves. The authority in his voice was amusing within the scenery, calling himself a Special Agent while tipping his battered ball cap to scratch at the top of his head. Bobby had noticed Harry grinning at him, picked up a salt shaker on the table, and threw it at Harry.

Yes, Bobby was a duality. He seemed rude, crude, and rough. Well, he didn't seem anything, he was rude, crude, and rough. 'Idjit' was what he called them. The first time he called Harry that, it sounded like an insult, and Harry was almost properly offended by the strange term. When Bobby called Sam and Dean that, however, Harry could hear the fondness in his voice. It wasn't there when addressing Harry, mind, but it was clear how much affection Bobby had for the brothers.

A bit of that affection was extended to Harry, though, he noticed. It probably would have been for anyone at his age and in his circumstance. Bobby, in his rough, assertive manner, would demand Harry to 'quit that readin' 'n hit the sack,' or to get himself a 'second helpin' 'cos I ain't puttin' up with no leftovers.' Harry didn't quite know what to make of it if he was honest. It was paternal, though, so he accepted it. He had Bobby pegged as either a Gryffindor or Hufflepuff.

Though Bobby presented himself as someone 'backwood' or whatever the term was, he wasn't the stereotype, though he doubted Bobby would want to hear it. Bobby was smart, both in intelligence and all-around common sense. He liked his drink, though, Harry noticed, which might be 'backwood' stereotypical, and Harry found it fascinating someone could hold onto so much cognitive function after just one glass of his stash. He had given Harry a small drink his first night, and Merlin. Firewhiskey had nothing on Bobby's brew.

Dean liked it, he noticed. Dean also liked his drink and was also skilled at holding up cognitive
functions despite what number glass he was on.

Dean… Dean was the hardest to read, and by far the most infuriating. He wasn't so much a duality as he was a mystery. He could simultaneously make Harry feel like a moron and a waste of his time while making sure Harry had enough to eat and enough bedding for the night. Harry would think Sam would have more reason to act the way Dean did, what with Sam being Lucifer's vessel. Though, Dean did spend time in Hell. Neither brother talked about that outside of what they already told him. Sam was more willing to talk about his side of things, but not Dean's. Dean was barely willing to talk at all.

Harry wondered how much effort it really took the older Winchester to clue Harry in on as much as they did that first day at Bobby's. It was the most honest he had been, and the most opened.

Harry huffed again, throwing a glare at the sleeping Winchester as he sat up, sitting cross-legged and hugging his pillow. He wasn't in the habit of hugging pillows, but it was something Hermione did a lot while they were on the run, and he felt the need to be connected to someone in his… old life.

He looked around the dark room. The sun would be up within the next hour or so, and he knew the Winchesters would probably be up sooner.

Harry's sleep was becoming sporadic. He couldn't get on a good schedule. Sleeping felt… different, somehow, here. Though, he could admit it might be because of the lack of being a Horcrux. Sleep felt more restful now and his dreams didn't feel as significant. For once, sleep and his dreams truly felt like something connected to him and his emotions, nothing else, and Harry wasn't sorry to get rid of Voldemort's influence over it.

Even if he still had dreams of Voldemort.

His magic was different here, too, he had noticed. The spells came much, much easier, and he could do a lot more wordless magic than he ever could before. He even tested some wandless magic as well, and that came easier. He suspected it had to do with his magic being the only one of its kind here. It had a lot more room to work in.

He fleetingly thought about the *Reduко* he sent that watermelon. Did he really put more power behind it than he intended, or was he simply more powerful here? If he was more powerful, what did it say about the demons, then, who reacted the same as humans did when he used those spells on them? Of course, he hadn't tested his magic out on the humans here much.

So, he got up and started his eighth day here.

By the time he was out of the shower and dressed, the Winchesters were waking up, not really paying him any attention, though Dean did frown at him like he didn't like Harry was already up and not gotten more sleep. Or, that Harry was awake while they slept and were vulnerable. With Dean, he was learning, it could go either way.

…”

Most of the town was still asleep, and the fake fog was in full force. Not even birds could be heard in the early morning, which just made the eerie feeling of the town increase. Harry shivered a little.
Whatever was doing this was doing a damn good job.

Pastor David, Paul, Rob, and Rob's wife Jane and his son Dylan were already waiting inside the church. Sam, Dean, and Harry had taken a side door shown to them the day before and went to the weapon-assembly-line room. At the front of the room was an encompassed stage that was undoubtedly used for small productions before the end times, as they were calling it, and that was where the others were standing. A table was centre stage with a map flung over it.

"About time," Rob grumbled.

"Sorry," Dean quipped. "Needed my mornin' coffee."

"Now that we're all here," Pastor David intervened before any more could be said as the three of them joined the others on the stage, "let's get to it. The house is here," he pointed to a place on the map. "There's a back road here," he pointed, "that can get us close enough to walk the last mile on foot and come up to the house through these woods," Pastor David pointed one last time. "There's enough of us to divide into teams to surround the house and infiltrate."

"Ballpark, how many demons are there, again?" Dean asked.

"Leah couldn't get an exact number," Pastor David answered. "But there's plenty. We need to be ready."

"What do we got?" Sam asked.

"We have five shotguns, thirty salt rounds, and the holy water pack."

"Holy water pack?" Harry asked.

Jane smiled at him and pointed off to her side where he saw what could have been a muggle pest-exterminator gallon backpack with spray. It actually reminded him of one of Dudley's favourite American movies.

Without being able to stop himself, he said, "Demonbusters, then?"

Dean and Sam snorted, and the boy Dylan laughed. Jane herself looked amused, and she said, "Pretty much. It has a long range and full of holy water."

"Smart," Sam said. "We have three shotguns of our own, about twenty salt rounds, and this," he pulled the knife Dean was sharpening the night before out of its holsters. "It's a knife that will kill demons."

"Really?" Paul asked, clearly interested.

"One of a kind," Dean answered, leaving no room for arguments or further questions on the subject.

The others exchanged glances, but before Harry could read too much into it, he caught eyes with Dylan next to him. Dylan smiled at him and whispered, "You any good with a shotgun?"

"Honestly? I'm better with, er, smaller weapons."

"I've been working on a way to make salt-bullets," Dylan said, a spark in his eye. "I think I'm almost there."

"That would be great," Harry said, and though he could tell Dylan and he were around the same age, he felt like he was appeasing a younger child. "Easier on my shoulder."
"How do we want to divide?" Pastor David asked, getting their attention.

"Dylan and Jane with me," Rob said immediately.

"Rob," Jane hissed at the same time Dylan said, "You said I could team with someone else!"

"Who do you want to team with?" Paul asked diplomatically.

Dylan looked around then pointed to the Winchesters, "One of them."

"Now, hold on -" Rob started.

"I think that's a great idea," Pastor David cut in.

"I agree," Paul added, and Harry had a feeling this 'mission' was a type of coming-of-age thing for Dylan.

"I'll take him," Dean said, and Harry didn't miss the tension stiffened in his shoulders, like he was agreeing to watch over a new charge instead of just teaming with the kid. "He and I can take the back after the rest of you go in."

Harry noticed Rob relaxing a little, and he wondered what in Merlin's name he just missed.

"Good," Rob agreed. "Jane, you can be with me and Dave."

"Harry," Sam suddenly cut in, "how about you, me, and Paul be a team?"

Harry opened his mouth to… to what? Agree? Disagree? He wasn't sure about any of the… battle formations they were making, which of course made him feel worse about saying he'd been through battle. Regardless, it seemed Sam and Paul were the last two left, so he closed his mouth and shrugged.

"We can take the front," Paul said as a way of agreeing to the team.

"Then we'll take the side entrance," Pastor David agreed, and soon they were packing up and leaving.

The others piled into the red truck while Harry and the Winchesters took the brothers' car. They were quiet as they followed the locals to a dirt road, then Dean spoke up, looking at Harry via the rearview mirror, "So, Harry… Prophecy, huh?"

When the bloody hell did the brothers have time to talk to each other? "Yeah. Prophecy."

"What did it say?"

Harry sighed and looked out the window. "Basically, that the one who has the power to defeat the Dark Lord would be born as the seventh month dies. That he would have power the Dark Lord knows not, and that neither could live while the other survives."

"Oh, well," Dean huffed. "As long as it rhymed."

"Do you know what power it was talking about?" Sam asked, turning a little in his seat. There was some underlying hopefulness in his voice.

Harry took a moment to answer, then said, "Love, I think."
They were silent a beat, then Dean said flatly, "Love."

"You mean your mother?" Sam asked. "You said last night that her sacrifice saved you."

Harry shrugged. "Can we focus on this world, please? My last round with demons didn't go so well."

The brothers exchanged a look, then Dean said, "How's the shoulder?"

Harry rotated it a little and said, "Fine."

"Try relaxing it when you shoot," Dean suggested. "Let your shoulder go back with the kickback instead of pushing against it."

"Alright."

"Try to keep between me and Paul," Sam added. "Your height might be an advantage here. They might not see you at first."

Dean snorted and shot a grin at Sam. "Yeah, just hide behind this giant."

It was truly incredible how a small shift in Dean's mood could change the atmosphere. Harry hadn't met anyone like that before. Luna had an effect on the air around her, of course, and so did Sirius when he smiled. This was different though. Harry relaxed a little at the grin despite himself.

They parked by a cluster of outbuildings that looked to be a part of an abandoned farm. As the others got out and armed themselves, Dean motioned for Harry to meet him by the car's trunk and opened it.

"Okay, where's your stick?" Dean asked.

"My wand," Harry answered, "is in my pocket."

Dean frowned a moment then said, "Maybe we should get a holster for it or something. Well, keep it accessible, just in case. Here." He pulled out two knife holsters already holding knives and helped him clip one to his belt and wrap the other around his ankle. He then handed over one of the handguns Harry practiced on the night before, made Harry show him he remembered how to turn the safety on and off and check the clip, then handed over a shotgun with extra salt rounds once the handgun was tucked away in his waistband.

"Thanks," Harry said.

Dean nodded. "Keep close to Sam and don't take any unnecessary risks. Remember how to hold your weight?"

Harry nodded, wondering where this instructor side was the night before instead of the grumpy git that got a rouse out of him over sodding floss.

Dean quickly showed him a couple more positions with the shotgun then had Harry lead the way back to the others.

It was… strange, Harry thought, as their group began creeping toward the farmhouse. The wizardry defence stance was to stand tall, shoulders back, to be watchful and ready to move while keeping one's arms open and free for wand movements. Now, he was hunched over, holding a shotgun which was uncomfortably heavy for stealth movements, and he didn't like that because of it, he had
to move almost full-body to look around rather than just turning his head, in order to keep the weapon poised for fire.

He felt like he couldn't properly have someone's back because of it. He made sure his left hand was holding the shotgun more tightly than the brothers' showed him, so he could keep it up and aimed if he had to go for his wand.

He followed Sam and Paul toward the porch as they all divided. Sam, whose main weapon was the demon-killing knife, took the lead. He tried to open the door, but it was locked. Without pause, Sam crouched down, pulling out little pieces of metal which Harry recognised as a lock picking set, and got to work.

Harry caught Paul's eye, and they both dutifully took positions on either side of Sam, watchful.

A loud shotgun sound from the back of the house made Harry jump. Paul turned to the side, but before anything else could be done, the window behind Paul burst as someone wrapped arms around Paul, pulling him inside.

Sam swore, standing to probably kick down the door, but Harry was quicker, already having his wand out. He soundlessly unlocked and flew open the door with one swoosh and rushed in. Paul had gotten out of the demon's arms but was now being choked.

Harry aimed with the shotgun, wand still loosely in his hand as he curled his index finger around the trigger, but this time Sam was faster, pushing past him and stabbing the demon as several more shots could be heard around the house.

Harry was briefly distracted by the orange glow that flickered throughout the demon's veins as it died, having not gotten a proper look the last time they were fighting demons, but two more were rushing toward them for him to really focus on it. Harry turned, aimed with the shotgun, and fired. It hit square in one demon's chest, pushing it back. Sam had stepped up, slicing the knife through the other's throat.

A loud bang from the room over had Harry turning again. Rob, Pastor David, and Jane were pushing their way in through some French doors from what looked to be a sitting room, Jane spraying holy water at a demon that was waiting there for them as Rob covered her.

Harry sidestepped another demon that came rushing into the room. Paul shot it, and Harry followed Sam out into a hallway. Sam stabbed a demon that ran into him, most likely running away from Rob and Jane, but another was coming up from his side, nowhere clear enough for Harry to feel like he could hit it. He looked over his shoulder, seeing Paul was still busy, then aimed his wand instead.

"Flipendo!"

The demon was knocked back enough for Harry to get a clear shot. Sam, though, had a better angle and stabbed it before Harry could take it.

At the same time, a door down the hallway toward the back burst open with another shot, a demon flying through it and hitting the opposite wall.

Dean stepped through after it. Harry was momentarily frozen. Dean was… Well, Dean was a soldier, wasn't he? And clearly in his element. It was, frankly, incredible to see.

Harry only had a moment to admire him, though. Sam had stepped into the next room, and Harry saw in the corner of his eye being cornered by three demons.
Pointing his wand without hesitation, Harry cast, "Immobulus," at one, freezing it, then lifted up the gun and shot at the second, which hit, and Sam stabbed the third.

Harry felt Dean's eyes on him as he stepped over a body and into the room while Sam stabbed the demon frozen by Harry's spell, and he just hoped Dean wouldn't get onto him later for using both his wand and gun.

Of course, they didn't know it was the Elder Wand. The supposedly undefeatable wand. He wasn't quite sure he should share that yet. The Winchesters weren't the only ones being cautious in their new alliance, after all.

Guns were still going off, but now Harry could hear some of the others chanting Leah's exorcism spell. Paul had caught up with them in time for a demon to jump through one of the windows, heading straight at Harry. Paul shot it while Harry quickly tried to reload.

Sam cried out, making Harry whip around. A demon had him down on the floor, struggling against the knife.

Paul was busy chanting, so Harry dropped the stupid muggle weapon, pointed his wand at Sam, and yelled, "Impervius!" just as the demon should have pushed the blade into Sam's chest. Sam and the demon stopped dead, staring as the knife was repelled.

"Sam!" Harry called, quickly pocketing his wand as Paul looked over. Sam seemed to recover, understanding dawning on him. He took the opening of the demon's confusion and stabbed it as Harry picked back up the shotgun, reloading.

Sam pushed the demon off him, then paused again. Harry tried to hurry over to see what made Sam's eyes widen, but he barely got a step before Sam was throwing the knife from where he sat.

Harry ran over and looked. Dean was there at the foot of the stairs, having obviously hit a demon in the face with the butt of his gun, and there was another demon behind him with the knife now in its back, falling over. Dean looked over at the falling demon, grabbed the knife from its back without question, then stabbed the demon in front of him on the stairs.

Sam was beside Harry instantly, snatching the shotgun out of Harry's hands, and heading over to Dean with it raised. Paul and Harry joined them when Rob and Pastor David did from the room across the way.

It was eerily silent then.

"Is that all of them?" Paul asked.

"Let's check it out," Dean answered, stepping over the fallen bodies on the stairs and heading up. Sam and Harry followed, the others seeming to be content with letting them clear the upper level. Sam wasn't giving him the shotgun back, so as soon as he was out of sight of the muggles downstairs, he pulled his wand out.

"So, uh," Sam whispered toward Harry as they entered an empty bedroom, "was that you, Harry? Down there?"

"Yeah," Harry answered, peeking into an adjoined washroom. He figured he was talking about the thing with the knife.

"What was Harry?" Dean asked, leading them back into the hallway.
"The demon down there, it should have stabbed me."

"What?" Dean asked, glancing at Sam up and down before he looked into another washroom.

"It was just an Impervius," Harry said, clearing the second bedroom with no loo and an open closet.

"What's that?" both brothers asked.

With the upstairs cleared, if Sam's satisfied glance into the last room was anything to go by, Harry turned to face them. "Impervius Charms repel things. It made Sam's chest repel the knife."

The brothers blinked at him, then Dean frowned, "Is it permanent?"

Harry smiled a little. "No, it was just for that instant. It's a rather mild spell and isn't defensive magic of any kind. If the demon had any velocity, it wouldn't have done anything." He shrugged. "But it was the subtlest thing I could think of."

Dean then looked him up and down. "Good job."

"Yeah, thanks, Harry," Sam clapped him on his shoulder.

They went back downstairs. Harry helped Pastor David check all the bodies and shared a loaded look with him when they didn't find any of the hosts alive. Sam and Dean's lecture about living hosts seemed to not matter in combat.

He hung at the back of the group as they walked back to their vehicles. Sam made a comment about what it was like to have backup, which made it sound like they weren't used to it.

It was odd, watching these muggles. Harry got the feeling that Rob and Paul didn't like nor trust each other, yet, they trusted each other enough to throw themselves into a life or death situation. It was a lot like how Sam and Dean treated him. It wasn't a true partnership among them, just a makeshift team joining together against another force. It was a tentative thing - nothing like the team he, Ron, and Hermione made, even back in first year going after the Philosopher's Stone. Harry didn't exactly have experience actively fighting with people he didn't implicitly trust, but here… It saddened him a little because here, it was like the muggles didn't have that privilege against the angels and demons.

Dylan, however, he noticed with a bit of amusement, was flying. He looked proud of himself and seemed widely untouched by war. Or Armageddon. Whatever. He still had the innocence and excitement boys his age should have.

Boys their age, Harry thought.

When they were back to their cars, loading up their weapons, Dylan jogged up to them. "Dean! Harry! Sam!"

"Yo," Dean greeted, shutting the trunk.

"Hey. So, um, is - is that cool if I get a ride back with you guys?"

The others' truck was already running, Rob in the driver's seat and watching them. Dean waved in assent, and Rob gave them a brief smile and nod as he began to pull away.

"Hey, you saved my ass twice today," Dean said. "One more time, you can drive. You have a beer?" he then asked Sam who was standing by the backseat's cooler, already opening it. Harry was on the other side of the car by Dylan.
Sam tossed a beer to Dean then gave Harry a questioning look, clearing asking if Harry wanted one. Harry shook his head. He watched with interest as Dean carefully peeked over his shoulder to make sure the truck was out of sight.

Once it was, Dean turned back to Dylan, tossing over the beer. "Hey. You earned it. Don't tell your mom."

Dylan grinned then said, "Oh, believe me, I will not."

He turned to lean against the car, opening the can victoriously with an air of a rebel, and Harry couldn't help but lean next to him, smiling. "I'm guessing it was a big day for you."

Dylan shrugged, taking a sip. "Not really," he answered, though Harry could tell it was. "It was easier without Dad breathing down my neck."

Harry nodded, though he couldn't actually relate. He opened his mouth to ask how often Dylan went on these runs.

He didn't get the chance.

A hand wrapped around his ankle and yanked, causing him to fall to his knees. Dylan had fallen with him, and though Harry was able to grab onto the car to keep from being pulled underneath, Dylan slipped under without much fight, crying out.

"Dylan!" Harry called, kicking out at whatever had him. It let go, and Harry pulled out enough to go for his wand. Dean was there then, throwing himself down and trying to pull Dylan out. Harry could hear Sam on the other side, struggling with something.

Harry peeked underneath to see Sam stabbing a missed demon. When he looked back over, Dean was calling out Dylan's name as he tugged a limp body out from underneath the car.

Dylan's eyes were open and empty, and his throat was bleeding.

Sam ran over to their side, and the three of them blinked at the open wound for a moment. Dean grunted out a, "No," and then Harry was scrambling over.

"No, no, no," Harry whispered, knocking Dean's hand away and pulling Dylan's shirt collar out of the way of the bleeding himself.

Several images flashed through his mind's eye: his bleeding arm in the graveyard, George's head bleeding from his missing ear, Hermione bleeding on Malfoy Manor's floor, Snape bleeding out - then Malfoy bleeding out. Snape saving Malfoy.

"Vulnera Sanentur," Harry began to chant, pointing his wand over the wound gushing out blood. "Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur."

Slowly the bleeding stopped and began to retract.

"Holy shit," Dean breathed.

Harry noticed Sam checking Dylan's pulse point, but he didn't stop. "Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur."

"Harry," came Sam's calm voice. "Harry, stop. He's already gone."

"Vulnera Sanentur. Vulnera Sanentur."
"Harry, stop," Sam tried again, roughly pulling Harry away.

The wound was mostly closed. With his chanting stopped, however, the wound began to bleed again, only this time through a much smaller gash.

"He's gone," Sam said, hands bracing Harry's shoulders, trying to get him to look over. "If you heal his wound, we won't be able to explain it."

Harry was blinking at Dylan's neck, fast and hard. Logically, he knew Sam was right, but his heart was still pounding against his ribcage, telling him to fight, to do something.

"Is he... is he really dead?" Harry had to confirm.

"Yeah, Harry. He's really dead. Check for yourself."

Harry slowly reached out, about to touch and feel for a pulse, but he stopped and quickly pulled his hand back. He shook his head, pointed his wand instead, and said, "Pulsus Exemplum."

Nothing. His wand didn't pulse in time with Dylan's, meaning, there was no pulse to sync with.

Harry collapsed down to fully sit the ground, dropping his wand and shoving his hands in his hair. He curled his knees to his chest, resting his forehead on them.

"We have to call the others back," Dean announced.

Sam moved away, and a moment later, he was speaking into the radio the others had given them to communicate while they were out there. Meanwhile, a warm hand rested on Harry's shoulder, shaking him a little and trying to get his attention.

Harry shook his head.

"Hey," came Dean's voice. "Hey, come on, freak out later. We gotta take care of this."

"There's nothing to take care of," Harry snapped. "He's dead."

"There's his parents," Dean replied roughly. "Y'know, the ones we're calling back here, who just saw their son alive five fucking minutes ago."

Harry swallowed, tensing up.

"Yeah," Dean said to Harry's reaction. "So pull it together."

Harry nodded, and Dean left him to breathe steadily for a few moments before standing, pocketing his wand, and avoiding looking at Dylan's body while they waited for the red truck to return.

Dylan's death weighed heavily on them, but Harry knew it was for different reasons.

For Sam, it was another innocent lost. He returned back to the motel room and threw himself into research, demanding Harry explain everything he could about the fog, what he made of the demons, anything. Sam called Bobby, having Bobby double check what he could find about Leah's exorcism, and left a couple more messages for Cas, who seemed to have disappeared. Though, Harry did learn Cas' full name was Castiel.

For Dean, he felt responsible. Harry was right, this morning's demon run was a bit of a coming-of-
age thing for Dylan, being trusted enough to strike out on his own. From what Harry could tell, by
Dean agreeing to team up with Dylan, he was giving his parents a promise that he would protect
him. "Kid was good," Dean kept saying. "He knew what he was doing. I shouldn't have let my
guard down."

For Harry, it was the blood.

From the moment he forced himself to stand up straight and face Dylan's parents, his head started
pounding. He felt a little weak and shaken. The demons bled, sure, especially the one Sam got in the
throat, but it was different from Dylan's throat bleeding.

He wasn't just another dead body. He was another person Harry fought alongside with.

With the condensing fog throughout the town, Harry almost expected to see thestrals flying around to
mark the occasion: the first death Harry really witnessed in this world.

Eventually, being locked up in a room alone with Sam while Dean was out hitting the bar got to be
too much. He decided to take a walk, possibly find some place to hide away. He was going to bring
his map, but Sam stopped him, looking wary. "Maybe… you should just clear your head first."

Not having any fight in him, and annoyed that he had either been caught watching it every night or
showed himself too affected by it that first night, he let Sam pull it from his hands and left.

Harry walked the town, staying around its edges, every now and then casting more charms and spells
to see if he could find the source of the fog. He couldn't.

He didn't know why he was more unsettled by today than he had been the whole week he had been
in this universe, and not just because of Dylan's death. Maybe because he had started to relax some.
He was able to adapt and jump right in when he first arrived. He didn't have much choice, and that
was what one did in war. In battle. Adapt. Go with it. Take rest where you can, learn what you can,
and be ready for anything.

He wasn't ready though.

Merlin, he wasn't ready for any of it. His heart ached. He wanted his godfather. He wanted his
friends. He wanted Remus. He wanted to engulf himself in the warmth and smell of the Burrow,
have Mrs. Weasley fuss over him, let her wrap him in a blanket with her motherly cooing, set a bowl
of hot stew in front of him, and tell him to just eat up and worry about everything else tomorrow.

He really wanted Hermione. Though Ron leaving them in the forest was hurtful and heart-breaking,
he and Hermione became really close while Ron was gone. She became quite the big confidant,
really, with her preferring him to talk more about himself than anything else. Harry thought she didn't
really want to think about Ron or everything they hadn't accomplished yet, but he also knew that by
that time, she had come to terms that Harry would probably end up facing Voldemort alone, and she
wanted him to be as prepared as possible, including mentally.

He told her things he never told anyone.

He told her all about the Dursleys, all the abuse and neglect. He told her all about the guilt he always
carried, his fear, his anger. He told her about his growing suspicions of Dumbledore not being all
they used to think he was, possibly even using Harry the entire time. Hell, she even helped him
realise that he, though bisexual, really did prefer men.

He snorted a little to himself, thinking of that night, huddled together by a fire, and Hermione
laughing at him.
“What?” he demanded, though without any heat.

“It makes so much more sense now!” she laughed.

“Hermione, what?” he threw a stick at her.

“I’m sorry, it’s just… Cho and Ginny are pretty flat chested, Harry.”

“So?!”

“So nothing,” she smiled. “It just… oh, it makes so much more sense now.”

“What does?” he demanded again.

“Malfoy, Harry! And Cedric. God, even Bill, too, right?”

Harry threw more sticks and leaves at her.

Harry shook his head, then slowly the slight smile he had at the memory slipped. He closed his eyes, swallowed the lump in his throat, and began to make his way back to the motel. Hermione wasn’t here. No one was here for him to talk to.

He would find a way home. He would.

... 

As he approached the motel, he noticed the Winchesters’ car back in the lot. He frowned at it a little, wondering why they didn’t have a more modern car. It was several decades old and rather loud, hardly a good enough vehicle for stealth. He had the feeling, though, that if he wanted to ask, Sam would probably be the best one to approach. Dean was a little weird about the car.

When he got to the door, he had the keycard out to let himself in but stopped at the voices inside. The brothers reminded him of Fred and George in a way, the way they seemed to have their own communication system, able to have almost telepathic conversations. It made him think of how rare it was to stumble upon a conversation the twins were having where they were actually using their words, which made him think of Extendable Ears, naturally. What he wouldn’t do to have a pair… Instead, he pocketed the keycard, pressed himself against the wall by the door, and quietly cast a volume spell, slowly turning it up until he could hear clearly.

"- coincidence he popped up right when God told us to stop looking for him," came Sam’s voice.

Harry frowned, immediately confused. He recalled Dean calling God a ‘douche’ a few times, but he assumed it was more of a God-hates-us-all sarcastic type of deal. Not that God was real in an compacity.

"You aren't seriously trying to suggest Harry's God?" Dean barked back.

"No, I -" Sam sounded frustrated. "I'm saying, maybe God sent him here. I mean, Cas said himself, to die and be sent to another universe is unheard of. He said - he said there were some stories of people crossing universes, but he didn't think it was possible or real. I mean… Dean, Cas said this wasn't an accident. You can't accidentally throw yourself here."

"Yeah, and he also said it probably meant that if Harry did, he's this big, powerful being. I'm sorry, Sam, but I haven't seen anything big and powerful. I mean, he can do cool stuff, yeah, and I'm glad you're alive, but -"
"But we haven't seen it all, Dean! You're right, he doesn't seem to be like a -... I don't know, archangel or something, but we've seen him do some pretty impressive stuff so far."

"Stealing our shit ain't impressive."

"That fire-blasting thing, Dean, with the demons? Disappearing like Cas does? What he did with Dylan today? If he wasn't already dead, Harry would have saved him."

Harry's heart clenched.

"Yeah, and Cas can do all of that. Cas could have brought Dylan back!" Dean snapped, but he sounded disappointed, instead of angry. "Look, Sam..." Dean sighed. "Harry's good, okay? Real good. I saw him today, using his stick-mojo with the shotgun -"

"Me too," Sam interrupted firmly. "He used a spell to push a demon back, like our salt rounds do. He also flung open a locked door with just a wave of his wand, and, let's not forget the saving my life with something he called a mild spell."

"Yeah, something he said shouldn't have worked -"

"Something he said wouldn't have worked if the demon had velocity, Dean. That makes it more impressive. We were struggling with the knife, it couldn't have been easy to aim."

There was a pause, then Dean said, with more authority than before, "I know, Sam. Like I said, he's good. He knows what he's doing. But Sam... don't you see?"

Another pause. "See what?"

"He's human, man." Yet another pause, then Dean continued. "Harry's human, Sam, and he's almost broken. You saw how he looked when he landed earth-side. And today? After Dylan died? The whole prophecy thing, fighting his whole life - you said yourself he faced that Voldy-dude when he was eleven, Sam! He can fight, I ain't saying he can't - he can fight with the rest of us. Hell, he was one of the best out there today. But he's human, and there's only so much fighting a human's got in 'em."

Harry almost wanted to end his spell and stop listening, but instead, he closed his eyes and leaned his head against the brick wall, the chill from the fog making his skin tingle.

"That's what I was saying, too, Dean," came Sam's voice with gentle conviction. "He is human, but with incredible power. Think of everything we've come across. Hell, think of me! I can be powerful, too, but only if I become less human."

Harry heard a chair scrape against the linoleum of their kitchenette, some movement, then a bottle cap being flicked opened and falling into what sounded like the sink - where Harry knew other bottle caps to be.

"What are you gettin' at, Sam?" Dean asked from a different place than earlier, clearly the one who got up and got a beer.

"I don't know," Sam sighed. "It's just... Harry didn't put himself here, and he didn't accidentally end up here. He came to us, Dean. Joshua said God didn't think the apocalypse was his problem and to stop looking for him, but then Harry shows up as soon as he sends us back? You can't overlook that. And Harry can do things no human here can - not while remaining pure and uncorrupted, anyway. So, he's been through a lot? We have too -"
Harry abruptly ended the spell as he saw movement in the corner of his eye. He pushed his wand up his sleeve and turned.

Paul was standing there on the sidewalk, staring at Harry. Harry looked toward the town's square where he knew the bar to be and immediately summed up that Paul was most likely walking home. He looked back at Paul, who raised a hand in a small wave. Harry, feeling awkward having been caught just leaning there, waved back and tentatively walked over to Paul when he made no move to continue on his way.

"You alright?" Paul asked as he got close enough.

Harry nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets. He let his wand slip from inside his sleeve to inside his pocket as he crossed the last few feet to Paul. "You?"

Paul shrugged. "Dylan was a good kid."

"You're a good kid too."

Harry swallowed, looking down. "Yeah."

"Harry," he corrected.

"Harry," Paul nodded. "Dave said those boys," he jutted his chin toward their motel room, "found you a few towns back?"

Harry nodded, not elaborating on the lie.

"Lose people?" Paul asked.

Harry paused, then answered, "I lost everyone."

Paul closed his eyes, like it pained him to hear it, then looked back at him. There was sadness in his gaze, but also pure empathy "Y'know, they say we don't actually lose people… Bullshit, I say. We lose them. The trick is not to lose ourselves with them."

Harry gulped. "What do you mean?"

Paul sighed, looking around like he was trying to find the right words. "I think it's a philosophy thing. We don't lose the people we love because the parts of us that were influenced by them are still there or some shit. I don't know about all that, but…" He looked back at Harry. "All I know is, just because they're gone doesn't mean we are. This whole," he waved his hand, "apocalypse thing. I don't know what death is, but if there's an apocalypse, then it's more than just… stopping to exist. Which means, if we die, we aren't dead. So, if they die, they aren't dead. Just… gone."

Harry couldn't stop the bitter laugh that pushed out of him. "I don't know if that's better or worse."

Paul smiled sadly. "Me either."

They shook hands, bidding each other a goodnight, and Harry went back to the motel, this time not stopping to listen. It seemed the brothers were finished talking anyway. Dean was on the bed, drinking a beer and flipping through the telly, and Sam was on his laptop, continuing his research.
Harry ignored them both and went straight to the loo. He took a hot shower, sitting in the tub with his knees to his chest letting the stream hit him like rain.

Dean had said he was almost broken. Paul had, to Harry's experience, correctly guessed what death was. Sam thought him being human, but a wizard was some God-sent key to their problems. A God that was apparently real and told the brothers he didn't care about what was happening and to leave him alone. A God that might have sent him here.

He found himself, probably the Gryffindor in him, making a resolve.

Nothing so far had broken him. Death could take its best shot.

... 

Dylan's funeral was to be the very next day.

Harry woke up before the brothers, dressed, and left for a patch of woods that he was starting to think of as his own. There he set up security wards he was all too practised with now, making sure no muggles would stumble onto him, as well as keeping away the fog. From there, he practised and reviewed almost every damn spell, charm, and curse he knew.

They all flowed so easily.

He practised several elementary spells and charms wandlessly and succeeded in his first attempt. Over half what he couldn't do wandlessly, he could do wordlessly. The atmosphere here was so clean, in a way. Clean of his magic, anyway. It was like the air around him never experienced his kind of magic before, and letting himself get engrossed in it, he felt a tiny thrill shoot through him. It was, for lack of better phrasing, virgin air. Even muggle places in his universe had experienced some kind of magic at one point. Here, nothing was competing against his.

It was brand new.

It made him laugh and filled him with a confidence and strength that he, oh, needed so much.

Afterward, he made sure to cancel his spells around the area and remove any magical traces, then began to walk the town again, using his magic to subtly open him up to what was around him without casting a spell. He didn't learn anything new, but he did get the idea of experimenting with his Patronus and the fog.

He ran into Leah as he was doubling back. She was near the entrance to the woods he normally took, looking out over the town with her back toward the trees, frowning.

"Leah?" he approached. She was only a few meters from him, but he softened his voice anyway. The fog was really silencing in its own way.

She whipped her head toward him, obviously surprised. "Hello. I'm sorry, what was your name again?"

"Harry," he nodded in greeting, stopped beside her. "Alright? It's a bit early to be out."

She smiled kindly at him. "I could ask you the same."

Harry simply answered, "Couldn't sleep."
"Oh." Her pleasant features took on a pained expression. "Dylan?"

Harry shrugged, trying to look out into the town while also sneaking a look into the woods. Leah was a 'prophet of the lord' or something. She was specially connected with angels, so if she was near where he, basically, just vomited all the magic he knew for an hour or so, it couldn't be good.

"You lost people, didn't you?" Leah asked gently, and when Harry glanced over at her, she looked almost sickeningly kind.

"End times," Harry answered. "We all have. You couldn't sleep either?"

Leah sighed and shook her head. "No. The angels… I think they're worried."

"Why?"

Leah chuckled. "Why?" she grinned. "So many humans could be lost. We're here at the end. It's our last chance."

Harry considered her, then looked back at the town. "Everyone's?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Harry said carefully, "this is a pretty intense area." He shrugged, again thinking of what he overheard from Dean's hours-long channel surfing. "I mean, in Hollywood, movies are still being made. In New York, they're more concerned about fashion shows than anything else. Here, well… It's like only here is the end of the world."

Leah touched his arm, making him look at her again. Her eyes were full of sweet sincerity and concern. Her gaze became so focused, Harry threw up what shamefully weak Occlumency shields he had. She smiled, "That's the way evil works, Harry. It breeds when those in power ignore it."

Harry blinked, looking away. He couldn't help it, he checked his brain, but he couldn't feel where anything was penetrated. He shifted on his feet to politely knock her hand away and said, "I guess you're right. We've seen enough of the truth."

Leah made a commiserating noise. "We just have to keep going. Keep strong. The world may fall around us, but we'll stand tall."

"Er…" he said, clearing his throat, "yeah."

She smiled again and walked with him a little away from the woods. After a few minutes, Harry had to turn down a different street than she, so they parted ways with only nods of acknowledgement.

Angels, Harry thought. He knew nothing about them. Most of his time at Bobby's was either trying to find information about getting home or studying demons. Maybe the angels were behind the fog. Cas was an angel - apparently the only one on the Winchesters' side. Maybe he could figure it out. After all, Harry could use his magic to detect something was going on, but it wasn't a wizard's doing. There was only so much he could find out. An angel would surely know its kind, right?

Trying not to think about how Cas could have 'brought Dylan back', he walked back to the motel and quietly made his way inside.

"Aren't you becoming an early bird," Dean greeted him as he walked in. Dean was dressed and sitting on his bed, tying his boots. Sam was at the en suite's sink and mirror, also dressed, brushing
his teeth.

Harry shut the door and sat in one of the two chairs at the kitchenette's small table. "I walked the town again. Ran into Leah. I think we need Cas here."

Sam audibly paused in his brushing. "What?" he said around his toothbrush.

Dean, finished tying his last boot, propped his elbows on his knees to look at Harry, eyebrow raised.

"There's this spot in the forest away from the muggles. I went out there, and I cast protection spells around it to test out most of the magic I know. I took the charms down and erased any magical evidence, but when I walked back around, Leah was there - at the entrance of the woods I took. She said she thought the angels were worried -"

"You mean you led the angels to you," Dean interrupted.

Harry scowled at him - a scowl he hadn't done in probably years, usually reserved for Snape. Dean blinked at it, obviously taken aback. "No," Harry said, voice a bit lower. "My protection spells are undetectable even in my world, where they're common. I don't, though, think it was a coincidence. Leah… Well…" he conceded, looking at Sam, who was now finished with his teeth and leaning against the en suite's counter with his arms crossed. "Leah and I shouldn't speak again. Angels, or something, have her. It didn't get into my mind, I don't think, but I think it got close enough to try to manipulate me. If it weren't for Vold-… if it weren't for my last life, it would have worked. I think it's working on everyone here."

He looked back at Dean, who was now listening attentively.

"I don't think my magic led anything to me. I think my protection spells left a gap in the fog long enough for something to notice. For the angels talking to Leah to notice, if nothing else. That had to be it. They could tell the fog didn't affect someone."

"Meaning the fog knows who it affects," Dean answered immediately.

Harry nodded. "I'm thinking angels, because of Leah. I talked to her, to see why she was there. She thinks I was there because I just couldn't sleep - because of Dylan, but I know she, or something through her, tried to see into me." He shivered against his will, closing his eyes. Clearing his throat, he said, looking back at Dean, "Let's just say, I'm from a place where things and… people can tell what you're feeling and thinking without you noticing. I had to learn the hard way to tell when that was happening and how to prevent it."

"And that happened talking to Leah?" Sam asked.

"Yeah," Harry confirmed. "It wasn't what you call mind reading, not how I know it, anyway. I checked my mind and put up my Occu-… er, I guess, you'd call mental shields. Still, she knew what to say to me."

"What did she say?" Dean asked.

Harry looked away and shook his head. "Trying to convince me of 'end times'. I tried to point out that this area specifically seems to be experiencing it while the rest of the world isn't as bad. She… she knew exactly how to phrase… that, if I was impressionable to it, would accept that, well, 'the end is here'," he mocked a little in an attempt at an American accent.

"The end is here," Sam replied.
Harry rolled his eyes. "Not in the way the town thinks. Whatever is influencing Leah, influencing the whole town, it knows what it's doing, and it'll find out what I am if I poke around too much, won't it? So, I just, well, shouldn't talk to Leah again."

The brothers agreed and began to move around the room, accepting his report. As they got into the car to head to the church, see if they could help with anything, Sam asked, "So, did you learn anything in the woods this morning? Casting, or… what you said?"

Harry just barely stopped himself from grinning. "Yeah. I'm a lot more powerful here than in my universe. There's nothing here competing against me."

He kept himself looking out the window, casual, but he still noticed Sam give Dean a significant look in his peripheral.

He didn't want to be another 'Chosen One', not at all. However, he was not broken, and he wasn't going to have Dean thinking he was.

Most of the town was at the church. Sorrow was thick in the air as the townspeople decorated around the pews with flowers and cleared out the pulpit for Dylan's coffin. Harry felt awkward, not knowing how to help. Dean jumped right in, which seemed to be natural for him, offering to carry the ladders around the church to pin some flowers higher up. Sam, on the other hand, seemed to take to a more counselling role, laying bracing hands on shoulders, talking softly to people as they brushed away tears.

Now that was definitely not Harry's forte, so he took to following Dean around, handing up flowers to him when needed.

Eventually, the church began to settle in the pews. Harry stood in the back by the doors, and as Dylan's coffin was being carried into the church, Sam and Dean took it upon themselves to hold the doors open.

Jane and Rob were walking behind the coffin. Jane was crying, her make-up running down her cheeks. Harry's heart broke for her, and maybe it was the red hair, but Harry thought again of Molly. She had lost a son too.

"He's as good as!" Harry heard the echo of Molly's voice in his head, fighting with Sirius when he said Harry wasn't her son.

Did she feel like she lost two sons, with Harry dead?

"Ma'am," Dean hedged, shifting awkwardly on his feet. "We're just, um, very sorry."

Jane's face twisted into a cruel and unpleasant expression. "You know…" she said, looking at Dean with pure disdain. "This is your fault."

"Jane," Rob whispered to her. His grip on his wife's shoulders tightened. "Come on."

As Rob led Jane inside, Harry had to resist the urge to reach out and touch Dean's elbow or something, show solidarity. The brothers exchanged a look, and Harry watched with interest as the look Sam gave Dean was one of incredulous disbelief, like he thought the woman was unhinged. It made Dean's shoulders relax some, and Harry made mental note of it.

The coffin was set up in the front of the church, one half of it opened so the people could see Dylan
one last time. People formed a queue and, one by one peered into the coffin and then spoke softly to Jane and Rob, shaking hands and giving hugs.

Sam, Dean, and Harry sat in the back. Harry doubted they would be welcomed to go up and view the body.

"Is this normal?" he whispered to the brothers. "The whole looking-into-the-coffin thing?"

"Yeah," Sam answered.

"Haven't you been to a funeral before?" Dean asked.

"Just one," Harry shrugged. "But his body wasn't... well... I mean, falling that far... I doubt anyone would have wanted to see that."

Sam and Dean made a face and turned back to the front.

After a while, everyone sat, and Pastor David took his spot by the coffin, turning to face the congregation. "I wish I knew what to say... but I don't. I'm so sorry, Jane. Rob. There are no words. Dylan... I don't know why this happened. I don't know why any of this is happening. I've got no easy answers... But what I do know is..."

What he knew, they didn't find out. At that moment, Leah, who was seated in the front, fell over out of the pew and onto the floor. Harry half-rose, wondering what to do. She was on the floor, convulsing like she was having a seizure. Pastor David was at her side immediately, reaching for her and grabbing her hand.

"Leah? Leah, honey? Honey?"

Leah began gasping and slowly stopped shaking.

"It's okay, sweetie, it's okay," Pastor David said, helping her sit up.

"Dad, it's Dylan," Leah said, louder than her father.

"Just rest a minute, huh?"

"No, listen," Leah pressed. "Dylan's coming back."

The congregation broke out in murmurs, and Harry and the brothers snapped their heads around to look at one another. Harry's own thoughts were clearly written over their faces: whatever was behind the fog was up to something.

Harry slowly lowered himself back in his seat as Leah stood, brushing off her clothes while her father quietly whispered to her. She seemed to dismiss him, though. Whatever composure she had lost by falling over was back in spades now. She turned and faced the congregation, back straight and a small smile on her face.

"Jane," she began, nodding to the woman, "Rob. It's going to be okay. You'll see Dylan again."

Harry's eyes darted across the room and landed on Paul, who was already looking back at Harry, undoubtedly them both thinking of their conversation from the night before.

"When the final day comes," Leah continued, "Judgement Day, he'll be resurrected, and you'll be together again." She turned back to the congregation. "We'll all be together - with all our loved ones."
Again, Paul and Harry exchanged a glance, this time Paul mirroring Harry's own scepticism.

"We've been chosen. The angels have chosen us, and we will be given paradise on earth. All we have to do is follow the angels' commandments."

Harry leaned over to Sam and whispered, "I thought it was God who had the commandments?"

"God's left," Sam answered. "The angels run Heaven now."

"So… there really is a God?" Harry couldn't help but ask, despite his eavesdropping the night before.

Sam frowned disapprovingly, though it wasn't directed at Harry, "Yeah, but I wouldn't count on him."

Harry cleared his throat and shifted some in his seat. Sam's tone of bitterness just then was very different from the night before, talking about Harry as a literal God-send.

Leah began speaking again, listing off rules and reminding Harry a bit of Hogwarts under Umbridge. The image of the decree stating students couldn't stand closer than half a foot apart flashed before his mind.

The other commandants, though, Harry wasn't worried about. Technically, here, Harry was underage, and he wasn't even allowed alcohol until he was twenty-one, which he thought was ridiculous. (Not that it stopped Sam and Dean from offering him alcohol when they could or stating he was twenty-two on his fake ID). So, unless Harry found himself a nice young lady or man who got off on scars and a British accent, he didn't think he would have any trouble following the angels' new rules.

Sam scoffed as they were dismissed. Apparently, Leah's announcement essentially made the rest of the funeral pointless. "I feel like we just witnessed the angels' bad attempt at an after-school special."

Dean shrugged, leading them out among the others.

"No, really," Sam pressed, frowning at his brother. "They can't actually think the whole town will do this."

"I don't see why not," Dean replied.

Harry fell into step right behind them as they pushed out the door. Sam seemed to wait until they were a little away from other people before saying, "No drinking, no gambling, no premarital sex? Dean, they basically just outlawed ninety-percent of your personality."

Harry snorted. Dean shot him a glare and said, "Yeah, well, whatever. When in Rome."

Sam stopped walking, making Harry run into him, and turned to fully face his brother and give him an incredulous look. "So, uh… you're cool with it?"

"I'm not cool. I'm not not cool. It's - Look, man, I'm not a prophet. We're not locals. It's not my call."

Sam stared, and Harry did, too, not really knowing where to put this apathetic side of Dean in his impression of the man. A series of emotions flickered across Dean's face, who glanced at Harry, then back at Sam.

He looked back toward the church and said, "I'll catch up with you guys later," then turned and marched right back from where they came.
Sam and Harry looked at each other. "I take it that's not how Dean normally would react."

Sam shook his head. "No. Maybe it's the fog. We've got to find out where it's coming from."

"Or what's doing it," Harry agreed.

"Show me where you've been walking the town, where you've been checking."

Harry nodded and led Sam around a now worn path through the town and its borders. When they reached Harry's special spot in the woods, Harry said, "I want to try something. This is where I cast this morning, so maybe it's best if I do it here, just in case the fog and whatever's behind it senses it. We don't need to be leading it all over town."

"Okay," Sam easily agreed, putting his hands in his pockets. "What do you want to try?"

"Well, see, there's only one thing that works with dementors back home. It's called a Patronus Charm. Dementors, like I said the other day, feed on happiness - contentment, joy, all the good emotions, leaving you only with despair and reliving your worst memories."

Sam shivered, and Harry was pleased that he took Harry seriously and respected the description. He obviously had no trouble picturing what that would be like.

"A Patronus comes between you and the dementor, shielding you from it and chasing it away. To cast it, you have to - well, I guess that doesn't really matter. What matters is, basically, a Patronus forces back what is taking away your, well, happiness? Or whatever. If this fog is feeding off of people or forcing them to experience certain emotions, then, in theory, a Patronus can shield you from that as well, right? Which I think might work since it obviously knew someone was out here this morning and wasn't being affected."

Sam nodded. "I agree. It could work."

"Okay, so, er… I guess… Assess how you're feeling? Then we can compare how we feel after I cast."

Sam looked around, gaze clearly not seeing anything, then said, "I'm feeling worried, mostly. A little hopeless. But, um… You said the fog is giving off a false sense of security?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. It has to be false, too, because it's pushing out fear as well."

"Alright," Harry accepted, then assessed his own emotions. "I feel… grief, sadness, not really worried or afraid. Not entirely secure either. Just… sad, but determined."

Sam nodded. "Okay. Let's give this Patronus thing a whirl."

Harry pulled his wand out, pointed it to the middle distance between them, and cast, "*Expecto Patronum*!"

His silver bright stag burst forth immediately, landing gracefully on the ground and standing tall and elegant. Harry couldn't help but grin as the Patronus searched around the clearing, and after having found no threat, turned to look at Harry, dutifully waiting for its orders.

"Hey, you," Harry greeted, holding out a hand. The Patronus nuzzled it a little with its nose, though
all Harry could feel was a slight tingle of electricity from the creature.

"Harry," Sam breathed. "That's… that's incredible." He came to stand beside him, mouth slightly open as he looked at the stag. It turned its head to him, nodding just slightly in acknowledgment. "This is a Patronus?"

"Yeah. Back home, when you can produce a corporeal Patronus, everyone has a different animal. Mine's a stag, I think because of my dad. My mum's was a doe. Your Patronus can change, too, after you've been through… well, if you go through a lot," he finished lamely. "Professor Snape's turned into a doe after my mum died."

"Professor? He was your teacher?"

Harry clenched his jaw, staring into his stag's silvery eyes. It had its head tilted just a little, as though it was listening very closely to Harry and would wait for all the time in the world until Harry was ready to speak again.

He wasn't ready though.

Instead of answering, Harry cleared his throat and spoke to the stag, "Can you keep guard around us, not let any of the fog through?"

His stag puffed out its chest, then gracefully and proudly began galloping around them in a watchful and purposeful stride.

"So," Harry turned back to Sam, "how do you feel now?"

Sam blinked then frowned, looking down at himself, having obviously forgotten what they were originally there to do. "I, uh… Huh." He looked back up and grinned at Harry. "I feel better, actually. Still worried though. Um… not as secure, too."

Harry looked down at himself as well, thinking about how he felt. He sighed, heavy. "I feel the exact same."

"Maybe it's because you aren't from here?" Sam suggested.

"Maybe," Harry shrugged. He looked back at his Patronus. "Thanks," he told it. It nodded once then disappeared.

"Oh," Sam straightened as the fog began to drift back into the clearing. "Okay, I felt that."

"All the emotions from before coming back?"

Sam nodded. "It's subtle, but it's there."

"I doubt whatever we're dealing with has had Leah send anyone outside the fogged zone, so it's likely no one here has really noticed the difference or that something might be wrong in the way they're feeling."

"I think you're right."

They continued to walk the town, Harry showing Sam some of the detection spells he knew, and they ended up at Paul's pub. When they went inside, Harry was surprised to find it completely empty save Paul behind the counter. Though, given the new laws of the town, he probably should have expected it.
"Hey," Sam greeted as he closed the door behind them. He gestured around the room and smiled at Paul. "So what happened to, uh, 'the apocalypse is good for business'?

Harry snorted as he and Sam walked over to where Paul was wiping down the bar. "Oh, yeah," Paul shook his head. "Right up until Leah's angel pals banned the good stuff. You boys want to help me kill some inventory?"

"Sure," Sam agreed, looking at Harry, who shrugged and sat down, Sam sitting next to him. Paul pulled out three glasses from underneath the bar.

"Don't get me wrong," Paul continued, pulling down a bottle from one of the shelves behind him. "I grew up here. I love this town. But, um…” He sighed and gave them a significant look. "Well, these holy rollers…”

"Yeah, yeah," Sam nodded, agreeing to whatever Paul's expression was supposed to mean. Harry wasn't quite sure he knew what was not being said, though. "I, uh, I noticed you're not the praying type."

"Yeah, well," Paul answered, pouring their drinks and sliding them over, "between us, neither are half those guys. Couple of months back, they were all in here, getting wasted, banging the nanny. Now they're all warriors of God." He set down the bottle after pouring himself a drink then lifted the glass. "Cheers."

"Cheers," Sam and Harry said together, lifting their own. The three of them clinked their glasses then tossed back the amber liquid. It burned a little, and Harry couldn't stop a small choking sound from escaping his throat. Both Sam and Paul gave him a teasing smirk, and Harry rolled his eyes as he set down his glass.

Harry thought he was catching on to what the odd friendly-but-hostile situation between Rob and Paul was now, though. It would explain the odd look between them the other night if Rob had suddenly become a 'holy roller' and passing judgment onto Paul for not following.

Paul sighed and said, "Look, there's sure as hell demons." He set his elbows on the counter, relaxing against it. "And maybe there is a God. I don't know. Fine. But I'm not a hypocrite. I never prayed before, and I ain't starting now - if I go to Hell, I'm going honest."

Harry snorted again. He couldn't exactly disagree with Paul, but the image of honest and righteous men like Paul and Dean in Hell was making him think less and less about the morality of angels.

"How 'bout you boys?" Paul asked.

Harry and Sam exchange a glance, then Sam asked, "What about us?"

"Not true believers, I take it?" Paul asked.

Sam took a breath, clearly turning his reply over in his head. Harry just looked down at his hands, more than willing to let Sam take the brunt of Paul's curiosity.

"I believe," Sam said, "I do. Yeah. I'm just… pretty sure God stop caring a long time ago."

Harry frowned. From what he overheard the night before, Sam was more than willing to believe God cared enough to send Harry here. This was the second time today, though, that Sam didn't sound like he thought much of God. Had Dean won their debate and changed Sam's mind?

It was basically a mute point, altogether, Harry reasoned with himself. Harry hadn't made up his own
mind what he believed or thought.

Paul and Sam let out small, humourless chuckles, then Paul poured them all another drink.

"What 'bout you, Harry?" Paul asked.

Harry took just a sip this time, letting the bitter taste swoosh around on his tongue and took his time swallowing it. When he did, he said, "I don't know. I never… had any reason to really think about it, really. You could say I grew up with, er… ghosts. I knew death, so er… I, er, never had to think much about where life came from."

"'Grew up with ghosts,' huh?" Paul repeated. "Deep." Then he threw back his drink, turning his glass upside down.

A sudden image of Nearly Headless Nick's head dropping to the side comically popped into Harry's head, and he had to work hard to keep the smile off his face. He looked over at Sam who was watching him, an eyebrow raised. Harry shrugged and let some of his good humour show.

"Well," Paul sighed, pushing up from the bar. "I'd offer to turn on a game or something, but we're locked down."

Sam's head whipped back around. "What?"

"They cut all the cable lines, the phones lines, and shut off the cell towers."

"What?!" Sam repeated.

"Why would they do that?" Harry asked.

"To prevent us from, uh," Paul chuckled darkly, "'being corrupted by the outside world'."

Sam and Harry shared a quick, but heavy look, clearly both thinking about Harry's conversation with Leah that morning when Harry pointed out the rest of the world seemed basically okay, that it was just this area this intense.

And… when had he picked up on the Winchester communication-expression-style? Merlin, they were rubbing off on him.

"What about the internet?" Sam asked.

"Nope," Paul shook his head.

"So…” Harry said carefully, "basically, they don't want the townspeople to know anything but this town?"

Paul shrugged, "I guess."

Sam sighed and tossed back his drink, gesturing toward Paul for more. Harry followed suit, this time proudly not making a sound, though he knew he made a slight face if Paul's smirk was anything to go by.

They had a couple more drinks, talking with Paul about the town's 'good ol' days', he and Sam swapping stories of school days. Harry joined in a little, but he mostly stayed quiet since almost all of his school-related stories couldn't be told without revealing that he was a wizard.

Once it was dark, a short, but loud, buzzer was sounded from outside.
"What was that?" Sam asked.

"That's curfew," Paul rolled his eyes.

"Oh, right," Sam and Harry said together. Harry had already forgotten the angels had set a curfew for the town to discourage any unrighteous behaviour. He had never been good at keeping curfews. Maybe he should have listened to angels' commandments better after all.

"Part of the new regime. Better be making your way back to the motel, boys."

"Jesus," Sam muttered under his breath.

They thanked Paul for the drinks, tried to pay for them, but he said they were on the house. Paul let them out and locked up after them, and Harry had a feeling he probably wasn't going to go home. He hoped Paul wouldn't just sit at his bar in the dark and drink all night.

"So, Harry," Sam looked down at him as they began walking, "what's this, uh, 'living with ghosts' thing?"

"Oh," Harry grinned. "At my school, there were tons of ghosts there."

"The castle? Really?"

"One even taught History."

"You… wait," Sam paused looking at Harry with bright eyes. "You… actually had a ghost teach you history?"

Harry snorted. "Don't get too excited. Professor Binns was so boring, I barely remember a class where I didn't fall asleep at least once. The only exciting thing about him was that he never used the door. Floated in through the chalkboard."

Sam chuckled, shaking his head, and they resumed walking. "How did they not go vengeful?"

"Vengeful?"

"Yeah. The ghosts here, well, uh… The longer they stick around, the more vengeful they become. They all end up as an evil spirit, one way or another."

Harry frowned. "That's… odd, isn't it? I wonder why. Some of the ghosts back home were hundreds and hundreds of years old. I mean, the most vengeful one I ever met was the Bloody Baron, but that was more self-venging, I guess. He wore bloody chains wrapped around him. A real fright as a child."

Sam chuckled again, pulling out his keycard as they approached the motel. Harry noticed Dean's car in the lot. "Were any of them, uh, muggle? Or all wizard ghosts?"

"Yeah, all wizards. D'you think that's it, then? Only muggle ghosts become vengeful?"

Sam shrugged, "It's worth a bet."

He swiped the keycard and stumbled through the door, using his foot to keep it open for Harry. Dean was there, on his bed with ankles and arms crossed, eyes closed, resting against the headboard. He peeked over at them as they came in.

"Where y'all been?" he asked, closing his eyes again as Harry shut the door.
"Drinkin'," Sam answered, taking off his jacket.

Dean snorted. "You rebels."

"We would have had more," Sam began, rolling up his sleeves and walking deeper into the room. Harry took off his jacket as well but only took a few steps in, studying the brothers. Sam seemed to have become a bit tense at seeing Dean just sitting there, in silence. "Um… but it was curfew."

"Right," Dean answered flatly.

"You hear they shut down the cell towers?" Sam asked, clearly trying for casual but not managing it. That at least got Dean to open his eyes. He blinked a couple of times then rubbed them. "No. That's, uh, news to me."

"Yeah," Sam pressed. "No cable, internet." He paused, but Dean just blinked at him, keeping his arms crossed. "Total cut off from the 'corruption of the outside world'," Sam finger quoted.

"Huh," Dean offered.

Sam stared at Dean for a moment, then asked, "Don't you get it? They're turning this place into some kind of fundamentalist compound."

"No, I get it," Dean stated.

"And all you got's a 'hmm'?" Sam asked, eyebrows flying up on his forehead. "What's wrong with you?"

"I get it, I just don't care," Dean sighed, finally moving to swing his feet off the bed and put his elbows on his knees.

"What?" Sam's voice raised a little. Harry was beginning to think the brothers forgot he was there. Dean's hand flew up in a frustrated gesture before falling back down. "What difference does it make?"

"It makes a hell of a -" Sam stopped, cutting himself off before scoffing, expression turning hard. He crossed over to tower over Dean. "At what point does this become too far for you?" When Dean didn't answer, he sat across from him on his own bed and began suggesting, "Stoning? Poisoned kool-aid?" He paused once more, but Dean just rubbed his eyes again. "The angels are toying with these people."

Dean shrugged, looking back up, and Harry felt himself not daring to move. This was the most open the brothers have been in front of him since that day they explained the apocalypse to him.

"Angel world, angel rules, man," Dean said.

"And since when is that okay with you?" Sam demanded, voice rising again.

"Since the angels got the only lifeboats on the Titanic," Dean answered. He snatched up a mug on the bedside table and walked over to the coffee maker. "I mean, who exactly is supposed to come and save these people? It was supposed to be us. We can't do it." He poured his coffee, then added, gesturing toward Harry with the pot before setting it down, "Harry here can't do it. Cas can't do it. Bobby can't do it. All of us together, and we're still a good mile from shore, Sam."

So, at least Dean knew he was still there, then. Were the Winchesters openly fighting in front of him?
He wasn't sure what to do with that.

"So, what, you - you want to - you want to just stop fighting, roll over?" Sam demanded.

"I don't know," Dean simply stated. "Maybe."

There was a tense silence while Dean gulped his coffee and Sam looked away. Harry felt like he could cut the air with a knife if he wanted.

Then Sam shook his head and scoffed again. "Don't say that."

"Why not?" Dean raised a challenging eyebrow.

"Cause you can't do this."

"Actually, I can."

"No," Sam shook his head again, "you can't." He stood, fixing Dean with a watery glare. "You can't do this to me."

Dean froze, staring at his brother.

Sam looked away again, taking a moment, and when he looked back, his voice was calmer. "I got one thing - one thing keeping me going. You think you're the only one white-knuckling it here, Dean? I can't count on anyone else." Dean looked away this time, but Sam pressed, "And I can't do this alone."

Dean stared down at his mug as if it betrayed him, then, face hard, he set it down on the counter and began to walk toward the door.

"Dean," Sam tried.

"I gotta clear my head," Dean announced, grabbing his jacket. He passed by Harry on the way out the door, their shoulders almost touching. Harry wanted to reach out, or something, again. Pat him on the shoulder and tell him it was okay.

"It's past curfew," Sam threw after him petulantly.

The door shut after Dean with a click.

"It's past curfew," Sam repeated, more quietly but still petulant, falling back to sit on the bed again.

Harry shifted where he stood, uncomfortable in the silence that followed. He thought maybe Sam would apologise, say something like 'Sorry you had to see that'. But as the silence stretched, Harry wondered if actually, this was the kind of situation where he should be offering comfort of some kind. A quick but firm, 'It'll work out,' like he had the urge to do with Dean. He wasn't good at this kind of stuff. Give him a Dark Lord, or the Devil, apparently. That he could do.

He also wondered what exactly the brothers were talking about. What happened that allowed Sam to say 'you can't do this to me'? What was the one thing that kept Sam going? He wanted to ask, but the brothers were just as evasive as he could be, and he knew, at least, an interrogation wasn't a part of comforting.

"Er…" he ventured. "Maybe he just, er… Maybe really does need to, er, just clear his head? He'll come around."
Sam sighed, shaking his head. "He's losing faith. Faith in us."

"Well..." Harry tried, searching for something to say. "Maybe it's more of a, er, end of the world thing, than a faith thing. Or, er... maybe he's just tired? Needs some rest?"

Sam snorted and smirked at Harry over his shoulder. "You're worse than Dean at this, you know."

His reply broke the lingering tension at least, and Harry relaxed some. He let himself walk over to the couch and sit. "If it wouldn't be such a giveaway, I'd offer to send my Patronus after him."

"Yeah, I don't think Dean would appreciate a sparkly deer following him around."

... 

It was still a bit early, so after Sam pouted some more, they got to work searching through some books they had, discussing the 'case', as Sam continued to call it. More than once, Sam would stare longingly at his laptop and wishing out loud he could call Bobby or Cas. They got distracted at one point comparing and contrasting the werewolves from their worlds. Harry was properly horrified at the werewolves they had here, and Sam was fascinated by the idea of Wolfsbane. It got them discussing potions, but the more questions Sam had (which Harry was being to suspect Sam was nothing but questions), the worst Harry's mood got, thinking about home. Eventually, they stopped and went back to researching.

It was late, getting on midnight when a small flutter-like noise sounded around the room, and a man in a trench coat appeared. Harry noticed him first, surprised, and it took a moment for him to recognise him as Cas. Cas swayed where he stood, looking at their mini-fridge.

Opening it to peer inside, Cas said, "I got your message," causing Sam, whose back was toward Cas, to jump.

Apparently, Sam didn't hear the noise, but then again, Harry didn't notice a noise the first time he met Cas. It was barely there at best. Sam twirled around and released a heavy sigh upon seeing the angel.

"It was long, your message," Cas continued, "and I find the sound of your voice grating."

Harry felt his eyebrows rise and looked over at Sam, who was frowning at Cas.

"What's wrong with you?" Sam asked.

Cas shut the fridge door and swayed a little more in turning to face Sam.

"Are you... drunk?" Sam asked, clearly surprised.

The angel blinked, then barked, "No!" He tried to step forward, but stumbled, having to hold onto the metal decorative room divider to steady himself. "Yes," he then admitted, looking at Sam like he was just daring for Sam to say something about it.

"What the hell happened to you?"

"I found a liquor store," Cas sighed.

"And?" Sam prompted.

Cas shot him a glare. "And I drank it."

Harry felt his eyebrows go up even further. Could an angel really drink an entire store's worth of
"Liquor?"
"Why'd you call me?" Cas changed the subject, stumbling closer to Sam.

"Whoa," Sam chuckled, stepping up to help steady Cas. "There you go. Easy. Are you okay?"

Cas squinted at Sam for a moment, then stepped closer, gesturing for Sam to lean over as though Cas was about to tell him a secret. Instead, Cas said into Sam's ear in nothing close to a whisper, "Don't ask stupid questions."

Harry didn't know whether he was allowed to laugh at that or not, so he pressed his lips together to prevent any sound from coming out. He had heard a lot about the angel from the brothers. Bobby seemed to have a bit of a sore spot where the angel was concerned, and though no one had said anything directly, Harry reckoned it had something to do with why Bobby was in a wheelchair, that it was too late to heal him by the time Cas got back what Dean called his 'Heaven antenna'. Regardless, all three men painted a very different picture of the angel than the one in front of him.

Harry winced a little, not knowing if that was literal or not. He wouldn't assume so, but he had asked the brothers what Leah had meant when they first arrived, about the markings on their ribs. Instead of tattoos, that did turn out to be literal - carved marking onto their ribs to hide them from angels, given to them by none other than Castiel himself.

"Leah Gideon is not one of them," Cas finished over Harry's musings.

Sam studied Cas a moment, but when Cas didn't say anything further, Sam asked, "Then what is she?"

"Possibly not human," Cas answered.

"Could she be behind the fog?"

"Fog?" Cas frowned.
Sam looked at Harry, who, when Cas followed his line of sight, felt the weight of the angel's gaze almost physically. Castiel, Angel of Intense, Harry thought in a voice that sounded a bit like Ron.

"The fog around the town is fake," Harry answered. "It's emitting false emotions into the air, being absorbed by the townspeople."

Cas blinked at him a couple of times, then straightened, stumbled, and clumsily made his way over to Harry, bending down to brace his hands on the low coffee table and turning up the intensity of his gaze. "How do you know this?"

"Ran detection spells?" Harry answered slowly.

Cas seemed satisfied with his answer and made his way around the table to collapse in a heap on the other side of the couch. "How powerful is he?" Cas asked Sam, nodding toward Harry.

Sam looked back and forth for a moment, apparently thinking of how best to answer, then shrugged. "He's good. He's more powerful here than he is in his universe."

Cas nodded then said to Harry, "I still haven't found anything about your universe."

"That's alright," Harry assured. "I, er… Well, I have this map of sorts. I was able to find out that Voldemort was defeated. It's fine."

Cas raised an eyebrow. "Do you not wish to go back?"

Harry straightened. "Of course I do. Why? Can you help me?"

"No," Cas answered simply, sitting up to reach for one of the discarded books on the table. "What can you tell me about this Leah Gideon?"

Harry looked at Sam for understanding, who shrugged as if to say 'Meet Cas' and came to sit in one of the chairs they had pulled up around the coffee table.

Sam opened, "Well, she's apparently impersonating a prophet. She's been leading the town, basically, reporting what the angels tell her."

"They've been following it to a tee," Harry added, scratching the back of his neck. "She's been reporting demon hideouts that they exterminate, and today she told the town that paradise is coming to them as long as they follow the angels' commandments."

Cas sighed, long, heavy, and entirely put-upon. "Have the people been obeying the commandments?"

"Yeah," Sam answered.

"It sounds like she's the False Prophet."

"Uh, yeah, you said she's not a real one," Sam confirmed.

"No," Cas glared again. "The False Prophet, the one who rises with Lucifer to condemn souls to Hell."

"There's also this, er, spell?" Harry provided since Sam began glaring back. "A quick exorcism phrase for demons. Bra de gah ra ma?"

Cas shook his head. "It's Enochian, but nowhere near any kind of exorcism. Bobby would have the
books you need. Why didn't you call him?"

"We can't talk to him," Harry replied. "They've shut down the cell towers. We're shut out from the world."

Cas frowned at him, squinting, as though trying to figure something out.

Harry gave a small, slightly guilty smile. "Might've been my fault," he admitted, hoping it would get the squinting off him.

"How?" Cas now glared at Harry. It wasn't any better than the intense look or squinting, but it wasn't any worse either, so there was that.

"I, er… Well, ran into Leah, this morning. Mentioned how it seemed things are worse here than anywhere else."

Cas rolled his eyes. "Did you tell her you're a wizard, too, or did you want to wait until people started killing each other?"

Sarcasm aside, Cas' quip threw up several red flags.

"Killing each other?" Sam asked.

"That is often where false prophecy leads." With that, Cas disappeared with another fluttery sound.

"Killing each other?" Harry repeated after a moment.

"Killing each other," Sam nodded.

"But…" Harry tried. He gestured to where Cas was a moment ago.

"He'll be back," Sam answered Harry's unspoken question, then added, "I think?"

"Ah, well…" Harry sighed and took off his glasses to rub his forehead unimpededly. "I'm guessing that sound when Cas comes and goes is, what, his wings?"

"Yeah," Sam answered. "You don't seem bothered by his comings and goings."

"I'm used to it." Harry put back on his glasses. "Well, my kind's kind of thing."

"Yeah… about that," Sam leaned forward. "How can you do that?"

Harry grinned a little. "It's called Apparating. It's a wizard thing."

"How often can you do it?"

"Anytime we want. Have to be of age to get your license though."

Sam quirked a brow. "License?"

"Sure," Harry tossed the book still on his lap onto the coffee table. "It's like… muggle driver's license. You have to be old enough to be responsible with it. Otherwise, you could end up splinching yourself."

"Splinching?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. Not, er, bring all of you with you. Y'know, leave a leg or eye behind."
Sam winced. "That happens?"

Harry nodded again, pushing away images of Ron splinched. "But as long as there aren't any wards preventing Apparation, any witch or wizard who knows how can do it."

Before Sam could ask another inevitable follow-up question, Cas was back, having landed a bit too hard. He fell backward onto the couch with a grunt, the stack of books in his arms falling everywhere.

Sam sighed, and both he and Harry helped gather the books up and set them on the table, putting the others away.

... Castiel the Angel of Intense, Harry decided, was someone original and all on his own. He was impatient and completely sloshed on drink, which, Harry learned, was from literally drinking every drop of alcohol in whatever liquor store he had found. Apparently, angels had a very high tolerance for that kind of thing, and so it was with absolute purpose and determination that Cas had his own, private piss up. It only took half an hour before Sam started suggesting Cas drink some water, which resulted in another half an hour of arguments with Cas insisting that, as an Angel of the Lord, he needed not for water, food, or any other sustenance, and that consuming water would do nothing for his current state.

Harry, at one point, suggested that maybe if it took an entire liquor store to get him pissed, drinking an entire lake would help a bit. That was met with a glower so extreme, Harry didn't attempt to contribute again and kept his head down for a good five minutes.

Eventually, a compromise was made. Cas drank glasses of water, and instead of helping them read and sort through all the material that Cas brought (from Bobby's and few other libraries around the country), he would help dictate their research.

A lot of books alluded to the same, vague reference of the False Prophet, but finally, around four in the morning, they found what they needed in a book from some big library in a church somewhere in North Dakota.

The Whore of Babylon.

Cas made a victory grunt that sounded like a mix between, 'Yes', and 'Oh', and then proceeded with narrating Heaven's process and reaction to assigning that name to the False Prophet as he reviewed important information about the creature.

"At that time," Cas informed, "'whore' was a moniker for someone who desired sin. Bets were placed in Heaven as to where the Whore would present, and Babylon won out because of Daniel and the lions." He waved his hand as though to dismiss some kind of long-involved process he refused to get into. "The only reason we agreed to name the Whore something other than the False Prophet was because of John, who was writing down the human prophecy, Revelations, insisted it needed a specific name or the humans would be declaring False Prophet left and right." He rolled his eyes. "Now, humans misunderstand what the False Prophet is because some Anglo-Saxon centuries later decided to start calling prostitutes 'whores'."

Harry listened to Cas' monologue with a large degree of humour, just imagining how History of Magic would have gone with a drunk Castiel teaching it instead of Professor Binns.

Sam, however, interrupted to bring some of the reality back to the room abruptly, like he just
remembered.

"Dean hasn't come back."

It took only a beat to process what that could mean.

Harry, who no matter death and world-travel was a Gryffindor through and through, jumped to his feet and rushed to his jacket. He couldn't believe himself, honestly. There they had been, and yes, distracted by a drunk angel, but a member of their makeshift team left hours ago - after a fight even, and never returned.

"What are you doing?" Sam asked.

"Leaving," Harry said, shouldering his jacket on all the way and padding his pockets to make sure he had his wand, as well as other things he needed like his motel keycard and some muggle cash. "We should look for him. Something could have happened. Leah never told us the consequence for breaking curfew."

Sam made a noise and jumped up, too, grabbing and putting on his own jacket. "Cas, stay here in case he comes back."

"Of course," Cas readily agreed, sitting up straight with some concern in his features, all traces of a drunk Cas relaxing against the couch gone.

Sam and Harry left and quickly determined which parts of town to divide and search individually. Harry had walked the town the most out of all of them, so Sam left him to look through the woods and more obscure parts.

Harry walked quickly, careful not to run and draw any attention, but also too fast to be called a stroll. He wished he had his Cloak. Moreover, he wished he could Apparate throughout the town, but not only did Apparation make a crack sound that would alert anyone who heard that something was going on, it was also likely that whoever - no, the Whore - would be able to tell via the surveillance of the fog.

He used his wand where he could, but nothing. Ninety-nine percent of the tracks in the woods were his. The backside of buildings and the alleyways gave nothing informative. Point-Me spells were only useful as a compass, and as much as he wanted to simply Accio Dean, that had the potential of causing more trouble than what it could be worth.

Eventually, Harry surveyed the parts of town Sam was supposed to have checked. The brothers had bought Harry a cell phone days ago, and Harry for the first time was feeling the frustration Sam had been feeling all night, not being able to call or 'text' either of them.

When he arrived back at the motel, he wasn't surprised to find Dean was still missing. Cas was still in his spot on the couch, though was looking a bit more with it. Sam had been pacing and was visibly disappointed when Harry said he didn't find anything, not Dean nor any clues as to what could have happened to him.

Sam sighed and shook his head. "It's okay. He'll turn up."

"He'll… turn up?" Harry asked, a bit appalled. "What, does he disappear often in lockdown towns with a Biblical creature on the loose?"

Sam shrugged. "Rule of thumb with Dean: if he isn't back by lunch, worry. Usually, when this happens, he's just found someone to take him home."
Harry frowned. "Premarital sex is outlawed here, though. Dean acted like he was going to follow that."

Cas snorted. "Doubtful."

"No, he did," Sam confirmed, but then added to Harry. "But that - that, it really isn't like Dean. We'll wait a few more hours, try looking for him again if he doesn't come back."

Harry gave a sharp nod of assent, but he didn't like it. Harry never really cared when people in his life just disappeared for a bit. He knew the need for space and knew intimately when that need could just creep up on a person without warning, therefore, not being able to give anyone else warning. He knew they'd come back, mostly because he lived with them and would run into them eventually. However, that was in an everyday kind of situation. In the midst of a war, an apocalypse, in a town where something was very obviously wrong, it was unsettling and worried him.

Given, he tried to remind himself, Dean could be fine and would have contacted them but couldn't, thanks to the lockdown. Or shut out. Or take-over. Whore Occupation. Really, he thought, he could just take his pick on phrasing.

Harry, after pacing a little himself, eventually took a shower, changed, and got ready for the day despite the lack of any sleep. Sam did the same once he was finished, and while Sam was in the washroom, Harry had Cas tell him about this world's Merlin, since their universes seemed to follow the same basic plot points, even with significant parts being very different.

It turned out, however, that Merlin in this universe was nothing more than a fictional character. Cas pondered out loud if Merlin was really a fictional character, or if he was a tale from Harry's universe of an actual wizard simply carried over from someone hopping worlds.

The end of that was caught by a freshly showered and dressed Sam who asked what they were talking about.

That led to Harry having to tell them of who his universe's Merlin was, which led to explaining about Hogwarts Houses since he let slip Merlin was a Slytherin, which led to explaining about Hogwarts founders, which led to Harry becoming absolutely exhausted and requesting they both, please, write down their questions, and Harry would try to get to them eventually.

Nevertheless, it also led to Cas telling Harry that those details would help him narrow down where his universe was. He asked if Harry still wanted him to search for it, to which Harry adamantly agreed - because yes, he wanted to know. More details could only help, but all three of them acquiesced to Harry's tired sighs that those should be given at another time.

They were just getting back around to the Whore at hand when the sound of a keycard being swiped and the door opening interrupted them.

Sam had jumped up as soon as the door began to open, but Harry, who was half-way up, dropped back down onto the couch next to Cas as soon as he saw the red on Dean's hands.

He knew that red.

It was a specific red.

It was the dried red that was close to the texture of dried ink on skin, but also gave the illusion of dried dye - not exactly cracking on its own but allowing for the natural cracks of one's skin.

Otherwise identified as dried blood.
"We went out looking for -" Sam started, but stopped.

The door shut.

"You alright?" Sam asked tightly.

Dean glanced around the room before lifting his hands awkwardly, looking down at them. "Yeah, it's - it's not my blood."

Harry stood then, hand twitching to reach for his wand.

Dean glimpsed over at him and Cas before stepping forward into the room, speaking to Sam. "Paul's dead."

"What?" Sam said sharply.

"Jane shot him," Dean practically snarled.

Cas cut in, "It's starting."

Harry knew Cas meant 'the killing'. He knew Sam knew too. There was a moment of thick, heavy silence that settled over them after Cas' statement, making Harry have to force himself not to pull out his wand, not to rush out the room, not to run to Paul's bar, because Paul was already dead. There was nothing to be done.

Dean frowned at the three of them. "What's starting - where the hell have you been?" he demanded of Cas.

Cas scowled. "On a bender."

Dean blinked. Then his eyebrows furrowed. He looked at Sam. "Did he -?" He stopped and directed his question instead back to Cas. "Did you say on a bender?"

"Yeah," Sam confirmed. "He's still pretty smashed."

"It," Cas interjected, "is not of import."

"It's a little import," Harry mumbled, earning a dirty look from the angel.

"We need to talk about what's happening here," Cas pressed, gesturing to the open book on the coffee table.

"Well, I'm all ears," Dean said, turning and walking toward the kitchenette's sink.

"Well, for starters…” Sam began, sitting back down as Dean washed his hands. Harry sat as well, stiff and tensed. "Leah's not a real prophet."

Dean turned off the faucet and turned around to look at them, grabbing a dishrag off the counter. "Well, what is she exactly?"

"The Whore," Cas announced.

Dean looked a little taken aback but didn't miss a beat before saying, "Wow, Cas, tell us what you really think."

"She rises when Lucifer walks the earth." Cas leaned forward to point at the opened text in front of
them. "'And she shall come,'" he read, "'bearing false prophecy'. This creature has the power to take a human's form - read minds."

Dean crossed back over to them, sending Harry a commiserating glance no doubt at the 'reading minds' part and sitting in the last empty chair. Cas turned the book over for Dean to see.

"Book of Revelations calls her the Whore of Babylon."

Sam and Harry exchanged a quick smirk.

"Well, that's catchy," Dean mumbled, looking down at the book.

"The real Leah was probably killed months ago," Sam said, more serious than he was a moment ago.

"What about the demons attacking the town?" Dean asked, looking back at Cas.

"They're under her control," Cas answered.

A thought occurred to Harry. "Wait…The warehouse."

The others looked over at him.

"The warehouse – a few nights ago," Harry said. "I... With so many, I thought it was a trap. But it wasn't, was it? It's... Merlin," he breathed, "it's actually storage. Demon storage."

"Fuck," Dean's head dropped back. "Yeah, that makes sense. But," he looked back at Cas, "the Enochian exorcism?"

"Fake," Cas said readily. "It actually means, you, um, breed with the mouth of a goat."

Harry's brain helpfully reminded him of the rumours of Aberforth Dumbledore, but he pushed it away, despite an unintentional twitch of his lips.

Cas seemed to be fighting a smile of his own, but when no one else responded, he said, "It's funnier in Enochian."

Dean redirected them. "So, the demons smoking out, that's just a con? Why? What's the endgame?"

"What you just saw," Cas said gravely. "Innocent blood spilled in God's name."

"You heard all that Heaven talk," Sam added. "She manipulates people. Exploits them. She created the fog. She's been the puppet-master of everyone here."

"So she can slaughter and kill and sing peppy little hymns," Dean growled, standing again. He tossed the dishrag that was still in his hands into the sink. "Awesome."

"Her goal is to condemn as many souls to Hell as possible," Cas continued. "And it's... just beginning. She's well on her way to dragging this whole town into the pit."

Harry clenched his jaw, a familiar spark shooting down his spine - the one that always told him to get ready for a fight, get ready to protect. The one he first felt fully when McGonagall told him, Ron and Hermione, at eleven, that Dumbledore had left Hogwarts, leaving the Philosopher's Stone unprotected. That spinal spark he hadn't felt since he stepped into the Room of Requirement turned refugee-camp. To him, that was only about a week and half ago. At the moment, though, in this world, it felt like years ago.
"Alright," Dean said, apparently resolved and mirroring Harry's conviction. "So, then, how do we go Pimp of Babylon all over this bitch?"

... 

The North Dakota book, which Cas insisted once belonged to a library overseas in Africa, gave specific instructions on how the Whore could be killed. Before Harry, Sam, or Dean could fully read the instructions, Cas was disappearing in a fluttery sound of feathers and reappearing five minutes later with a greyed, very pointy, branch.

"The Whore can be killed with that," Cas opened, setting it down on the coffee table.

Sam had taken Cas' vacant spot on the couch to look at the book with Dean, and Harry, though he wanted to scoot further over to look with them, remained where he was to give the brothers space. For two men who seemed an insult away from throwing punches the night before, Harry was fascinated with how they both were acting as though nothing of the sort had happened. Dean gave them a quick account of Paul's death and how he spent the night helping Pastor David bury Paul since, apparently, the town had turned against Paul, was originally trying to run him out of town, and probably wouldn't react too well to a funeral.

Now, though, Harry did scoot forward to get a better look at the branch.

"It's a stake made from a cypress tree in Babylon," Cas continued, walking to the kitchenette sink and pouring himself another glass of water.

Dean picked it up gently, turning it in his hands. "Great," he said. "Let's ventilate her."

"It's not that easy," Cas sighed, turning to face them.

"Course not," Dean mumbled, handing the stake over to Sam.

"The Whore can only be killed by a true servant of Heaven."

"Servant like…" Dean hedged.

"Not you," Cas shook his head. "Or me. Sam, of course, is an abomination, and Heaven doesn't even know Harry exists to classify him as anything. We'll have to find someone else."

"What constitutes a servant of Heaven?" Harry asked, taking the stake from Sam. It was heavier than he expected and also rough, as though just holding it would give him splinters.

"Someone who's vowed their life to Heaven."

"That's it?" Harry asked. "Not someone saintly or without sin?"

"No one is without sin," Cas rolled his eyes and drained his glass of water. "Besides, most sins listed in the Bible are human creations, ways religious governments tried to contain their people."

"That's good to know," Dean said, standing a little to reach over and take the stake from Harry.

"So, a servant of Heaven would be like a priest?" Sam asked. "Someone like Pastor David?"

"There's a priest here?" Cas asked, seemingly surprised.

"Yeah," Dean answered. "Leah's dad."
"What's the difference between priest and pastor?" Harry asked. "Didn't you also call Pastor David a preacher?"

"They're basically the same," Cas provided. "The titles change according to branches of parishes, but any of them would do."

"Alright," Dean nodded, laying the stake back down across the North Dakota book. "So all we have to do is convince a servant of Heaven to stake his daughter through the heart. Easy peasy."

Sam sighed heavily, falling back against the couch. "If he knows that isn't his daughter but his daughter's killer, it might be easier than we think."

"Oh sure," Harry said, "because anyone can convince a normal muggle that the person who looks and acts exactly like someone they know isn't actually the someone they know."

"He isn't a normal, uh - muggle though," Sam pointed out.

"He's still the one we need," Cas said.

They got a little sleep while Cas sobered up, and then they scouted the town, assessing and making sure they weren't too late. They almost were, though, because while they had slept, Leah pulled the congregation together and announced that at midnight, the Final Judgement would be handed down. She told them the angels had given her names of the sinners that needed to be dealt with before they could reach paradise, and thanks to Harry's volume spell, they were able to eavesdrop and figure out that Leah's plan was to burn at least a third of the townspeople, some of whom were mere children.

They met back at the motel to regroup and plan things out. They agreed that Pastor David might be the only one who could kill the Whore, but there was no way he would do it easily. They would have to explain everything to him - or as much as they could. There was no getting around the whole apocalypse thing, but Dean and Sam didn't think it was necessary to walk Pastor David through details such as Lucifer walking the earth.

It made Harry pause a little with the realisation that them sitting him down and explaining all that they had was a rare thing for them. It showed just how desperate they were, being practically out of options, and why Sam was holding out hope in Harry while Dean was rapidly losing confidence. Cas, well, just seemed… hurt, by God. Harry was able to gather that Cas had spent the better part of the year looking for God, and it seemed likely that Cas went on a bender as a coping method to deal with the disappointment.

Harry hadn't forgotten what he overheard the other night about how he couldn't have just accidentally ended up here. He didn't much like to think about it though, avoidance quickly becoming a tried and true coping method of his own. The thought that God was real and brought him here was unsettling, at best. It made him angry - beyond angry. Quite frankly, he was tired of being a pawn, a weapon, a used and moulded toy for the greater good. He didn't care if it was God. It was one thing to be what he needed to be for his universe, but to not even have a choice to fight in another war in a world that wasn't his home?

No, it was better not to think about that.

It didn't much help that he felt responsible, in this incidence. He felt responsible for Paul's death and like if anyone else died, that would be on him too. True, he didn't know Leah was the Whore when he talked to her the morning before, but he should have known better than to speak to her at all since
she had to be connected to whatever was going on - knowingly or not. He obviously accelerated her timeline, and not just by their conversation but by the magic he had been performing. She had to know she was running out of time, and Harry pushed her.

He also wondered if just the Winchesters' presence accelerated her timeline as well. Leah knew who they were the moment they stepped foot into the town. It was a testament to how much the Winchesters had done in this world, sure, but Harry was quickly learning that being known in this universe didn't bode well, at least not in the supernatural realm of things.

They had to wait until Pastor David was alone before Cas could fetch him. They decided it was best for an actual angel to approach him first, ensure a little faith in the pastor and make him more willing to listen.

Their motel room was dark, a strategic move on the brothers' part so no one could see in, and, more importantly, see them talking to Pastor David alone. Sam was on the couch, flipping through pages of the North Dakota book even though he had read through them several times. Dean was pacing, gearing up, and too quiet for someone who was just preparing himself for a chat.

Harry was leaned against the kitchenette counter, arms crossed, content with staying back and watching. He was so far out of his comfort zone, he may as well have been… well, on a different planet. He couldn't help but keep thinking about Luna's father, about the length of his love and devotion for his only daughter had gone. He wanted to believe that the knowledge that Leah wasn't actually Leah would help, but he knew better.

The small sound of fluttery feathers was a brief warning before Cas appeared with Pastor David by his side.

Pastor David's eyes were wide, and his body tensed at the sight of the three men. "What the hell was that?" he breathed.

"Yeah," Dean greeted, "he wasn't lying about the angel thing. Have a seat, Padre. We gotta have a chat."

Dean gestured to one of the chairs by the couch as he sat next to Sam. He tossed Harry a look, as though Harry was supposed to be doing something, but before Harry could decipher what, Sam began slowly approaching the subject at hand.

Harry had to admit, the brothers navigated the conversation well, but the more they talked, the more sorrow and fear filled the pastor's features. It was clear - he knew. He knew something was wrong with his daughter. He knew that wasn't his Leah. He just really, really didn't want to see it.

"No," Pastor David rasped, shaking his head. "She's my daughter."

"I'm sorry, but she's not," Dean said firmly. "She's the thing that killed your daughter."

"That's impossible," Pastor David tried desperately.

"But it's true," Sam said gently, "and deep down, you know it."

Pastor David's face scrunched in barely concealed agony, and Harry's heart broke for him.

Sam continued, "Look, we get it - it's too much, but if you don't do this, she's going to kill a lot of people and damn the rest to Hell."

"It's just -" Pastor David gasped, but then Dean held the stake up toward him, face set and hand
steady. Pastor David stared at it, and Harry wouldn't have been surprised if he vomited all over the floor. "Why does it have to be me?"

"You're a servant of Heaven," Cas answered from behind him where he was leaning against the wall. He was sober now, and if there was any question if angels got hangovers, one look at Cas answered it.

"And you're an angel," Pastor David snapped over his shoulder.

"Poor example of one," Cas said softly, meeting Pastor David's gaze with sadness and regret in his eyes. Harry knew some of Cas' story, that he had gone against Heaven in the eleventh hour to try to prevent Lucifer from escaping his cage and how he had been fighting against Heaven ever since. The toll of it was peeking through, heavy on his shoulders.

Pastor David looked helplessly back at Cas, then to the brothers, then to the stake. Slowly, he lifted his eyes and directed them to Harry.

Knowing he had to say something, Harry spoke the first words that came to mind. Of course, it had to be one of Dumbledore's vague but wise sayings because Harry was rubbish at this sort of thing, so he quickly followed it up with some sense, trying to apply it to the situation. "It is the unknown we fear when it comes to death and darkness, nothing more… Sir, your daughter is already dead - that has already happened. Don't condemn her memory to darkness."

It was the right thing to say. Pastor David slammed his eyes shut, one tear slipping out by the action, but then he took a long breath and nodded.

Sam gave Harry an approving nod, and Harry had to suppress a small smirk at how impressed Dean looked. He wasn't entirely sure what he himself meant, but it sounded good, and he thought, wherever he was, Dumbledore would be proud.

Cas dropped Pastor David off near the church with the stake. They planned on Pastor David making an appearance around the church as the sinners were gathered by the townspeople so as to not tip off the Whore. She needed to think things were going exactly as she planned.

Dean had Harry show him again what they taught him with the guns and knives, as well as recite how holy water was made, what to do with the holy oil, and the words to a real exorcism. He again helped arm Harry, this time with only one knife, one handgun, some rosary beads, and small vials of holy water and holy oil.

"My wand would be a better weapon than all of these combined," Harry griped to Sam as the two of them crept through Harry's worn path in the woods to get around town and to the church. Cas was going to fly he and Dean right into the church when the time came. "Not to mention none of these will work on the False Prophet."

"That's just Dean," Sam assured him. "Take it from me - in a pinch, you'll be thankful you have them."

"Take it from me, in a pinch, anything can be a weapon."

Sam snorted. "Spoken like a true hunter."

The woods dumped them out in a field behind the church, and Harry cast Disillusionment charms over them to allow them to cross unseen. Sam made a noise at the sensation, and though Harry could tell he wanted to say something, he thankfully remained on task instead.
They snuck down to the basement, Harry using his wand to unlock it, and they waited next to a life-size Nativity Scene in storage for Dean's signal. They had to somehow get Leah alone, so Pastor David was going to ask if he could speak to her in private, meeting her in the choir room where Cas and Dean would be waiting.

They heard Leah before they saw her, giving them enough time to hide in another room though they were still Disillusioned. Once they heard her go into the choir room, they poked their heads out and slowly entered the hallway again.

"You might want to make us visible now," Sam whispered.

"Finite," Harry waved his wand over them.

Sam gave him a sharp nod then headed to the other side of the hallway to stand guard.

Abruptly, there was a shout from the room, and then he heard Leah's voice, "Don't hurt me, Daddy!"

"Now!" Dean's voice yelled.

There were quiet words spoken that Harry couldn't make out, a groan of pain, two loud bangs that sounded like people were being thrown, then the door was flung open and Leah came running out.

She ran toward Sam, and as soon as Sam lifted his gun, she flicked her hand. Sam went flying, hitting the opposite wall.

"Immobulus!" Harry cried, and Leah froze… but only for a moment.

She slowly turned around and gave him a wicked smile. "I knew it."

"Harry!" Dean called as he came running from the room, putting himself between Harry and Leah.

"Incarcerous!" Harry flung the spell around Dean, stepping up and pushing him out the way. Thick ropes sprang from Harry's wand and wrapped themselves around Leah.

She struggled, falling over, but the ropes held.

"Where's Dave?" Sam asked, coming up to the other side of her with a small limp.

"Knocked out," Dean grunted. Harry noticed his lip was split. "And she did something to Cas."

"Leah!"

Harry turned to find Rob and Jane staring at them with wide eyes.

"Now, hold on," Dean said slowly, lifting up his hands. "She's not who you think she is."

"What do you mean?" Jane asked. "What do you think you're doing?!"

Instead of answering, Harry pointed his wand to Leah and said, "Aparecium."

The Revealing Charm slid over her, crumpling the Whore's Leah-disguise and unveiling a hideous creature with stretched, almost translucent, sunken skin and white eyes.
Jane screamed.

"She's the False Prophet," Harry said evenly, looking down at the creature. "She's been lying to you all for weeks."

"Shit," Rob whispered.

"What now?" Sam said, apparently deciding to ignore Rob and Jane.

"Can't you do anything?" Dean snapped at Harry.

Harry's eyes were still on the creature, though.

The ropes were holding. *Immobulus* was basically nothing on her, but the ropes were holding. The Revealing Charm worked. Harry's magic was the only one of its kind here, and the words *Heaven doesn't even know Harry exists* were spinning around in his head. The conditions to killing the Whore didn't take into account anything like him.

He knew it would be worth it to try. They could, in theory, hold her until Pastor David returned to consciousness, but Harry's heart had broken for the man. He didn't want him to see his daughter's body like this. Harry had witnessed people seeing their loved ones in awful states too many times.

Way too many times.

Not to mention, it was confirmed that the Whore could, in fact, read minds. Waiting would just give her time to find a way to manipulate the others, possibly get Rob and Jane to kill them and the rest of town all while still being tied up.

What sealed his fate was that somewhere in Harry, he knew it would work. Merlin help him, he just knew. He was as far away from home as he could possibly be. He was thrown into a war that, for once, actually had nothing to do with him, and yet, here he was. Facing this truly terrible creature in a town full of innocent, frightened muggles, with children waiting to be burned alive, and their only other hope unconscious in the next room.

It wasn't going to end, his life - this life. He wasn't going to get a reprieve. Somewhere through time and space, Ron and Hermione were probably huddled together, comforting each other. Molly was probably cooking a big meal, actively avoiding thinking about the void Fred's absence was leaving at the table. Hogwarts was being assessed for repairs, the portraits and ghosts warming its cold, broken stones. Harry had done his duty, and the wizardry world could breathe again.

In the end, that was what mattered, wasn't it?

Harry straightened his back to stand tall and pointed his wand, and though a tear escaped to caress down his cheek and something inside of him fractured spectacularly, he softly but firmly spoke the words he had spent countless nights praying with every fibre of his being he would never, ever have to say:

"*Avada Kedavra.*"
The Angels' Plan B

Chapter Summary

Harry begins to learn he isn’t exactly coping, let alone coping well. Dean begins to let his guard down. Cas and Harry duel. There’s some Dreamless Sleep, then someone is brought back to life and changes everything.

Chapter Notes

Oh holy hell... GUYS. I have literally never had anything, ever, to have such a response. I am SO touched, and honored, and terrified. If I didn't reply to anyone's comment, please let me know.
This chapter fought me so hard... it was so mean to me. I tried. If anyone feels something doesn't work or isn't right, please let me know.

Some shoutouts:

ktapples: for the inspiration of the Harry alone-angst scene and the Dean and Harry on Bobby's porch scene, as well as being incredibly supportive.
ChildoftheForest: for the inspiration of the Bobby and Harry scene and being unafraid to speak their mind.

snaxarba: for being so incredibly supportive and amazing and awesome

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
The Whore’s fog had dissipated. In its place was its naturally occurring cousin, the fog of autumn, that still brought with it a biting chill, but happily mingled with the visible breath of the living. The brown and yellow leaves that had fallen dead onto the ground danced and twirled in the cold wind, and the light from the street lamps shone to help the barren trees stretch out their shadows and darken the night even more.

Within his patch of woods, that light barely reached. Complete sound was back to the town, and Harry could hear the little scurrying of creatures, hurrying away from the presence of potential predators. Harry thought he heard a hoot of an owl, and when he looked up, he could have sworn he saw a glimpse of white feathers.

The smell of the Whore’s death still lingered, as though it followed him. As always, the Killing Curse left no physical sign, but the Whore's skin sizzled as she died, black smoke leaking out of her pores giving off a smell of burnt hair and rotten flesh, while she screamed a deep, hollow sound. It lasted only a moment, but it was a moment too long.

He had dropped his wand and Disapparated as soon as she was confirmed dead.

Another hoot echoed around his clearing, and this time, he could just make out the silhouette of an owl. It sat perched high on one of the trees, looking down at him.

Harry shivered as the wind picked up around him and brought his knees closer to his chest from
where he sat on the ground.

He stared at the owl's silhouette for he didn't know how long. In his mind's eye, he was on the Quidditch pitch, during a team practise, flying.

The crunch of leaves pulled him back as someone walked up to where he was sitting.

A warm body plopped itself next to him, knocking into his shoulder. The newcomer stared out into the trees with him for several long, silent minutes, then Dean said, "Fourteen."

When he didn't go on, Harry turned his head toward him, resting it on his arms on top his knees.

"I was fourteen, my first kill. Dad had brought me along on a few hunts and said if I wanted to keep coming, I'd have to pull my weight. There were only a few weeks left of summer, and once school started, that was it. My job was to look after Sam. So, I tagged along to go after some werewolf in Texas. The only thing I remember about that hunt was what it felt like to pull that trigger."

Harry watched Dean's profile. Dean had his arms loosely around his own knees, one hand holding the other's wrist. He was looking out around them instead of at Harry, and that small privacy was somehow better than being alone outright.

"Eleven," Harry said eventually. "Voldemort didn't have a body - was less than human. He possessed a professor of mine my first year at Hogwarts. Because… because of my mum, they couldn't touch me. It burned them. So, I… I turned him to ash."

Dean, who still wasn't looking at him, nodded slowly, lips pursed.

Harry closed his eyes and turned his head, so his forehead was on his arms and his face was hidden. Dean's firm hand came to rest between his shoulder blades, thumb stroking where it was.

"If all ya got under your belt is Volde-bitch's meat suit and a whore, I'd say you're doing a damn good job so far."

The snort that pushed out of Harry was unbecoming and loud in the small area. "And a basilisk."

"Oh, well, and a basilisk," Dean huffed, hand falling away. "You're a goddamn Bundy, my bad."

Harry's lips twitched upward against his will, the humour pouring into the cracks of his soul like a cool balm. "I may have almost killed a classmate once, as well. I didn't know what the spell did though, and he did try to Crucio- er, torture me."

He felt rather than see Dean shrug. "Eh. Self-defence ain't always pretty."

Harry sniffed, more because his nose was runny from the cold than anything else. He finally looked up again and met Dean's eyes. After several beats, Dean plucked open his jacket and from the inside pocket, pulled out Harry's wand. He lifted it in front of Harry and gave him a questioning look. Harry stared at it a moment, then slowly reached out and curled his fingers around it. It was the same as ever, seemingly unaffected by the curse that went through it earlier that night.

Harry gulped. He took it back from Dean and quickly pocketed it, then asked. "Is everyone okay?"

Dean nodded. "Yeah, Harry. We're all good. You?"

Harry shifted to sit cross-legged, elbows on his knees. He brushed away some leaves on the ground and began twisting grass between his fingers. "It's not just that I killed it."
"Okay," Dean accepted.

Dean was quiet, letting Harry pick at the grass. Eventually, Harry said, "You said the only thing you remember about that hunt is pulling the trigger."

Dean hummed an affirmative.

"That's different. What I just did, it's- … It's called the Killing Curse."

"Creative name."

Harry shook his head. "It's… It's an Unforgivable. Those, you… You have to mean it."

"And I didn't mean to pull that trigger?"

"No - yeah, you did, but… You pulled the trigger because you wanted the werewolf dead."

"Yeah…" Dean said slowly, as though trying to reason with a child.

"You meant to kill that one specific thing. You meant for that one thing to be dead. But to perform the Killing Curse, you have to… You can't do it unless you -" He cut himself off, not knowing how to phrase it.

"You have to mean it," Dean finished for him. "You have to mean to kill in general, not just the thing you're aiming at."

"Yes," Harry whispered. "Otherwise, it's just words."

The owl, wherever it was, hooted again. Dean sighed, letting his legs fall and his knee knock against Harry's. "Well… you feel like killing now?"

"I've never felt like killing," Harry snapped. "I don't want to kill. Professor Quirrell – he was trying to kill me. Merlin's sake, he had Voldemort's face sticking out the back of his head! And the basilisk was trying to kill me! The basilisk - the basilisk would've killed every muggleborn at Hogwarts! I didn't particularly enjoy -"

"Hey, hey, hold up!" Dean interrupted, palms coming up defensively. "Calm down. I ain't calling you a killer."

"But I am!" Harry yelled, voice echoing. "I literally just killed -"

"Something that would have killed half the town," Dean said sharply, "then throw the rest in the pit. And I've been there, man, you should be happy that bitch is dead."

Harry deflated a little, biting his lip to keep from arguing.

"That's not unforgivable, Harry. The town's alive because of you."

Harry sniffed and slumped some. "No - they're… They're called Unforgivables. The Unforgivable Curses."

"Well, still," Dean huffed. "They're alive because of you. They're not going to Hell because of you. That's gotta count for something."

Harry sighed, picking up a leaf. "Of course, it does. It's why I did it, after all."
Dean sighed, too, looking up at the stars. "Look... What I did in Hell..." he paused, and Harry kept his head down, looking at the leaf in his hands to give Dean the same small privacy he had given Harry. "I meant it too. I meant it every damn day. Because I had to mean it - but that doesn't mean -"

"Dean," Harry cut in, "that was Hell. You didn't have a choice -"

"Oh, I had a choice -"

"How? Dean, you were - ... It was Hell. You and your brother - Merlin. And me? We... Fuck," he swore in his frustration, pushing a hand through his messy hair. "Destiny. Fate. I don't know. Before, my old life, I functioned off choices. Or thought I did? But I made a choice - I made my choice way back during my Sorting - and everything happened, and maybe if I wasn't put in Gryffindor? I don't know. I was told I had a choice when I died. But I didn't, did I? I'm here, alone, and Merlin, used the Killing Curse."

Harry completely sagged, head falling forward. Dean's hand was back between his shoulder blades almost immediately. "You aren't alone."

"I am," Harry said flatly, "and that's okay. It's not about that. It's not about me -" He straightened his back to knock Dean's hand off, "and that's the point, isn't it? None of this, any of this, is about any of us, not really. But we still have to pay the price, don't we? And that's okay - fine - I'll do it. I'll do it. Because I rather it'd be me than anyone else. And I'm glad I killed the Whore - I'm glad Pastor David didn't have to kill it. It's just, sometimes, I mean, I feel like... I don't know. I don't know what I'm trying to say."

"That you'll do it, it just sucks?" Dean suggested.

Harry shrugged. "I guess. It's just - it just isn't about me, I'm not what's important." Harry hung onto that thought like a lifeline. "I guess... all any of us can do is make the choices that will save the most people. Do the right thing. Right?"

"I don't know," Dean answered quietly after a moment, slowly, as though his thoughts were far away now. "Making that kind of decision isn't easy."

"No," Harry agreed.

They fell silent again, Harry crumbling the little leaf bit by bit, and Dean letting him, just giving him company.

It was sometime later, while Dean shifted like he was a bit uncomfortable or as if a leg had fallen asleep, that Dean spoke again. "So... good ol' Darth Volder was stickin' out of some dude's head, huh?"

...
were clearly frightened by the knowledge that demons were real and out there and they were without having the guidance of someone to help them. Harry could tell that they were also relieved. They didn't like what Leah was doing, having them do, but they were more afraid of disobeying to say anything.

What killing a third of the town would have done to their souls stood out most to Harry. Something broke inside of him when he performed the Killing Curse, sure, but if it saved that from happening to them, then Harry thought, maybe, it was worth it.

Harry didn't know how Dean had found him in the woods, but he had assumed Sam told him of possible places, that perhaps they were both looking for him. Apparently, that wasn't the case. As soon as Harry and Dean returned to the motel, Sam had jumped up and asked where they had been. Which meant Dean had been watching Harry while they were there, knew where he often snuck off to, knew where he would have gone after he disappeared in the church. It was unsettling but spoke to Dean's skill that Harry didn't notice he had apparently been followed at one point, at least. Harry knew the Winchesters didn't trust him fully, and he hoped Dean showing his hand by approaching Harry in the woods meant that he was coming around. Sam certainly seemed to trust him. A little, at least.

Sam, who knew *Avada Kedavra* was what had killed Harry, and had almost killed him twice before, was giving Harry worried looks but seemed to have confidence that Dean had handled Harry's minor freak-out.

Cas, on the other hand, was impressed with Harry and didn't seem to care how Harry felt about what he did. Harry was able to heal whatever the Whore had done to him with a *Reparifor* that usually healed minor magically induced ailments. Though whatever was done to Cas wasn't minor, Harry and his magic were powerful enough in this world to do the trick. Cas was still a little weak and sore, but Harry wondered if his bender had more to do with that.

It wasn't just the healing, though. Cas was impressed that Harry was able to kill the False Prophet at all. Sam seemed stuck on the 'servant of Heaven' bit, and both he and Cas thought Harry killing something as powerful as the Whore was a good sign that he could be the answer to their apocalypse.

Dean was very quiet on the subject.

They agreed they should go back to Bobby's, and Harry and Cas could experiment with his magic.

First, though, Harry had stayed up all night again, helping Cas empty the demon warehouse. Most of the demons left when they felt the Whore's death, and the few that lingered (possibly to gather their own information and figure out what happened) tried taking off as soon as they saw the angel. Cas left one alive for Harry to try different spells on before he killed it once they confirmed the host wasn't alive in there. Harry was indeed a lot more powerful than regular demons, and it turned out that a *Flipendo Tria*, which was a jinx three times stronger than a regular *Flipendo*, could literally push the demon out of their hosts, though only for a moment. It reminded Harry a little of the cartoon Peter Pan's shadow, black smoke pushed out in a perfect shape of its host only to be snapped back in.

It was good, doing that. He felt a little like he was back in the classroom, only with Cas as his instructor. It was distracting.

It meant he didn't have to sleep.
They returned back to the town by dawn, and Harry helped Sam and Dean make sure the town had everything they needed to recover. He got hugged by a couple of the children, too, which was awkward, and whatever his expression was made Dean snigger at him. Harry would have made a rude gesture at him, but there were children there, after all.

Harry avoided Pastor David altogether.

They left. Cas rode with them, joining Harry in the backseat which caused the Winchesters' cooler to be pushed between them. They were seriously one more piece of on-the-road living away from Harry offering extension spells. During the drive, Sam suggested several times for Harry to get some sleep (and Harry noticed Dean had his cassette tapes locked away), but Harry wouldn't. It wasn't like they got any more sleep than he did, and Cas didn't need sleep at all. If none of them needed sleep, he didn't either.

That was what he told himself.

Bobby greeted them with hamburgers when they arrived that evening. While they were gone, he had done some digging and reached out to a few hunters. He had some leads on magical objects that might be useful and a list of some voodoo experts who might help or give them a lead for something else.

They told Bobby about the False Prophet, which he recorded their adventure in some journal of his. Harry had a suspicion he himself was also in the journal like he was some supernatural creature, but it didn't really bother him as much as he thought it should.

He kind of felt like a supernatural creature.

Dean was still quiet, which seemed to be worrying the others, until late into the evening when he and Bobby split off together and had a short, hushed discussion. After that, Bobby kept giving Harry calculating looks, which pushed Harry, annoyed with the lot of them, to bid everyone goodnight and leave to go upstairs.

He tried to stay awake as long as he could.

…

"I killed Sirius Black! I killed Sirius Black!" Bellatrix sang as she skipped through the Ministry's lobby.

Harry had her in his sights. He pointed his wand. "Crucio!"

Nothing happened, and Bellatrix's smile grew, wicked, suddenly in front of him. "You need to mean it, Potter. You need to really want to cause pain - to enjoy it - I'll show you how it is done, shall I?"

"Do it, Harry," came Voldemort's hiss. "You know the spell."

Bellatrix's eyes turned white. Ropes shot out of Harry's wand, tying her.

"Do it, Harry," Voldemort said again. "Say it. Say the words."

"You need to mean it, Potter!" Bellatrix shrieked.

Harry jerked awake, yanked his wand from under his pillow, and stood on the bed as he pointed it to whatever woke him up.
It was Castiel.

"You were having a nightmare," Cas informed him.

"You don't say," Harry panted, slowly lowering his wand. He was shaking a little, blinking to get his bearings.

"I was afraid you would start yelling and wake the others."

"Yeah, well… Thanks, I guess." Harry bent and reached over to grab his glasses, shoving them on. The lights in the room were on, he noticed, and Harry, though he had sweat soaked through his night clothes, felt very chilly. He probably looked a fright. "What time is it?"

"Early."

Harry blinked, then rolled his eyes at Cas' non-answer and cast Tempus. It was just after three in the morning.

"Who is Sirius Black?"

Harry startled at the question. "What?"

"The woman, in your dream. She said she killed Sirius Black. You seemed to have a strong emotional reaction to it."

"You… You were in my head?" Harry snarled, standing off the bed to advance on the angel and tightening his grip on his wand.

"I was not in your head," Cas said calmly. "You just dream really loudly."

"I-… what?!"

He yelled this. His heart was beating wildly at just the mere thought that he shared his dream with someone - that something was in his head while he slept. His thoughts were scattered and unfocused from his nightmare anyway; now his only thought was *something was in my head again*, and he was trying desperately not to panic.

"You dream really loudly," Cas repeated.

"What the bloody hell is that supposed to mean?!!"

"You were pushing out projections of your dream."

"So, you - what - just stood there and watched?!"

"They caught my attention, yes -"

"Who gave you the right?! I thought angels needed permission!"

"You were projecting them *out*, I didn't -"

"How long have you been standing there?! What else did you see?!"

"Calm down -"

"No, I will not calm down! How dare you! It's my head - it's private!"
"Your dreams weren't exactly staying inside your head -"

"I don't care!"

"- and the intensity of the nightmare couldn't exactly be ignored -"

"I don't care!"

"What's going on?"

Sam and Dean were at the bedroom door, both in pyjamas with guns in their hands. Sam's hair was an absolute mess - they were obviously just woken up and ran to the raised voices. Frankly, their response time was a bit impressive, he realised distantly, as was the fact that they seemed to have left all traces of sleepiness behind, ready for action.

"Harry was having a nightmare," Cas informed, sounding supremely annoyed. "I woke him up to keep him from waking the entire house."

Dean snorted. "And that worked out perfectly."

"He was in my head!" Harry shouted.

Cas glared at him. "I told you - I was not in your head."

"Yeah - I projected my dreams, whatever the fuck that's supposed to mean! It's my sodding head! Stay away from it!"

"Harry -" Sam tried.

"No!" he rounded on them. "I don't care if he has the ability to see my dreams - he is not allowed!"
He turned back to Cas. "And how dare you! How dare you ask about Sirius! You have no right! You have no right to ask about him! You have no right to say his name!"

"Harry, calm down!" Sam yelled over him.

"NO!" Harry bellowed at him. Every light bulb in the room and hallway began to flicker, and the furniture started rattling. He was losing control, and he knew he had to reel it in. But he had to confront this. Had to secure himself. Back to Cas, he shouted, "You are not allowed in my head! Got it?"

Cas was squinting at him now like Harry was an interesting puzzle.

When he didn't answer, Harry shouted louder, "Got it?!"

"Stay out of his head, Cas," Dean said, coming fully into the room and laying a hand on Cas' shoulder, getting his attention. "Come on, let's leave Harry alone before he causes an earthquake. Bobby's probably tryin' to find a way up here to see what's going on."

"Yes, okay," Cas easily agreed, and Dean led him out, both shooting Harry an odd look.

"You okay, Harry?" Sam asked hesitantly.

"No," Harry snapped, taking off his glasses and rubbing his face. "Please leave me alone."

He turned his back to the door and waited until he heard it shut to really let himself crumble, sitting on the bed and burying his face in his trembling hands. He shouldn't have lost his temper, but fuck
Castiel. Cas shouldn't have done it. If Harry was projecting his dreams or whatever, Cas should have politely side-step them. Not watch. Not look. And definitely not ask about it.

This was why he wanted to avoid sleep, but sleep had eventually claimed him. He knew - he knew he was going to dream something like that, and now he had the disturbing image of Bellatrix with the Whore's eyes. The dreams were bad enough - trying to cope with the idea that he was a Horcrux for most of his life was bad enough - spending all his time around two people who were apparently fated to be vessels for creatures of Heaven was bad enough - having used the Killing Curse was bad enough - he did not need yet another something inside his head.

After he collected himself, which was no easy feat, he decided Dreamless Sleep was now a necessity.

He took a shower, trying to scrub the rest of the dream off and got dressed in a pair of soft jeans and a blank grey t-shirt. The scars from the graveyard and Umbridge's detention caught his attention, and he considered pulling on a long-sleeve overshirt. However, he was going to be brewing and would end up pushing up the sleeves anyway.

When he made his way downstairs, he wasn't surprised the others were still awake as well. They must have heard him coming because he entered a silent room, that awkward quiet that made it clear he was the topic of the conversation they were just having.

"Harry…” Cas opened, tentatively taking a step forward.

Harry held up a hand. "Just… don't. Can you help me get some ingredients?"

"For what?" Dean asked.

"A Sleeping Draught," Harry answered. "I need moon dew, neem oil, fluxweed, and octopus powder. And a cauldron. And vials. Do you think you can get that?" Harry asked Cas.

Cas nodded and disappeared.

Looking at Bobby, Harry asked, "Do you have onion juice and beetle eyes?"

"Uh," Bobby lifted his ball cap and scratched his head. "Any specific beetles?"

"Preferably a darkling beetle, but any leaf beetle will do."

Bobby gave a sharp nod and turned his wheelchair before leaving the room.

Dean and Sam followed Harry into the kitchen where he began to set up an area for himself, using wordless Accio to summon some items he knew Bobby already had such as bloodroot and goosegrass.

"What's Sleeping Draught?" Sam asked eventually. He and Dean had sat at the kitchen table, watching him and failing to seem casual.

Harry sighed. "This one will be a potion that gives its drinker dreamless sleep."

He began separating and cutting the goosegrass as Sam asked, "Do you really think that's necessary?"

"Yes," Harry said tensely.

"Listen, Harry -" he began.
"No," Harry interrupted. "My head - my dreams - my decision. Just leave it alone, please."

"But, Harry -"

"He said leave it, Sam," Dean cut in. "Why don't you go help Bobby?"

Sam made a displeased noise but left.

"How 'bout you bring that over here? I'll help." Dean was doing a much better job at acting like everything was normal, and it did calm Harry's nerves a little. He appreciated it.

Harry considered the offer a moment, not sure if Dean could help being a muggle. He could chop things, Harry figured, and it would go much faster with two people. He levitated everything to the table, which was about half the size from the last time Harry was there. It would seem Bobby's kitchen table had an extender somewhere to make it longer. Now, the table barely sat two people.

Harry pushed the bloodroot to Dean along with a measuring cup. "Cut those in half and bleed them until you have ten ounces."

"Wanna try that again?"

Harry reached over and rotated the cup in Dean's hands to where the marked ounces faced him and pointed. "There."

"Yeah, I got that, funnily enough. But bleed them?"

Harry nodded. "Make sure to cut them along the ridges. It'll bleed from the centre, but you'll have to squeeze it. Think of it like a toothpaste tube. Start at the tip."

He watched carefully as Dean cut the first root, lifted half of it over the cup, and began squeezing. Satisfied, Harry went back to chopping the goosegrass.

"If there are any leftover bloodroots cut, I'll cast a preservation spell and we can bag them. No need to be wasteful."

"Awesome." Then after a beat, Dean said, "I wouldn't mind some dreamless sleep."

"I'm not entirely sure what it does to muggles. You might want to have Cas analyse it first if you decide to try it."

Sam came back in a few moments later with a jar of onion juice and a stack of beetle eyes wrapped in a handkerchief. "Here," he said as he sat them on the table and making a face at the eyes. "Will this be enough?"

"Yeah, thanks," Harry said, attempting to sound light.

"We got it from here, Sam," Dean announced, giving Sam a look. Sam glanced over them, eyes sharp, but then he nodded and left. Harry could tell Sam was extremely curious about what they were doing and probably wanted to be a part of it, most likely had several questions, but Harry was grateful he seemed to know that now wasn't the time.

"So, did you really take a class on this stuff?" Dean asked.

"Yeah. Potions. It wasn't my favourite."

Dean hummed. "Kind of like cooking, only…" he gave the beetle eyes a cautious look, "kind of
Cas appeared then with his arms full. Harry took the cauldron from him - a lot smaller than what he was used to working with and not iron at all - magically hovering it over the table just a little and using his wand to fill it with water and light a small, controlled fire underneath it. Harry reorganised the items on the table to accommodate the new ingredients, standing at one point to cross over to the cabinets and grab a few bowls.

Harry sighed, looking up at Cas. "And how, exactly, are you now aware that I have a history?"

"Sam and I told him," Dean answered. "About what you said, that people in your world can get into your head without you knowing. That you learned how to stop it."

"Which can't be done while sleeping," Cas continued. "So, I apologise -"

"It can," Harry sighed again, falling back against his seat. "Well, sort of. If… Nevermind."

He straightened back up, shuffling the goosegrass, preparing to mix it with the octopus powder.

"You don't have to explain right now," Cas assured him, and Harry opened his mouth to tell the angel he wasn't going to explain at all. Cas seemed to sense this and pressed, louder, "I would, however, like to go over wizard's ability to read minds. We need to be evaluating your power, and that includes things that might be a part of a past trauma for you."

Harry clenched his jaw. He appreciated the apology, sure, but Cas was making it clear that it wasn't going to be a topic dropped. That Harry wasn't being given a choice, again. Sure, Harry guessed technically he didn't have to give an account about his personal dealings with it, but how in the world was he supposed to describe it without giving away his 'past trauma'? It wasn't like he was a trained Legilimens, and his Occlumency skills were mediocre at best.

When it became clear Harry wasn't going to answer, Cas made an impatient sound and asked, "What is it that you're doing?"

"We're making Dreamless Sleep," Dean informed him brightly as though they were making holiday cupcakes or something instead. He was squeezing another bloodroot dry.

"Dreamless Sleep? This is a potion?"

"Yep. We'll holler if we need ya."

Harry frowned down at his work, wondering why Dean was fielding the others for him. He wasn't going to stop him, but he was still curious as to why. Cas didn't seem to like being dismissed, though, and it took a long look from Dean to make him leave.

As he began to mince the beetle eyes, Harry asked quietly, "Why are you helping me?"

"Look, man, I get it. It isn't fun to feel like even the shit in your own mind ain't safe."

"No," Harry agreed. "Fun wouldn't be anywhere on the list of what it's like."

Harry had Dean help him with the small things that he knew wouldn't affect the potion too much,
and Dean seemed to be enjoying himself some. He didn't press Harry, didn't ask him anything about his dream or his past life, just merely sat with him and handed over ingredients. Bobby came in a couple of times to get something from the kitchen and most likely checking on them, and Harry had the feeling that if Harry was somewhere in Bobby's journal, this potion would be added next to him.

Eventually, as Harry set the potion to a simmer, he felt recovered, mostly, from his rude awaking. He felt even better knowing the potion was turning out just right, so much so that it probably would have had Snape fuming that Harry did it.

The sun was fully up now, and Dean was fiddling around the kitchen, having decided to cook breakfast for everyone since there was nothing more he could do for the potion. Harry watched him, thinking.

Dean was confusing Harry. Sam definitely seemed more like the counsellor type - was the more counsellor type, from what Harry had witnessed and how Sam kept trying to get Harry to talk about things, confront things. But it was exactly that, that made Harry not want to talk to him. Dean, on the other hand, acted like he didn't care if Harry spoke up or not. Like he trusted Harry to talk if he needed. Yet, he was still there, physically, a presence to block the absolute silence and the memories that usually accompanied it.

On top of that, Dean didn't seem to judge. Sure, he was a judgmental person - a very loud, judgmental person on small, trivial things (Harry would never understand why putting ice cream on top of pie was so inexcusably offensive to Dean when he turned around and did the same thing in the next town), but on the big things, Dean seemed to understand. Sam judged whatever Harry told him, though not unkindly, but he would classify it as sad or something, like something had to be done about it. Harry could hear it in his voice. Harry thought back to sitting with Dean in the woods, the way Dean just casually shrugged at Harry admitting he almost killed a classmate, almost as if to say, 'Yeah, that happens.'

Then again, Dean had been to Hell. He had, what was it? Inflicted pain of some kind? The first seal to free Satan was a righteous man picking up a weapon in Hell or something like that? What was he going to say, in those woods, that he didn't like it - he didn't want it, but he meant it? He said he meant it every day. Sam was still curious and young - though, clearly seasoned and had been through enough in life to be a bit troubled. Dean, though…

"How long were you in Hell?" Harry asked spontaneously.

Dean froze where he was standing at the kitchen counter stirring pancake mix. He cleared his throat and replied, "Four months on earth. Forty years in Hell."

Harry sucked in a breath.

Forty years?

How was Dean sane? How could he just be standing there, whipping up pancakes?

Harry immediately decided that the whole conversation wasn't his place, and there was no way he was going to ask Dean any more questions. He remembered thinking at one point during the last year that if there was a Hell, it couldn't have been worse than what he was already living. Knowing now that there actually was a Hell, he knew it was probably worse than anything he could imagine.

No, he really didn't want to know. He would… just leave that with Dean.
Merlin, it made what he had been through seem like nothing.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat as Dean went back to stirring the pancake mix and pouring it in a pan. He still looked a little tense, and Harry figured he was waiting for Harry to ask follow-up questions.

Harry decided instead to give some answers.

"Legilimency is the spell to get into someone's mind. A skilled Legilimens doesn't even have to say the spell or use a wand, can just penetrate right in and riffle through your head without you knowing it. They can see your memories, know what you're thinking, figure out what you're feeling. Most definitely know when you're lying. Occlumency is the art of magically closing off your mind against it."

"Occ-whatsy?"

"Occlumency. And Legilimency."

"Why do you guys have such weird names for shit?"

"Weirder than Impala or Metallica?"

"Yes, weirder than Impala or Metallica," Dean replied, glancing back at Harry like he was mildly offended. "They're classic! And pronounceable."

"I can pronounce our names just fine."

"That's because you're a nerd with a magic stick."

Harry thought, briefly, of making an innuendo. He didn't get the chance, though, because Bobby, Cas, and Sam, undoubtedly because they were hearing friendly enough voices or smelled the bacon Dean was now frying, came in. Harry moved his simmering potion to stasis on the counter - it needed a few hours for the fluxweed to settle, and Sam got the table leaf out to extend the table for all of them to sit together.

Over breakfast, Dean told the others about Legilimency and Occlumency, saving Harry from having to discuss it too much. It was tactfully done, if Harry was honest. The other three obviously had questions, but with Dean telling them instead of Harry, they accepted the report and let it be.

Once they were finished eating, Sam cleared his throat. "So, Harry, there are some things we need to discuss."

"Yeah," Dean picked up, grinning at Harry. "First thing's first, you're getting inked."

Harry blinked. "What?"

Sam and Dean pulled down the collar of their shirts to present their identical tattoos. He had seen it on Dean before, as Dean never seem to care whether he was shirtless at night. It was an outlined pentagram of sorts with a circle of flames around it.

"It's an anti-possession tattoo," Dean told him.

"I'm pretty sure you would be able to push out any demon who tries to possess you, but they think the precaution is necessary," Cas added.
"Well," Sam shrugged, "if you're possessed - with your powers, that wouldn't be good for anyone."

"I suppose not," Harry agreed. "Can I see it again?"

Dean and Sam obliged by pulling down their collars again, and Harry studied it more closely. He didn't much like the idea of getting a tattoo, but he absolutely loved the idea of preventing possession. If he could do something that would guarantee that demons, at least, could never use him as a puppet, he was going to do it. Plus, he didn't think the brothers were lying about what the symbol did. It had elements that were similar to a demon's trap, at any rate, but not in a trap-a-demon-here type of way.


Dean nodded and shot Sam a glance that looked an awful lot like an 'I told you so'.

"Then we'll run some tests on your magic," Cas went on.

"Tests?" Harry asked, immediately getting his guard up again.

"Yes. Comprehensive ones, probably starting with your magical core."

"I'm not sure," Harry interrupted. He didn't like the sound of that at all. Cas made it sound like he was an alien about to be probed or something.

Cas frowned. "It's the only way we can detail the full extent of your powers."

"By poking at my core? I don't think so, sorry."

Cas looked annoyed again. "You should have had more than enough time to rest -"

"It's still no," Harry shook his head.

Cas glowered. "Then what do you propose we do?"

Harry thought about it, and a ghost of a grin danced a little on his face. "We can duel."

"You… want to duel an angel?" Sam asked.

Harry shrugged. "Why not? We could test my powers against his, find out where I stand among angels - like Cas and I did with the demons. I mean, Michael and Lucifer are archangels, right? A duel with Cas can show us how well I might stand against one of them, wouldn't it?"

"I think it's a good idea," Bobby put in. "We ain't got nothing better to compare Harry to."

"Awesome," Dean grinned. "A wizard and angel showdown. Hey, Sammy, wanna place bets?"

"Are you sure about this?" Cas asked Harry, eyeing him carefully.

"Definitely," Harry confirmed, some excitement growing in him. It was small, but there. He couldn't remember the last time he had a friendly duel, other than duelling with Ron and Hermione while on the run to keep their skills up. That wasn't very fun, considering the circumstances.

"Let's, uh, let's get you inked up before," Sam suggested, looking warily between Harry and Cas.

"Sure," Harry agreed, thinking the more time to review all his defensive spells could only be a good thing.
The tattoo parlour the brothers took him to was much nicer than Harry would have guessed. It was creative, all kinds of art hung on the walls, and the style was very modern. The receptionist had blue hair and a nose ring and looked about seven cups of coffee away from being fully with it. An artist named Mike was free to take them, though, and led them to a back room that was just as creatively decorated.

"So, what are we getting today?" Mike asked.

"This," Dean said, he and Sam revealing their tattoos again, "on him."

Mike raised an eyebrow. "The same one?"

"Yeah," Dean smiled, full of charm and grace. "We're in a band, it's our logo. He's our new drummer."

"Really?" Mike's eyes lit up, looking at Harry expectantly.

"Er..." Harry threw Dean a quick glare, "yeah. Yes. I am. I bang the..." he trailed off, awkwardly doing the hand motions for drumming.

Dean snorted. "Yeah, he bangs. He can bang all night long."

"Dean," Sam groaned, elbowing him, while Harry's face went up in flames. Rotting git. It wasn't like Harry didn't have the urge to make a joke earlier, but at least his innuendo wouldn't have been public.

Mike grinned at them. "Cute," he said to Harry's blush, making Harry blush harder. "Let me get it drawn up then."

He had the brothers walk over to his station to copy the design. It didn't take him long, and before Harry knew it, Mike was asking where he wanted it. The brothers had told him he could get it anywhere and it would still work but suggested somewhere on the torso, so something couldn't cut it off, and also somewhere he could see it in case a cut or something broke the line.

Dean had decided on his left side, in the middle of his ribs, like he had seen military men put tattoos of their dog tags. Which meant he had to take off his shirt. He didn't quite think that far ahead.

Harry's body was littered with scars. Even some of the wounds Cas healed when he first arrived left scars due to their magical origins. Not to mention, Harry's body just seemed to like to scar. Hermione had suggested that it was yet another side effect of being malnourished growing up, like his height and lack of body strength.

His torso, in particular, had the scar from the Hungarian Horntail, some small scars from the battle as well as the fight at the Ministry in fifth year, the scar from wearing the Horcrux/locket too often (Ron and Hermione had the same one), but most importantly, to Harry, were the scars on his back from when he was younger and Uncle Vernon would decide to use his belt on him. Vernon hadn't done it since Harry entered the wizardry world, but the whelps did leave scars. Not big ones. Not bad ones. Harry had always been able to excuse them away to dormmates and Quidditch teammates, saying they were from a playground injury, from some muggle thing.

He knew adults would know what they were instantly and did everything he could to keep them
hidden. Even when he went into the lake during the Triwizard Tournament, the suit he had on had a top with it. He figured Madam Pomfrey had seen them, but she never said anything about it.

He knew Sam and Dean would know exactly what those scars were.

There didn't seem to be a way around it, however. He wanted the tattoo to be near his heart, but not in the front where he would see it all the time. Besides, he learned that living with someone usually meant they would see him shirtless at one point. Might as well get it over with.

He removed his shirt and laid on his side with his left arm up, just as Mike instructed.

Getting the tattoo hurt a lot more than he thought it would, but he got used to the sensation pretty quickly. By the end, it was almost soothing. The brothers kept Mike in conversation, and Harry allowed himself to relax some, enjoying watching how the brothers could act and seem so normal. At one point, he did notice the brothers doing a double-take at the scars on his back, each at different times, but thankfully, that was the extent of it.

Neither brother asked about them, nor did the tattoo artist.

All in all, it was a quick trip and short session. Exactly what Harry needed to be regrounded from that morning. To centre himself and focus completely on only what was immediate and at hand.

He didn't think he could cope otherwise.

…

Cas and Harry faced each other.

They were out in Bobby's salvage yard, Dean, Sam, and Bobby standing off to the side. Cas was squinting at him, sizing him up. Harry felt the adrenaline pumping through him. He needed this, to let off some steam, to do something useful, to sharpen his senses - to do all of that and not be in mortal danger.

To do all of that and not kill something.

It didn't matter that Harry was still annoyed and frustrated at the angel. At the moment, Cas wasn't Cas. He was the opponent.

Harry opened his magic to Cas and very quietly, barely moving his lips, he whispered, "Augure Sensibus," to increase his senses. His magical senses increased, too, which would help Harry predict some of Cas' moves. It wouldn't be enough, though, so he also cast, "Specialis Revelio."

There it was, as colourful static. Cas' special brand of magical properties. It was actually very similar to his own.

"Alright, rules," Bobby called out. "If you aren't sure if what you're about to do might kill one another or cause permanent harm, don't freakin' do it. Cas, Harry is human, so limit hand-to-hand."

"Yeah, don't try punching him, Harry," Dean added. "It hurts."

"Noted," Harry nodded, grinning a little at Cas. He knew some spells that could put extra power behind his punches if needed.

"Tell me the spells you already cast," Cas demanded.

Harry's grin widened. "Wouldn't you like to know."
Cas tilted his head. "I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want to know."

"After the duel, Cas," Sam placated.

"Whenever you're ready," Bobby declared, ceasing any conversation.

Harry straightened, arms out and ready to cast. Cas braced himself into a different stance, equally practiced if not significantly more practiced, and raised his hands. After a few moments of them staring at each other, Cas pushed out a hand. A force containing the energy Harry noticed was gathering around the hand rushed toward Harry, and Harry threw up a silent *Protego*. It deflected Cas' aimed energy with a *woo* sound, and it hit one of the many broken down, old cars surrounding them, denting it.

Cas frowned, then tried something else with the same result. Then again. Then again. Each time teaching Harry how he was gathering the energy around him to do what he willed it. Cas huffed, changing his stance, and Harry took the opening and silently cast *Everter Statum*.

Cas only stumbled back a little. He had a feeling that had been what Cas was trying to do, and if Cas had a shield, he could have deflected it just as well as Harry had.

"Point one - Harry," he heard Sam say as Cas rolled his shoulders and got back into position.

Cas' magical properties shifted, gathering strength from the angel, and Harry immediately cast a stronger shield charm. Whatever Cas threw at him, though, penetrated, hitting Harry in the chest and knocking him back a step.

Cas raised an eyebrow at Harry, a barely-there smirk playing on his lips.

Harry felt lighter than he had since he arrived in this universe. Cas was going to be a challenge, and if Harry tried hard enough, he could pretend he was back home, with Ron and the rest of DA in the Room of Requirement, duelling, learning, laughing.

Cas began gathering the energy around him again, but this time, Harry cast a silent *Protego Maxima* and instead of leaving it around himself, he pushed it out at Cas. The energy that was building immediately disbursed, knocking Cas back a step in apparent surprise.

"That's cheating," Cas growled. "I hadn't tried anything yet."

"You were about to. You use energy the same way wizards do. It's not my fault you make what you're about to do obvious."

"Okay," he heard Dean from somewhere to his left, "make that two points for the sass."

Cas made an annoyed sound, then he gathered some energy and pushed it at Harry so quickly that the only thing Harry had time to do was dodge it. Harry landed on his side which stung because of his new tattoo but still pointed his wand and yelled, "*Levicorpus!*"

The spell grabbed Cas by the ankles and flipped him, dangling him in the air. Cas was able to shake off the spell, falling back onto the ground, and they both stood slowly, critically watching the other.

"That was pretty cool," he heard Sam whisper.

He felt a little smug that they didn't know his senses were increased, that they didn't know he could hear them. Having increase hearing was just one thing, though, and he had more important things to focus on than the brothers' commentary.
The energy around Cas wasn't showing itself in a certain pattern anymore - clearly a distraction tactic. Cas knew the energy of Harry's shields now, so that meant Harry had to distract Cas as well, throw him off course before he decided what to do next.

He pointed his wand and said, "Sreleus."

Cas sneezed - twice - and sure enough, all the energy he was building up disbursed once more.

Cas glared at Harry, and Harry grinned. "I'm sorry, do angels not sneeze?"

Cas' glare hardened, and he lifted his hand and snapped his fingers. Harry suddenly sneezed, burped, and - yawned? - he thought, all at once, and it felt like his jaw was about to break in half from the sensations. He had to take a few deep breaths to recover, clutching his chest.

"Mine didn't hurt you!" Harry accused.

Cas just smirked, and Harry saw the zealous glint in his eyes. The competitiveness. Dare he suggest, fun.

It was on.

In between having to constantly send up new shield charms because one rush of energy from the angel broke down his shields (although, he sent a *Protego Totulum* around Dean, Sam, and Bobby to keep them out of harm's way, and Cas seemed to have reinforced it as his deflected energies that hit that particular shield charm continued to bounce the energy onto something else), Harry cast his usual defensive spells. *Immobulus* was absolutely nothing on Cas and *Stupefy* barely made Cas blink. *Pertificus Totalus* couldn't freeze Cas, but it did freeze the energy around him briefly, giving Harry an opening to cast an *Impedimenta*, which knocked Cas to his knees.

He got up quickly though.

*Locomotor Mortis*, the leg-locking curse, was a bit more effective, but just like with *Levicorpus*, Cas was able to shake it off.

Harry then attempted all of them with a *Magicus Extremos* just before each cast, which, fortunately, Harry only had to say the spell-strengthening charm and not the others, so Cas didn't know what was coming. Though Cas was able to dust the spells off of him as well, they did at least work.

While testing those out, however, Cas was able to get in some good shots of his own, causing Harry's breath to be knocked out at one point, him to be pushed back several feet at another, and he himself to be frozen still and almost falling over before he could shake it off several times as well.

They seemed to be matching, and they both were breathing hard from the exertion.

Knowing a bit more about how Cas fought, Harry decided to get creative.

Cas, being an angel, didn't have bogeys, so the Bat-Bogey Hex wouldn't work. Harry cast the Leek Jinx at him, though, as well as *Furnunculus* to cover him in boils. Cas just copied him, doing the same thing in his own angel way, which was annoying because it only involved snapping his fingers instead of gathering energy, but they were both able to heal themselves without wasting a moment, Harry having only needing to use counter curses he knew.

Next opening he got, Harry cast *Melofors*, and for the first time since he died, Harry felt like he had a memory of this world good enough for a Patronus. Not a corporeal one, but still.
Melofors, of course, encased the target’s head in a pumpkin.

Cas, whose arms were up ready to manipulate the energy around him, stood stock still a moment before his arms fell to his sides almost in their own exasperated reprimand. Their audience of three howled with laughter.

With a wave of his hand, Cas vanished the pumpkin and fixed Harry with a challenging stare.

The energy around Cas suddenly snapped, and a large, heated wave of energy was being pushed toward Harry. It reminded him of the *Lacarnum Infiamareal* which sent balls of fire. Fire wasn't being formed though, so no water spells he knew would work. As it rushed toward him, he pointed his wand to the ground, cast a gripping spell onto the gravel and dirt beneath him, and whipped it up to cocoon himself, blocking whatever Cas sent him.

It was loud, his spell and Cas’… energy-shooting-whatever, and Harry knew instantly that it was the perfect cover to change things up. While he was cocooned in his small tornado of gravel and dirt, he Apparated to just a bit behind Cas.

Cas, who was waiting for Harry to reappear, didn't notice.

"*Magicus Extremus,*" Harry whispered underneath the noise, then he pointed his wand and yelled with a burst of his magic, "*Everte Statum!*"

Cas went flying, through the settling tornado of Harry's spell and right into one of Bobby's garage doors, leaving a large, significant dent.

So, Cas did have his version of a shield, then. The energy in front of Cas was reinforced, awaiting something in front of him to strike, not behind.

Interesting, Harry thought. Also, infuriating, because Harry couldn't see that from the front.

Cas groaned, probably not loud enough for the others to hear, but with his sensory spell, Harry caught it. He stood, and Harry squinted to sharpen his spelled vision. He saw a new determination on Cas’ face before the angel disappeared.

Thanks to *Specialis Revelio,* Harry knew where Cas reappeared behind him.

"*Ventus Duo!*" Harry yelled, sending Cas a strong blast of wind that he hoped disorientated the angel from his flight.

It seemed to have because Harry was able to retreat several steps back. Cas blinked, then sent a large wave of energy to Harry that knocked him off his feet and sending him back several feet. Harry grunted as he landed but scrambled up, wand at the ready.

"*Fumos!*" Black smoke surrounded him as the smokescreen spell took effect, and Harry Apparated again, this time between two rows of stacked cars but where he could still see Cas. "*Incarcerous!*"

Ropes sprang from his wand and tied Cas, making him fall to the ground. It held, but just barely. Apparently, magical ropes were -

Temperamental.

Cas couldn't vanish them, but he burned them without hurting himself, stood, and turned to Harry.

A wave of energy that reminded Harry of several explosion spells he knew was pushed toward him,
and he Disapparated before it could reach him, cracking back to his original place. Cas turned at the noise, but before he could do anything, Harry yelled, "Obscuro!"

Cas stumbled back, hands coming to his eyes. It was a simple blindfold curse, but it left the eyes blinded without an actual blindfold wrapped around the head. Cas seemed to have figured it out because he grasped the specific energy of the spell, like he would an actual blindfold and pulled it from his face.

While Cas got his bearings, Harry cast a lightweight charm on one of the cars around them. Cas lifted his hands to push something else at Harry, but Harry magically threw the car at him first.

Cas' eyes widened for a moment before he disappeared right before the car landed on him.

Harry turned toward where he reappeared, and he had just enough time to "Reducto!" and grip the broken pieces of the car thrown at him and toss them into the sea of stacked cars.

Things might have gotten a little out of hand after that.

Cas and Harry threw everything that wasn't deadly, or potentially deadly, that they could at each other. At one point, Cas sent an entire six-car stack of cars down on Harry, who got scratched and his shoulder even more hurt before he could Disapparate from underneath them. Harry, at another point, shrunk Cas' head while also sending a Jelly-Brain Jinx to confuse Cas, which resulted in Cas flailing, sending a bit of energy in every direction and a hood of a car to fall on him.

There were several points when Harry wanted to go deeper... darker. Just to see if it would work - just to see if he could win. Like, Sectumsempra, Deprimo, or Orbis. He felt like Cas could survive them, maybe even deflect or reflect them. But... he didn't want to see himself do it.

He had to push down the urge. Push it far down, into a place he never liked to look at. So much so that it got to the point where Harry started wanting the opposite, wished he could cast a simple tooth-growing hex or something similar. He thought he wanted a challenge, and in a lot of ways he did. Casing an angel to bleed while trying to Apparate with a twisted ankle was not that challenge.

In fact, Harry - as though watching himself in a movie - went from friendly-duelling mode to battle-mode pretty quickly after he Colloshoo Cas to adhere his shoes to the ground to keep him from flying, only to Apparate himself to another position and shoot a Diffindo. Luckily, it didn't have a lasting effect on Cas.

Still... It was enough to make the shift in Harry's brain.

They were lost in the stack of cars far from their starting place when a shotgun fired from somewhere near the house. Cas and Harry looked at one another, alarmed, and they both used their respective means of travel to go to where the sound was in a blink of an eye.

Bobby and the brothers were there, and Bobby was holding the shotgun.

"Enough!" Bobby barked. "You two are going to blow away my whole damn yard! You've destroyed two years' worth of inventory, ya idjits! Call this a tie and quit."

If the duel was enough to push Harry into battle-mode, Bobby's scolding was enough to bring him out of it. He almost expected to lose House points and be handed detention.

He suddenly felt awkward and glanced at Cas, who mirrored his discomfort. They were a mess. Their clothes were ripped, both were bleeding, and some of Harry's hair was singed.
Harry looked back at the other three. Bobby was scowling, Sam was watching them looking mildly distressed, and Dean was staring wide-eyed at Harry with an expression Harry couldn't decipher. He licked his lips, looking Harry up and down, then shook his head and said, "What the hell…"

"I know, right?" Sam huffed a laugh. "Damn, Harry."

"I would say his power is equal to mine, yes," Cas cleared his throat. "A tie would be an appropriate ruling."

"You're both a mess," Bobby sighed, laying the shotgun on his lap and turned, making his way back into the house. "Damn non-human human and freakin' angel, blasting through my yard…"

Cas and Harry exchanged sheepish glances and followed, both of them limping.

As Harry pocketed his wand, he wondered briefly if they would have tied if he didn't have the Elder Wand. He also wondered if he should tell them about it now.

A part of him wanted to, but that was a very small part. That was the small part of him that was longing for connection, that was missing his friends, that wanted to talk to people he knew and trusted.

A bigger part of him was yelling constant vigilance.

The brothers, Cas, and Bobby seemed nice enough - seemed trustworthy enough. But they were also focused, so focused, on finding answers, and Sam and Cas were already looking at Harry like he was one. He had this primal fear in him that if he told them - that if they found out he could literally not lose a fight, especially after having just proven himself to be a match to an angel, that it would seal the deal for them. They would have Harry march out to face Lucifer and save the world.

He was getting to know them well enough to know that if he told them about the Elder Wand, they would get fixated on the not losing part.

The problem was, just because Harry couldn't lose didn't mean he could win. It didn't make Harry invincible. The Elder Wand's history proved that. Sure, he was possibly the only one in this world who could use the wand, but it very well could be because its allegiance was to him. If someone took that allegiance away, it would be useless in Harry's hands - and if Lucifer, aka the Devil, found out about an undefeatable magical object...

Harry shivered. It gave him the same sinking feeling as when he thought about Voldemort having the wand. On top of that, there was also Michael to worry about.

The idea of telling the others also gave him a sour taste in his mouth because that would practically turn him, again, into a weapon. Another Chosen One. Give them a reason to use Harry as he had already been used.

His feelings about Dumbledore swayed greatly in that department. At times, he was furious with the man, other times hurt at the idea that Dumbledore only ever cared for Harry to the extent of Voldemort's defeat, and also a part of him missed the crazy, old goon.

Dumbledore never told anyone he had the Elder Wand. It kept it safe, and it kept him safe. Dumbledore didn't tell a lot of people a lot of things, actually. Harry did, though, always spoke up - he would have told Dumbledore each time he took a dump if Dumbledore had asked. It made it easier for Harry to be used.

No, he wouldn't be used again. He wouldn't tell the others about the wand.
Harry and Cas healed themselves, Cas being much better at it than Harry though Harry's magic prevented Cas from healing Harry as well as he healed others, and then Harry showered, changed, and wanted to get back to his potion.

As he walked back downstairs, he ran into Dean.

"Oh," Harry jumped back a step to keep from hitting him. "Sorry."

"No, um," Dean shook his head and cleared his throat. "No, my bad."

Harry gave Dean a nod then tried to move around him.

"Hey, Harry…"

Harry stopped and looked up at him.

"You were awesome out there."

Something in the way Dean said that and something about the look in his eye made Harry's cheeks warm. "Oh, er… Thanks. Thank you."

Dean grinned and winked. "You're welcome."

He continued on his way up the stairs, but Harry was a bit frozen on the spot by Dean's smile. It was genuine, charming, and Harry thought maybe a bit flirtatious. Harry didn't take much stock in the flirtatious part as that seemed to be just a part of Dean's nature, and from what he could tell, any flirting with men was completely unintentional on Dean's part. He certainly seemed to be exclusively into women. No, what threw Harry was Dean looked at him with no small degree of respect. He thought back to just a few days ago, overhearing Dean telling Sam that Harry was almost broken. Harry smirked.

…

Harry went back to his potion, alone this time. It was going to have to simmer overnight since he wasn't making it on a new moon, which ultimately was a good thing since Harry was having trouble remembering the last few ingredients. He thought it fortunate that he had learned this potion sixth year when he had Slughorn instead of Snape. If it was Snape who taught him it, Harry probably wouldn't remember how to make it. Probably would have never made it correctly in the first place.

Come to think of it, Harry was surprised how many potions he did remember.

Dean said goodnight second, though instead of going to bed, he went down to the basement. Probably to brood some. Maybe hang out in the supernatural panic room Bobby apparently had. If his routine remained true from their last visit to Bobby's, then he would drink, alone, and only stumble back upstairs when he had had enough to forget what he was brooding about in the first place.
It was late by the time Harry finished with the potion for the day. He cleaned up and piled his things into an organised heap on the counter. He didn't leave the kitchen, though. Instead of going to bed, he sat back down at the table and pulled out the Marauder's Map from his pouch.

"I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," he whispered, then lit his wand to see better.

He found Madam Pomfrey first, awake and in the hospital wing. There were several people still there who were most likely injured in battle. At first, Madam Pomfrey had to use several empty classrooms to accommodate everyone, but now it was back down to just the hospital wing.

Next, he found Hagrid, who was in Slughorn's office with the professor. They were probably drinking. Harry wondered if they ever discussed him and drunkenly sung laments. He felt a pang of guilt at remembering that Hagrid saw him die.

He closed his eyes tightly and had to shake his head to get the memory to release him.

He watched on as the house elves travelled the castle, probably cleaning, as McGonagall flittered between the headmaster's office and her original quarters, as Peeves bounced around the second floor's women toilets, most likely terrorising Moaning Myrtle, and as the stairs became unsettled and moved.

It was probably late there too. Harry could just picture it. Hell, almost smell it. Could almost hear his own footsteps echoing around empty hallways.

"Ain't that a little creepy?" came a voice, making Harry jump.

Bobby.

"Pardon?"

"That," Bobby jutted his chin to Harry's map. He wheeled all the way into the room and stopped across from Harry at the table, removing the glasses and bottle he had stuck between his legs to set them on the table. "Watchin' them."

"I don't know," Harry answered. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Well, I think it's creepy," Bobby said with a finality in his voice. He poured two drinks of his brew and pushed one to Harry. "Put it away, boy."

Harry huffed, but pointing his wand all the same, mumbled, "Mischief managed," then Nox his wand.

After the map was safely in his pouch, Bobby spoke again. "Heard you had a rough morning."

Harry's hands came to the table to play with the glass offered to him, but he didn't take a sip. Drinking Bobby's alcohol took some gearing up for, he was learning. "I apologise if I woke you."

"Woke me?" Bobby sniffed. "I think you woke the whole damn town."

Harry felt as though he probably should have been embarrassed, but he really wasn't. So, he just shrugged and said, "I don't like things in my head."

"Yeah, we got that."

They sat in silence for a while, but it was awkward for Harry; he didn't know what Bobby wanted. Harry finally braved taking a sip just to have something to do, and it was just as horrible as the first
time he had it. He was proud he didn't make a face. The second sip was easier, and it wasn't until the third that Harry realised he hadn't done something he should have done hours ago. "Oh, god, Bobby… er… I'm sorry about your inventory. Y'know, with the duel."

Bobby waved a hand. "Quit apologising for crap. Cas's been out there cleaning it up anyhow."

"What?" Harry frowned. "Oh. I should've helped him."

"Don't worry 'bout it," Bobby dismissed again then said pointedly, "He's not the one who needs sleep."

Ah, so that was the reason Bobby was sitting with him. Why couldn't they leave him alone? He wasn't doing anybody any harm. They didn't need his help at the moment. They already assessed him, evaluated him, gauged his bloody usefulness. Sure, he wouldn't be as useful if he was sleep deprived, but he was working on that bit. Hello, Dreamless Sleep, simmering behind him.

When Harry didn't say anything, Bobby grunted. "You ain't no use to anybody without sleep."

"Really?" Harry said coldly, causing Bobby to raise an eyebrow. "How shocking… and what a waste that I've spent all day making soup."

"Don't get smart with me, son. We're just worried 'bout ya."

"No," Harry corrected, becoming angry. "You're worried about the functionality of your latest apocalyptic investment. Well, I assure you, I'm fine and still useful, and I will remain that way if everyone could just leave me alone."

With that, he rose and stomped out of the kitchen. It was only the refusal to appear like a two-year-old that kept him from slamming the guest bedroom's door when he got there.

He paced, not quite sure what to do with himself. He was a whirlwind of emotions. Honestly, what a crappy day. What a crappy couple of weeks. What a crappy year!

His hand came up to his side to stroke his ribs the way that had become habit, and he felt a little soreness from his new tattoo. Cas healed it along with everything else, but the skin was still a little raw.

He had a tattoo.

Harry grunted, shoving his hands in his hair.

He felt like he was ripping from the seams.

He felt like screaming.

The little bit of excitement and glee he got from the duel was long gone, and Harry currently felt like he would never feel it again. He hardly dared he actually felt it in the first place because it surely didn't feel like he was capable of such emotions now.

He was so confused, so wrung tight, and felt like a yo-yo going up and down. He felt like he might explode. It didn't make sense. None of it was making sense. Why was he here? Why wasn't he clearer when he died? A clear, "Take me home," or, "Take me to my parents," or anything like that. Anything else.
It was like he wanted something else to pick for him. How cowardly.

Why couldn't he had been more decisive? Merlin, why was he here? Why did it have to be this world, this universe, with another goddamn war? He was not where he was supposed to be, wasn't with the people he was supposed to be with, and his friends didn't even know he needed them to come and get him. He'd do anything to go back. Even if it meant facing Voldemort again.

He sat on the bed, elbows on his knees with his hands still in his hair. He was pretty sure he made some kind of wounded sound, but he didn't care.

He was so tired, and he would really, really like to wake up now.

... 

He didn't sleep.

He mostly paced. He laid down a couple of times, but as soon as he felt like he was drifting off, his whole body would jolt him wide awake. Not that he complained.

As the sun started to come up, Harry looked out the window and wasn't entirely surprised to see that Cas was standing out on the lawn. Just... standing. Back to the house, head slightly tilted, and he looked to be contemplating the sky.

Harry left him to it, keeping the curtains open and sitting on the bed.

Harry thought of people he used during his war, mind playing over things like when Harry questioned Ollivander before he had time to rest, or convincing Griphook to rob his own bank and betray the goblins, or just showing up to Xenophilius' house and expecting loyalty and aid and giving nothing in return.

Well... he rather thought he was giving a world free from Voldemort in return, but that wasn't really his doing either, was it? Harry was a pawn that had to be sacrificed - his friends freed the wizardry world.

Still.

If someone had just popped up in the Forest of Dean with significant power that could help in defeating Voldemort, Harry would have tried everything to convince them to help. He understood. Really, he did. He meant what he said to Dean as well, that he'd do it if nothing else so no one else had to. Dean, Sam, and Bobby were just muggles, for Merlin's sake. It was just frustrating because he didn't want their war to be the focus of all his attention.

He didn't think he could manage it even if he did want that.

He stayed in the room for most of the morning. His potion wouldn't be ready for the next step until the afternoon at any rate. No one bothered him. He could hear them, soft voices floating through the cracks of the door, sounds of footsteps, even heard the microwave at one point. By the time he did emerge from the guest room, he felt a lot calmer than the night before, albeit exhausted.

It turned into another long day.

He stayed in a t-shirt and found he was getting comfortable enough with the others to not think much of it. They each at different times within the last couple of weeks eyed the I must not tell lies on his hand that Harry usually hid by wearing his long-sleeved shirts, and each time Harry said, "Don't ask." So, they didn't.
He was back at the kitchen table, finishing up the Dreamless Sleep. Cas had spent the day running errands for Bobby, checking out possible magical objects and bringing back the more powerful ones. Dean and Sam agreed to spend a couple days at Bobby's before they start following up some of Bobby's leads then spent the rest of the day helping Bobby with research.

Harry spent the day staying by himself, out of the way, and working on his potion, immensely pleased with it.

That was what he did. He brewed. Thought about brewing. Focused on brewing.

It took him a long time to remember one of the last ingredients, pearl dust. It was dark, getting late when Harry finally finished. He uncorked the vials and separated the potion out, happy it turned out the colour he remembered the potion being. Satisfied, Harry pocketed the vials, washed out the cauldron, and packed up the leftover ingredients. He knew Bobby would want to store them himself, had some kind of personal system, so Harry left them neatly on the table for him.

He looked over into the study. Bobby and Sam were both reading, fully into their research, Cas was studying some necklace he picked up in Brazil or so Harry thought he overheard, but Dean was nowhere to be found. Curious, Harry walked out into the hallway and looked into some of the other rooms. Through a window, he could see Dean out on the porch.

Harry didn't want to disturb the man, but it didn't look like Dean was doing anything but sitting with his ankles crossed on the wooden railing, looking out into the night.

If he was honest, the house was a little stuffy anyway, and he'd take sitting in silence with Dean than being roped into researching, or answering another inevitable question about his magic, or asked if he was okay. If he was pegging Dean right, Dean wouldn't do that, and he should probably say goodnight to someone, so they didn't come looking for him. Or think he was mad at them. He wasn't, not really. He understood, and he should speak to one of them at least. So, Harry grabbed his jacket and went outside.

"Hey," he greeted.

"Yo," Dean acknowledged, but he didn't look over. He had a glass of Bobby's drink in one hand and his expression was heavy.

"Alright?" Harry asked, kicking himself a little at his own hypocrisy of not wanting to be asked that.

The question seemed to pull Dean from his thoughts, and he looked over at Harry and blinked a couple times. Then he sighed and rubbed his eyes with his free hand. "Yeah. Just fine."

"I'm guessing the things Cas brought back aren't what we're looking for?"

Dean snorted, dropping his hand. "Man, nowhere close. I swear to god, I wouldn't be surprised if they stock up on waffles with Jesus' face on 'em."

Harry huff a laugh, small and not really there, and sat in the lawn chair across from him pushed up against the house. "As long as there's grape jelly. I can't stand the strawberry kind."

"Jelly on waffles? That's just nasty."

"Well, what do you put on them?"

"Syrup, you heathen. Syrup, whip cream, and powder sugar. That's a waffle."
"Can it be chocolate syrup?"

"Now you're talkin'," Dean said and tossed Harry a grin.

Harry hummed and looked out over Bobby's front lawn. He liked Dean like this, more open and at ease, not complaining or brooding. Not sending Harry little-worried looks or barking an order. In fact, now that Harry thought about it, he hadn't looked at Harry with that concerned look since he killed the Whore. He wondered if Dean was starting to think Harry could hold his own. If the respect he showed him after the duel with Cas was anything to go by, Harry guessed he was.

Perhaps it also helped that he didn't look like 'death eating on a cracker', Bobby's words, so much anymore. He was even starting to get some colour back. Though, his reflection today didn't really show any of that progress.

"You done with that potion?" Dean asked.

Harry nodded and pulled out a vial to show him.

"Dude, it's purple," Dean commented, stretching an arm to take the vial from Harry to look at it.

"Yes," Harry agreed, "and it should taste purple too."

"Purple's not a taste," Dean raised an eyebrow.

Harry shrugged. "Best I can describe it."

"Cas looked at this last night," Dean said, turning the vial in his hand. "He said he doesn't think any of us should drink this. Said it has a lot of addictive shit in it."

Harry hummed again, taking the vial back. "Sure. I think most sleeping drugs or pills can be addictive."

"Maybe you shouldn't drink it then."

Harry gave Dean a sharp look, and Dean put up his hand in surrender.

"Or do - your choice."

"Thank you," Harry rolled his eyes and pocketed the vial once more, "for allowing me the basic human courtesy of free will."

Dean chuckled. "Just don't come crawling to me when you become a druggy."

"Out of all the things out there to get addicted to, dreamless sleep seems rather mild."

"I hear that," Dean agreed, tipping back his whiskey and gulping it down. "But I ain't drinking anything with beetle eyes in it."

Harry gave a small laugh. "Beetle eyes are nothing. You should see half the stuff I've had to use in Potions."

Dean made a face. "No, thanks. Why does magic have to come with gross shit," he then mumbled, and Harry didn't answer, figuring it was a rhetorical question.

They fell into a comfortable silence, and Harry relaxed back into his seat. It was a little chilly out, but nothing compared to what he was used to. Harry let his mind wander some, thinking about the
weather at Hogwarts, about how the weather was there at the moment, being spring there and autumn here. He thought about his map and who might be at Hogwarts, if the repairs had started, if the Room of Requirement survived.

"What you said," Dean began, bringing Harry back to this world, "about destiny and choices…"

Harry furrowed his brows. "I don't remember what I said."

"That you thought you were making your own choices, but you still ended up fated or whatever."

"Oh," Harry remembered. "What about it?"

"Do you really think that? That your choices didn't matter in the end?"

Harry sighed and took off his glasses to fiddle with them, giving his hands something to do. "It's not that. I know my choices mattered. They mattered a lot. Even with the prophecy over my head. I mean… not even prophecies mean anything unless you make them mean something."

"But it still came true," Dean pointed out.

"Only because Voldemort made it happen."

"And you did."

Harry sighed again and put his glasses back on. When he looked over at Dean, he found Dean watching him intensely. Like he really needed Harry's answer. Like Harry's answer was actually going to decide his fate. Like Harry's answer might be the key to make or break something.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Harry admitted quietly.

Though Dean's expression didn't change, his eyes seemed to soften. "I don't know what I want you to say either."

They gazed at one another for a moment longer, and Harry realised that Dean was confiding in him. Trusting Harry with the knowledge that Dean was debating fate and wanting Harry's opinion. Truly, admitting one was confused about fate wasn't exactly a ground-breaking secret, but still. Dean was confiding in him, and Harry wasn't sure what to make of it. On one hand, that was a good thing when it came to being a team, the whole trust building thing, but on the other hand, it meant they were, somehow, getting closer? No, forming a stronger alliance.

Either way, to Harry, that felt like getting further away from home.

He blinked out of the moment and shrugged, looking away. "Dumbledore - one of my mentors - said once that we can't choose our fate, but we can choose others."

"What does that mean?" Dean asked.

"I… am never quite sure when it comes to Dumbledore."

Dean let what could have been a small chuckle and said, "Well, I think I need another drink - to fulfil my fate of getting drunk tonight."

Harry thought that sounded like a good plan, only it wouldn't be alcohol he would be drinking.

They went back inside then, and Harry asked Dean to tell the others he said goodnight. He went upstairs, got in his most comfortable night clothes, and happily took a vial of Dreamless Sleep.
When Harry woke up, there were raised voices in the house again, but this time, it wasn't Harry's. At first, Harry wasn't quite sure what had woken him up. He felt great, though. Really great. His Dreamless Sleep had worked like a charm, and he felt very rested, very comfortable, and he very much wanted to still be asleep. Then he heard it. The voices were muffled and sounded like they were coming from downstairs.

Worried about what was going on, Harry put on his glasses, grabbed his wand, and cautiously made his way to the study.

"- all you've ever done is run away!" came Dean's deep voice.

"And I was wrong, every single time I did!" Sam's voice replied. There was a pause, then "Just... we're working on it, Dean. You gotta give us some time."

"Oh, really? Having Cas fly around collecting random junk isn't a plan, Sam. We've got nothing - and you know it."

It was too early for this, Harry decided and satisfied there was no immediate threat, changed his direction to head into the kitchen instead.

"You ain't exactly helping," Bobby said next as Harry padded into the next room. He glimpsed inside the study to find Bobby at his desk, Sam seated in front of it, Cas leaning against the wall by the doorframe separating the study and kitchen, and Dean appeared to be pacing.

"What do you want to do, Dean?" Sam asked, obviously frustrated. "What, say yes? Let yourself become Michael's sock-puppet?"

Harry opened a cabinet door and pulled down a drinking glass.

"If it comes to it. Maybe."

He walked over to the sink and began pouring himself some water. He thought maybe Bobby had water bottles somewhere, but this would only take a minute anyway.

"How can you even say that?! Giving yourself over is not an option!"

Harry stayed by the sink, gulping his water and looking out the window. The sun was up, he noticed, and was pretty high in the sky. He wondered what time it was.

"Of course it's an option, Sam. And I'm starting to think it's the only option."

His toes were cold, he noticed as well, having come down with his feet bare.

"We have Harry, Dean."

And yep, there it was.

"Harry's not strong enough, Sam. He can't take on Lucifer, not to mention Michael too, and walk away."

He finished his water, set the glass in the sink, and turned to walk into the study.

"Harry said there are always ways to become more powerful. We just need to find it."
"Which brings us right back to the random junk," Harry said in lieu of a greeting. "But it's good to clear the air, get out all those nasty feelings, reassure yourselves that everything's fine because good ol' brave Gryffindor Harry has got it covered. A nice morning ritual, though I'm more used to reading it in the Daily Prophet. I, for one, love the feeling of the entire world resting on my shoulders. It's been a few weeks since someone has told me I'm the only hope. Really, it's been too long."

The silence that followed his words was heavy until Dean broke it by barking a laugh - that wasn't entirely without bitterness, Harry noted.

"Smartass," Bobby mumbled.

"Sorry if we woke you," Sam apologised, looking a little sheepish.

Harry sighed and crossed over to sit on the cot that was pushed up against the bay windows. He was pretty sure Bobby slept on it. "I can't be your only shot, mate. I don't know who or what brought me here, but I'm not some miracle coyly disguised under round glasses."

"I know," Sam rushed to say, "and I don't mean to, uh, put this all on you. It's on all of us. We're in this together."

"We've made some headway," Cas said, glaring at Dean. "We have leads."

Dean looked toward the ceiling, obviously at the end of his rope, and took a deep breath before he looked at Harry. "How'd your purple milkshake go?"

"Fine," Harry answered.

"You look better than we've seen you yet," Bobby commented.

"Yes," Cas agreed, squinting at him. "Did that potion have a healing quality I missed?"

Harry shook his head. "Sleep is a healing quality in and of itself, isn't it?"

"Damn," Dean said. "You really needed it."

"Yeah, you've been asleep for about fourteen hours," Sam said, nodding toward the clock on the wall. It was already the afternoon, Harry was surprised to see. "We were beginning to wonder if your potion put you under an endless sleep instead or something."

Harry opened his mouth to speak, probably say no but he did know a potion for that, but all thoughts were abruptly cut off as Harry's magic whipped out, a disturbance in the air setting off alarm bells in Harry. Cas hissed and clutched his head, clearly feeling it as well. Harry was on his feet immediately, wand at the ready.

"Cas, you okay?" Sam asked.

"No," Cas answered simply.

"Something's happened," Harry put in, spinning where he stood, still sensing the disturbance.

"Where?" Dean and Sam asked at the same time.

"You can feel it?" Cas stepped toward Harry.

Harry nodded. The next thing he knew, Cas was reaching for him, and a horrible sensation came over Harry. It was that split-second stomach dropping feeling when he leaned back too far in a chair
and was sure he was going to fall over - or die for all the sensation was worth. Or the stomach-lurching feeling he would get when his broom dropped too far, too fast. Only, it was much worse than either.

Harry sucked in a huge breath and blinked, taking in his new surroundings.

Cas had flown them somewhere, he realised.

Cas and Harry were somewhere else entirely - where the source of the disturbance was.

They stood in a flattened forest, the trees looking like they had been pushed down, and all of them facing away from a certain centre point he could barely make out. It was, frankly, unsettling. Harry wanted to ask where they were, why Cas brought him along, and also, how dare he just grab Harry and fly like that.

When he opened his mouth, what came out was, "Cas… I'm not wearing shoes."

"You and I both know you can solve that problem yourself," Cas responded, not even bothering to look at Harry.

"Well… sure, but still." Harry waved his wand over his feet to cast a charm to protect them, then another to make it feel like he was wearing shoes because it was simply uncomfortable not to. He then refocused on where they were and cast a detection spell. It told him nothing. "What is it?" he asked as he followed Cas to the centre of the flattened trees.

"A soul has been brought back to earth," Cas answered.

"Like this?" Harry asked. "Bit dramatic, isn't it? Why didn't I get knocked down trees?"

He eyed the roots of one tree that was ripped from the ground. There was fog around them, or smoke, from whatever supernatural event had happened. The whole area was creepy.

"You weren't reaped from here," said Cas

"Reaped?"

"There," Cas announced.

Harry followed his line of sight. A small area of the ground was moving, like something was crawling underneath it. Or a million little buggy somethings. He wrinkled his nose, "Oh, ew."

"Harry!" Cas yelled in warning before pushing him aside.

A bald man in a suit had joined them out of nowhere with what Harry recognised as an angel blade. Cas' own dropped down into his hand, and the two began to fight.

Harry swore under his breath, not sure what to do. After a few moments of watching the two struggle, an opening presented itself, and Harry aimed at the newcomer and yelled, "Everte Statum!"

The man was pushed back. He looked at Harry, agape. Cas took the opportunity, throwing his blade and hitting the man square in the chest. The man screamed, and an impossibly bright white light shone through the man's eyes, mouth, ears, everywhere, until a noticeable *click* in the atmosphere pushed out around them. The man fell down - dead.

The man was an angel. Had to be.
Harry desperately hoped he made the right choice in helping Cas. Even if it meant killing an angel.

Harry barely got the chance to appreciate an angel death - or to be horrified by it, he didn't know which. Another man in a suit appeared and approached Harry, blade out, eyeing him critically.

Now was the time to try the different sort of spells, Harry thought. See how he stood against an angel in real, active combat. "Defodio!"

The spell hit the man on the shoulder, breaking it into chunks that fell to the ground. Blood and the white bright light poured from the wound, and the man cried out. Harry felt like crying out too - he had no idea the spell would do that.

He had the wild, unsettling urge to apologise to the man when Cas charged at him, blade in hand, and the man raised his uninjured arm to defend himself.

Right, enemy.

Harry bit his lip, gulped, then pointed his wand. "Petrificus Totalus!"

The man's arms snapped to his sides as he froze momentarily, and Cas stabbed him. The man was still too frozen by Harry's spell to cry out again, but he died the same way as the other man, with that white bright light.

Did Cas really have to kill them? Wouldn't it just be enough to restrain? Harry forced himself to remember what Lupin told him about self-defence and how Expelliarmus had become Harry's signature move. That him not wanting to kill caused unnecessary problems. Sometimes self-defence wasn't pretty, right? They did what they had to do.

Cas looked over at Harry and gave him a sharp nod, a thanks for the help, before swiftly turning and walking back to the centre of the trees.

"Angels, then?" Harry wanted to confirm, jogging to keep up with him.

"Yes," Cas answered. He squatted and reached into the ground where it was squirming, for lack of description. When he pulled his arm back out, he was holding onto a human wrist.

"Bloody hell," Harry breathed, crouching to help pull the body out. It - he - was alive, but unconscious.

"Take him back to Bobby's," Cas said sternly. "I'll remove any trace of you."

"Okay," Harry agreed then added sensibly, "but don't stay long. The angels will find out about me eventually, and more could be on the way." And don't kill any of them, he didn't say.

Cas gave him another sharp nod and helped get the man's shoes free from the earth.

Nearby, Harry thought he heard the hoot of an owl, and through the mist and smoke and grey clouds, thought he saw a sliver of white.

He shook his head and made himself focus.

Harry wrapped his arms around the unconscious man's waist, securing his hold, then picturing Bobby's study, Apparated.

With a crack, Harry was back at Bobby's, tripping with the weight of the man in his arms. "Hello?" he called.
"Boys!" Bobby yelled from behind Harry.

Sam and Dean came running from the kitchen. They grabbed either side of the unconscious man and laid him out on the cot.

"Where's Cas?" Bobby asked, wheeling his chair up to them.

"Cleaning the area of my magic. There were a couple of angels there."

"Who's this?"

Harry shrugged. He looked over at Sam and Dean, but they were both staring down at the man with a flabbergast expression.

"He's our brother," Sam said softly.

Harry frowned, looking back at the man covered in dirt and mud. He was messy, but his face was easily recognisable. There was no reason to assume Sam was mistaken.

"Wait a minute, your brother?" Bobby asked. "Adam?"

"Harry, what the hell?" Dean asked, turning to Harry.

Harry shrugged again. "Don't ask me."

This was odd. He was thrown. Hadn't he just woken up? Maybe something did go wrong with the Dreamless Sleep, and he was stuck in some weird dream.

Fluttering wings sounded next and Cas appeared, tossing the angel blades he undoubtedly took from the angels they killed onto Bobby's desk. "We need to hide him," he announced to the room, "and you," he added to Harry.

He came between Harry and the man and placed a hand on both their chests. Extreme pressure curled around Harry's ribs along with a soft glowing light and Harry sucked in a sharp breath, stumbling back when he was released.

It seemed to have woken up the man, Adam, as well.

"What was that?" Harry accused.

Adam scrambled back on the cot. "Where am I?" he asked, voice rough.

"It's okay," Sam said to Adam. "Just relax, you're safe."

"Who the hell are you?"

There was a beat where it seemed everyone took a moment to get a grasp on the situation, and Harry took another step back. The others seemed ready and willing to jump on this new development, but Harry wasn't.

"Well..." Dean opened. He shot Cas a look clearly conveying he was speaking to him too. "You're going to find this a little -... a lot crazy, but we're actually your brothers." Dean gestured toward himself and Sam.

Cas stiffened. This obviously wasn't good.
"It's the truth," Sam added. "John Winchester was our father too. See, I'm Sam -"

"Yeah, and I'm sure that's Dean," Adam interrupted with a nod to the other Winchester. "I know who you are."

Harry took a few more steps back, not liking the look on Adam's face.

This was a family matter, after all. Once again, the brothers were in a situation where they didn't have to introduce themselves and putting aside how curious it was that they had to introduce themselves to their brother anyway and that Adam had apparently been brought back to life, Harry decided this particular issue didn't involve him.

"How?" Sam asked.

"They warned me about you," Adam answered.

"Who did?" Dean asked this time, shoulders tensing.

"The angels."

Harry and the others exchanged glances, silently conversing. This wasn't a good thing at all, and there probably wasn't an easy solution.

This definitely didn't involve Harry.

"Now, where the hell is Zachariah?!" Adam demanded.

"Zachariah?" Harry asked. He looked at the brothers. "You've mentioned him. He's the one that removed your lungs once, isn't he? The one who's been literally using time to try to manipulate you both?"

"That's the one," Dean snarled.

This absolutely, definitely didn't involve Harry.

"Okay - okay," Sam tried, raising his hands. "Let's regroup here. I think Adam should get cleaned up, and we'll talk about this. Figure out what happened."

It was eerily familiar from when Harry arrived in this world, and it made Harry's blood run a little cold.

Adam was seething, glaring at the five of them. Bobby was frowning. Cas was squinting again. Harry… really wished he had on shoes.

"I'm going to go and clean up too," Harry announced, backing out of the room. "Y'know… give you some space? Or something."

He turned and hurried away, but he didn't get far before Dean called out for him to wait and followed him into the hallway. "Harry, you're just as much a part of this as we are," he said, correctly interpreting the intention behind Harry's retreat.

Harry had one foot on the stairs already and chewed his lip a little, avoiding looking at him. "Yeah, I don't think I am."

"You are," Dean pressed, stepping up in Harry's space and looking down at him. He waited until Harry made eye contact to speak again. "The angels are up to something. You said there were angels
there - they saw you."

"And we killed them," Harry suppressed a wince. "It's not like they can skip off to Michael, or Zachariah, and tell him a wizard is on the loose."

Dean studied him a moment, then said, "Whatever is going on, we could use your help."

Harry sighed, closing his eyes. "Are you telling me or asking me?"

When there wasn't an answer, he opened his eyes again, and it seemed Dean was waiting for just that before answering firmly, "Asking."

It was Harry's turn to study Dean. He searched his eyes, his face, and though Harry knew the determination and stubbornness he saw there could be turned against him, this time, it was there for him. Forcing Dean to let Harry bow out of this one if he wanted. It was sincere.

Oh, Merlin help him.

"Fine," Harry snapped. "Bloody fine! I'll help. But I'm not losing my lungs, and I refuse to travel through time."

Dean's lips quirked into a smirk. "Deal."

"Am I to take it my ribs are marked now, too? That's what that was, right?"

Dean nodded. "I'll show you the x-rays later. The marks are insane."

Harry didn't respond, just continued up the stairs, frustrated and tense. The marks were meant to… to, what was it? Hide him from angels? Whatever.

He should never have come downstairs in the first place.

..."T"When Harry came back downstairs, donned in jeans and a plain jumper, it was obvious they were waiting for him. Adam was clean now, sitting on the cot with a glass of water, looking thoroughly impatient. Bobby was next to him in his wheelchair, looking calm. Sam was leaned against Bobby's desk, looking anxious. Cas was leaning against the wall by the hallway with such a cloud of dread around him, it made Harry do a double-take, and Dean was sitting backward in a chair close to Adam.

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"Took you long enough. Harry, right?" Adam glared. "Can we hurry this up now?"

Harry crossed the room hesitantly, coming to lean against the doorframe to the kitchen. Clearly, the others already got the introductions out of the way.

Dean looked Harry up and down, seemingly satisfied, then turned to Adam. "Well, you wanted to get started. So, why don't you just tell us everything? Start from the beginning."

Adam's face was hard, and there was no underlying affection in his glare. They may have been brothers, but they didn't know each other. They weren't, for lack of better term, family.

Adam looked around the room, as though trying to find a way out of this, then with an annoyed huff, he said, "Well, uh, I was dead and in Heaven… except it -" he deflated a little, eyes glazing over. "It, uh, kind of looked like my prom, and I was making out with this girl. Her name was Kristin McGee." A small smile played on his lips.
"Yeah, that sounds like Heaven," Dean nodded, and Harry couldn't tell if he was serious or not. "Did you get to third base?"

Sam cleared his throat loudly, shooting Dean an annoyed expression while he crossed his arms. "Just, uh… just keep going."

"Well," Adam continued, "these angels - they popped out of nowhere, and they tell me that I'm chosen."

"Of course you are," Harry said flatly. Because, of course he was.

"To save the world," Adam answered, tone carrying with it the fortitude a statement like that deserved.

"Right, mhm, yep," Harry said, crossing his own arms.

He shared a loaded look with Dean, then Dean turned back to Adam and asked, "How you gonna do that?"

Adam, who didn't seem to appreciate Harry's attitude, said, "Oh, me and some archangel are going to kill the Devil."

"What archangel?" Dean asked, voice carefully not conveying anything. Harry probably wouldn't have noticed the subtle difference in his tone if he wasn't spending every day with the man.

"Michael," Adam answer simply. "I'm his, uh, sword or vessel or something, I don't know."

"Well, that's insane."

"Not necessarily," Cas spoke up.

"How do you mean?" Dean asked, turning around at the waist to face Cas.

"Maybe they're moving on from you, Dean," Cas answered, and the memory Dean's and the others' argument earlier helpfully made itself known in Harry's brain.

Harry's instinct was right - this wasn't good at all.

"That doesn't make sense," Dean countered.

"He's John Winchester's bloodline - Sam's brother. It's not perfect, but it's possible."

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Dean groaned, turning back around in his chair.

"Why would they do this?" Sam asked Cas in a tight voice.

"Maybe they're desperate," Cas offered. "Maybe it's a trick." He fixed the back of Dean's head with a scowl. "Maybe they wrongly assumed Dean would be brave enough to continue to withstand them."

"Alright, you know what? Blow me, Cas," Dean snapped back.

"Look," Sam cut in, "no way. After everything that's happened? All that crap about destiny - suddenly the angels have a plan b? Does that smell right to anybody?"
"You know," Adam said, setting his glass of water down on the floor, "this has been a really moving family reunion, but, uh, I got a thing, so -"

"Wait," Harry said, straightening. "Sam's right, and I think Cas is, too - this could be a trick. You don't have to decide anything right now, one way or another, and it would be in everyone's best interest if you knew all the facts, wouldn't it?"

"I think I have all the info I need, thanks," Adam sneered, standing.

"Whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa, no, no, wait, sit down," Sam said, standing as well. "Just listen to us." Adam stared at him, and when he didn't say anything, Sam added a loaded, "Please."

It took a few moments, but then Adam sighed, mumbled what sounded like an 'it's unbelievable' under his breath, and sat back down.

"Now, Adam… the angels are lying to you," Sam told him, and Harry could see the desperation in him. "They're full of crap."

Adam scoffed. "Yeah, I don't think so."

"Really?" Sam asked. "Why not?"

"Um, 'cause they're angels," Adam said sardonically.

Harry and the others exchanged another look, one that held a dubious acceptance of Adam's answer.

Harry, for his part, meant what he said to Paul back in the Whore's town. He never really gave God and angels and the like much thought. The Dursleys weren't religious, not really. They went to Christmas Mass and subscribed to the usual Christian beliefs, but Harry wasn't raised that way. They never let Harry go with them to church, and Harry, to them, was simply a horrible freak all the way around that they didn't bother to try to instil some sort of religious rules in him or anything. At least, not after he started exhibiting magic.

Also, to Harry, the fact that angels were real here, and, to his knowledge, weren't in his world, meant that there was a possibility that angels were just creatures - or, like Harry, beings with power that muggles didn't have. That they weren't some divine all-answering things that were one degree away from what created… everything.

But Harry didn't like to think about or debate it in his mind too much. Because there was a possibility that his thoughts were wrong. Because there really may be a God - a God that flung him here to continue to be the brunt of effort to save a world. Because if that was true, he was angry. Furious. A little sick. Because he felt like he couldn't breathe at the thought. Because - because if God - God, The God, old testament-tower of Babel-burning bush-ten commandments-God, was real, then what exactly was Harry supposed to do?

How exactly was he supposed to cope?

So that was put under the avoidance cap in his mind, next to how one was supposed to spend forty years in Hell and stay sane, and the memories of Dylan and Paul, and the streak of green that burst from his wand, and basically everything else that had to do with, well, everything.

"They tell you they were going to roast half the planet?" Sam asked, getting Harry's attention again.

"They said the fight might get pretty hairy, but it is the Devil, right? So, we got to stop him," Adam answered.
"Yeah," Sam agreed, "but there's another way."

Harry clenched his jaw.

"Great," Adam said. "What is it?"

"Well, we're working on the power of love," Dean answered, voice positively dripping with sarcasm. Harry tried not to take it personally, considering what he told them about the prophecy and potential power Harry had that Voldemort didn't.

Love.

It was a ridiculous thought.

"How's that going?" Adam asked, voice matching Dean's.

"Mm, not good."

"Look, Adam…" Sam sighed, stopping Dean from going any further. "You don't know me from a hole in the wall, I know, but… I'm begging you. Please. Just trust me. Give me some time."

"Give me one good reason," Adam countered.

The mood in the room abruptly soured.

"You got no right to say that to me," Adam spoke, quiet but sharp.

"You're still John's boy," Bobby put in.

"No, John Winchester was some guy who took me to a baseball game once a year. I didn't have a dad," Adam snapped at Bobby. He looked back at Sam and added, "So, we may be blood, but we are *not* family. My mom is my family, and if I do my job, I get to see her again. So, no offence, but she's the one I give a rat's ass about - not you."

Feeling like an interloper and desperately wanting to end the heavy silence that followed Adam's declaration before it stretched, Harry asked, "If?"

"What?" Adam snapped, eyes hard.

"You said 'if'. If you do your job, you get to see her again. So, they have her? The angels have your mum?"

Adam's nostrils flared a little. "She's in Heaven."

Harry frowned. "Weren't you as well? You weren't with her?"

Adam stared at Harry a moment, then shook his head.

"When the angels talked to you, who brought up your mum first? Them or you?"

"Them," Adam said tightly.

Harry nodded, thinking quickly. "Alright. Well. Like Sam said, you don't know us, and honestly, I
don't know them very well either." Harry stepped forward, arms loose. "For all I know, they could be the real bad guys. But, I've seen them try to help - and save - other people. From my experience, bad guys don't do that. I reckon they might be alright.

"So, don't listen to them because they're them. Your brothers, or whatever. Listen for your mum. Because if they're right about angels, and if the angels are in position to already use her as leverage, then your mum might be in danger - and if she's in danger, you shouldn't go to the angels until you have your own leverage. Your own plan b."

"But they're angels," Adam said incredulously.

"So is Lucifer," Harry pointed out.

Adam opened his mouth to reply, froze, then snapped it shut, looking vaguely ill.

Yeah, Harry thought, agreeing with Adam's expression. He already missed his Dreamless Sleep.

…

Adam agreed to stay, for now. Bobby offered him some food, and he took Adam to the kitchen. Sam and Dean were next to Cas in an instant, beckoning Harry over.

Harry sighed but walked over anyway, completing the little square they had going.

"What do you think?" Sam asked, looking between Cas and Harry.

"He's not doing it," Dean spoke, voice deep.

"No one's doing it," Sam chastised, then gave Dean an odd look. He looked back at Cas and Harry briefly, as though trying to convey something, but it went right over Harry's head. "Uh… why don't we go downstairs?"

"To the basement?" Harry asked, confused.

"Yes," Cas immediately agreed. "We should talk privately."

"Uh huh," Dean said, clearly not believing them. "What are you going to do, Sammy? Lock me in the panic room?"

"Yes," Cas said. He reached out, grabbed Dean's arm, and they both disappeared.

"Wait, what?" Harry asked, dumbfounded. "You're locking him up? Why?"

Sam huffed. "I know Dean. Trust me. He's going to try to find a way to sneak out, say yes before Adam does."

Harry frowned. "I thought the whole point in," he gestured around the room where there were stacks of books, pages and pictures pinned to the walls, and objects with some power or another lying around, "was that no one says yes."

Sam nodded. "But you heard him earlier. He's giving up. After this - he won't let someone else take his place."

Harry pressed his lips together. He understood that, of course. If he was Dean, it wouldn't be a question… He wasn't, though, and he was starting to think that all the times his friends got frustrated with him for the whole 'hero' thing, they might have had - possibly, maybe - a point…
Cas returned in the next moment. "He's not happy, but he's locked in."

"Good," Sam sighed. He leaned over Harry to peek into the kitchen, which was more of a move for the angle than to actually see over Harry, the giant Sam was. "We need to keep an eye on Adam too."

"May I point out," Harry started with his voice low so as to not carry, "that if you want to win Adam's trust, locking Dean up under suspicion of wanting to do exactly what Adam wants to do probably isn't the best first step."

"You're right." Sam pushed a hand through his hair. "We'll have to make something up. Tell him Dean went out somewhere."

"And you think that'll work?" Harry asked, raising an eyebrow. "What if he sees Dean?"

"We'll keep him away from the panic room."

"What if he hears him? Dean could throw a fit or something."

"He won't," Sam declared. "He knows he's not in danger or anything. He trusts us."

"You just locked him up!" Harry whispered fiercely, incredulous. "Right now, I don't trust you!"

Sam levelled him with a flat look. "What do you want to do, Harry? Let him go? Hold his hand and go prancing off to Michael with him? Because if he gets out of there, that's exactly what he'll do."

"I don't prance," Harry shot back, annoyed.

"The question is," Cas interrupted, "what are we going to do now?"

The three of them turned to look into the kitchen where, Harry was slightly panicked to find, Adam was ignoring Bobby altogether and was leaning against the counter with his arms crossed, watching them.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you thinking there's something about the owl thing... I encourage you to keep thinking it ;)

The majority of spells are HP wiki ones -some are mine I WILL GET A LIST TOGETHER

Questions I'd love answered if 'ya' readers want: I'd love to know how Dean/Harry is going - if I'm doing it okay. It's supposed to be a slow thing, but some things have to change after the killing curse. Y'know?

And what of Harry's trauma slowly leaking through? Should I do something different? (SPOILER: Before anyone asks, he will break down eventually, but it will be okay and safe and Dean will be there to help make it okay and safe... that's later on though. But just a heads up.) Cas and Harry's duel and Harry's sass?

And hell, anything anyone wants to comment on - as long as it's friendly. I don't know if
I can handle trolls, to be honest.

Anyway. I really, really would love to know if I made anyone laugh at any point. I know this isn't a funny fic or anything, but I'd love to know if I made someone laugh or smile.
The Race to Michael

Chapter Summary

Harry, Sam, Cas, and Bobby try to get a handle on things, Dean sneaks out, Harry discovers Sioux Fall's nightlife, someone goes missing, Harry and Cas take on five angels, and Harry finally wakes up.

Chapter Notes

Hello! This chap is 63 pages O.O

Story reminder: their current plan of action for the apocalypse is Harry's suggestion of trying to obtain more power, mostly from powerful objects. Also, Harry had the whole single man tear thing going when he killed the Whore.

POTENTIAL TRIGGER WARNING: reference to self-harm and Harry has his first major PTSD flashback.

Disclaimer: I don't own these peeps, and the prose for Harry's PTSD flashbacks are taken verbatim from the JKR books except one sentence I'll clarify in endnotes and any typos.

The owl is not a PTSD thing.

There will also be mistakes and typos, but if anyone thinks of any they saw, please feel free to comment and correct me.

Spells I've made up:
Musculus instaurabo – muscle repair
Aqua Glaciem – produces ice
Celeritate Sanitatem – speed healing
Africa Sanationis – diagnose healing
Signationem Pellis – sealing of skin

THANK YOU ALL SO FUCKING MUCH! I'mma post this, then I'm going to go back to last chap and reply to everyone. Please, please continue commenting!! You guys inspire me and keep me going! I read them, just so you know, but I wait until next update to be sure to reply to everyone as best I can. :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
"Maybe we really should talk more privately," Harry suggested.

"Yeah," Sam agreed, and the three of them moved into the living room across the hallway, each casting wary eyes toward the kitchen as they went.

"First," Cas opened, "we need to keep Harry's real identity a secret, as a precaution."

"Please," Harry nodded. "If Michael gets Dean, he might find out about me, but at least with Adam, I can potentially keep my anonymity."

"Michael's not going to get either of them," Sam proclaimed.

"The odds still aren't good," Cas said. "It's just a preventive measure."

"Meanwhile, what are we going to do?" Harry rushed to ask to stop Sam from pushing the issue with
his apparent newfound aplomb. He didn't much care for whatever confidences Sam had; he didn't want to give the angels, or demons for that matter, any leverage of information on him. Zachariah sounded bloody sadistic, one angel was the bloody Devil, and Michael didn't sound much better than either. So, as far as Harry was concerned, he was perfectly happy to pretend to be muggle while Adam was around.

"I don't know," Sam sighed an answer to Harry's question, running a hand through his hair. "Dean's safe for now. We need to keep Adam here, try to convince him to come around, I guess."

"They have his mum," Harry reminded them. "He can't just abandon her, and we shouldn't ask him to. If we could get his mum back, we'd stand a better chance."

"She's in Heaven, Harry," Sam argued. "That would take literally bringing her back to life."

"Well, it's worked for four out of the five humans here."

"We don't know how you got here," Cas said, "and it was the angels that brought the others back. Not to mention, you would have to die to infiltrate Heaven, and even then, there's no guarantee of finding her then bringing her and you back to life again. Hers and Adam's best shot is with us defeating Michael and Lucifer, ending the apocalypse."

"Great," Harry rolled his eyes. "So, we're right back to square one - the most obvious and all-encompassing answer: end the apocalypse."

"Looks that way," Sam nodded. He looked out the window. "It's getting dark out. I don't think we can do much else for today, except what we've been doing. We still have to examine the things Cas got from that ancient temple in China."

"What about Dean?" Harry asked. "Are you seriously going to keep him locked up all night?"

"And all day tomorrow, and the next day, if I have to."

"That's ridiculous," Harry criticised. "What about food, water, the toilet?" The Dursleys had locked Harry away so many times, Harry knew the ends and outs of it. He didn't feel comfortable doing it to another person.

"We'll bring him food and water and let him have -"

"Toilet breaks?" Harry interrupted "Are you joking? Do you have any idea how demeaning that is - what it's like?"

"Actually, yeah," Sam snapped, face hard. "I know exactly what it's like because Dean did the same to me when I needed it."

Harry snapped his jaw shut, surprised.

Sam huffed and gave Harry's silence an approving nod before spinning around and leaving the room.

"Are they always like this?" Harry asked Cas.

"Yes," Cas answered. "You get used to it."

"Merlin help me if I do," Harry mumbled and exited the room as well. Instead of going back to the study or kitchen, Harry quietly snuck toward the laundry room where the door to the basement was. He peeked into the kitchen on his way and was glad to see Adam finally sitting at the table, not
Harry hadn't yet been down to the basement himself. He didn't really have any reason to. It was more of a place where Bobby used to tinker with tools and weapons that Dean now pretended to inspect and fiddle with when he was actually hiding away and brooding.

The wooden steps creaked under his weight, and the only light beside from the rapidly fading sun from the windows was a small lamp on a desk pushed against a corner. The basement was cluttered and looked as though a layer of dust should be coating everything, yet, like with everything else in Bobby's house, it was so often used that dust didn't get the chance to collect.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and turned - only to stop dead in his tracks, taken aback. Around the edge of the stairs toward the back of the basement was a large metal door, connected to a large cylindrical metal room, fading into the walls and stone of the house.

It was one thing to know Bobby had a supernatural panic room… it was another entirely to know Bobby had a supernatural panic room.

At that moment, Harry decided, Bobby was a genius.

Tentatively, Harry approached the big metal door.

"Dean?"

"Boy wonder," came Dean's echoing yet muffled voice. "Figured it'd be you to come snooping first."

"I'm not snooping," Harry said as he snooped closer.

There appeared to be what he guessed was a small window on the door with a metal cover that was slightly ajar. Harry carefully opened it all the way. Behind it was indeed a window to see inside, as well as bars that could possibly allow a small bottle through but nothing else. Inside Harry could see a cot, some metal shelves and cabinet, and a couple of desks with chairs. Dean was standing in the middle of the room, arms crossed, and he definitely didn't look happy.

"Bloody hell," Harry breathed, taking in the extensive rune protections carved in the walls and the metal pentagram shadowed on the floor.

Dean snorted and came to stand in front of the window, lifting his arms to rest on what Harry assumed was some kind of metal ledge underneath it. "You gonna be a good boy and open the door there?"

Harry frowned. "Are you going to be a good boy and stay away from Michael?"

"No can do."

Harry sighed and rubbed the back of his head. "Why? Why can't you just - I don't know. Slow down? Take a breath."

"Because Lucifer and the angels aren't slowing down. It's called the apocalypse, Harry. Not vacay."

"No, it's called a war," Harry scowled slightly. "It's called planning, strategy, gathering intelligence and reinforcements -"

Dean interrupted him by slamming his hand against the metal door, hard enough to make it rattle and
"The bang to echo loudly - but not enough to make Harry flinch. Dean seemed to notice and took an apparent calming breath. "We've been doing that for months."

"Try doing it for years," Harry said, unperturbed. Then, thinking of Voldemort and all the ways he was almost thwarted, added, "Try doing it your whole life."

Dean hung his head, visibly clenching his jaw for a moment. "Alright, Caesar," he looked up and glared at Harry. "Since you got that nice life-long résumé, what the hell would you do? Send an innocent kid off to Michael, buy a round of drinks, then cross your fingers for Storage Wars, the Church Edition?"

"No, I - what? No. I would do what I've been doing. Searching for answers and defending who I can, where I can. Though a drink does sound good at the moment," he added in a mumble.

"Well, too bad you ain't old enough here."

It was Harry's turn to glare. "According to the ID you made me, I am."

"Then grab a drink for all I care," Dean snapped, pushing off the door and walking deeper into the panic room. "Get shitfaced, have a party - I'm still not letting Michael take Adam."

"No one's going to let anyone do anything, alright? But unless you really want to spend all night down here, you need to come to your senses. Take a step back, mate, there's no reason to do anything rash just yet."

If he wasn't a little distracted by feeling like he was channelling the voice of Ron, he probably would have been a bit more cautious at Dean's expression. "I don't understand what you aren't gettin'," he said. "There isn't any stepping back. This is it! We're done. We're at the finish line, and there's nothing we can do about it. The angels have outplayed us time and again - they have the upper hand, they know they have the upper hand, and we got nothing."

"You have each other, you tosser. Bringing Adam back just proves the angels think they need Winchester vessels to fight. They won't fight otherwise. That gives us plenty of time to come up with something."

"There's nothing to come up with," Dean barked, sounding genuinely angry. "Our two best shots were God or a damn teenage wizard - and no offence, but a couple of magic tricks against archangels is like expecting popcorn to crack brick."

Harry let out a quiet breath through his nose, fists clenching and spine straightening in the thick silence that trailed after Dean's words. Dean seemed to notice the air around Harry changing and narrowed his eyes, calculating.

Evenly, Harry said, "I would be very careful, Dean. Everyone who has ever underestimated me has ended up worse for it."

Dean eyed him a little then shook his head. "New world, man. New universe, new bad guys, new rules, and let me go ahead and tell ya - not me, not Sam, not the angels, the demons, or even the freakin' boogeyman gives a shit about where you're from or what you've done. I can guarantee you half of what's on this planet is crap your worst nightmares can't create. If you want a chance in this world, I suggest you put on your big girl panties and grow up."

Anger boiled in Harry's gut, and he wanted to slam the window cover shut and stomp away. Maybe hex something. A few years ago, he would have - but he had grown. He wasn't anywhere near facing this kind of situation with a Dumbledore-zeal, but he had grown. He came down there with...
the objective of preventing any interspersed incarceration, and Dean trying to intimidate Harry wasn't going to deter him. Even if he just barely stopped himself from saying, *'I don't wear panties'*. "You aren't scaring me, Dean, and even if things in this world are that bad, they won't scare me either. Maybe I am a little late to this game, but nothing I've seen so far calls for any of," he gestured around, "this."

"You're right," Dean said, almost throwing Harry by suddenly being agreeable until he added, "you are late to the game."

Harry crossed his arms.

"Michael and Lucifer might not fight until they have us, but meanwhile, Lucifer is bringing Hell on earth. You said the rest of the world didn't seem as bad as the Whore's town? Well, guess what, it will be. Every day things are getting worse. There have been three hurricanes just this week! Exactly how many more people have to die until we 'come up' with something, huh?"

"And exactly how many more people will die if you say yes?"

Dean stepped back to the window, staring down at Harry. "I don't know, but I know of at least one person who will live."

"Yeah, the same person who would still live if you don't say yes."

"You don't know that. He's got Winchester blood, man; you saw how stubborn he is. He'll find a way to Michael, and he'll die if he says yes."

"You'll die if you say yes!"

Dean lifted up his palms and shrugged as though Harry had just somehow proven his point. "So, if one of us has to die…"

"If! If you both say no, you both live. Two plus two, mate."

"What a nice little tidy world you got there, Disney, but if you could come back to earth… The only way I can guarantee that Adam stays out of this is to say yes."

Harry fumed, both at Dean's words and the insinuation that Dean had any kind of authority like that. "Have you come unhinged? You can't keep Adam out of it - he's already in it. He's already invested. The angels have his mother, for Merlin's sake!"

"And no harm will come to her or him if the angels get what they originally wanted - me," Dean reasoned.

"Or, the angels get what they originally wanted - you - and harm will come to them and everyone else on the entire fucking planet."

Dean banged the door again, expression hard. "Harm is already coming to everyone, Harry! This will end it, one way or another."

"So that's all you care about, then? This being over? You don't give a damn about the rest of the world, about all the innocent muggles - and Adam is just the excuse you needed, is he?"

"Fuck you," Dean snarled. "You don't get to assume who I do or don't care about."

"I don't have to assume, mate, you're making it pretty bloody clear. You're willing to condemn the
"The world is already condemned! It's just a matter of how the angels are going to do it. They have their own prophecy, Harry, and they are playing every card in the deck to make it happen. Remind me again, what's your first-hand experience with something like that? And, oh, wait, what did it lead to? Someone sacrificing themselves? Hm, and who was it that did that again?"

"It led to saving the wizardry world, you prat!" Harry yelled. "I did what I did because I absolutely had to do it! You're trying to gamble away your life, the world be damned!"

"The world is damned!" Dean yelled, too, looking thoroughly exasperated and like he couldn't believe someone could be so moronic.

"So you keep saying!" Harry shouted back. "But if I walk into town - right now - am I going to find a ghost town? No. I'm going to find a thriving, alive and well, happy community full of innocent muggles who deserve more from us than a fucking 'I give up'!"

There was a beat of silence as the echoes of Harry's shouts faded, Dean studying Harry. What Harry was now realising was a very analytical glint in Dean's eye, that had been there this entire time, was beginning to fade, and Harry had a sneaky suspicion that whatever Dean had been seeking for in Harry, he found.

"You know what I don't get about you, Harry," Dean said, voice slow and like ice, "is how you can be so affected by anyone - or anything - dying or being hurt, but when there's twenty more dead on the evening news, you don't even blink an eye."

Harry flinched, visibly and badly. "Excuse me?" he snarled. "Don't blink an eye? What are you trying to suggest - that I don't care about those people?"

Dean, who suddenly and strangely seemed mollified by Harry's response, lifted up his arms to rest on the window's ledge again, eyes cold. "Oh, I think you want to care. I think you think you do care. But I think as long as your hands are clean and someone else does the dirty work, you're -"

"DON'T YOU DARE!" Harry bellowed, voice echoing again. "Don't you dare say that! If I was at any of those places, I would have done everythiing I could to save them! If I don't blink, it's because reports like those have been my reality for three years and counting!"

"Everything you could?" Dean scoffed. "The last time you did 'everything you could' to save people, you cried and ran away."

The anger boiling in Harry's stomach froze and took the rest of his warmth with it. He felt like he had been slapped - felt like he had been hit with a particularly effective and sharp *Pertificus Totalus*. He blinked, flashes of a swooshing vivid green passing over his eyes, and it took a moment for Dean's words to fully settle over him.

It stung.

Emotions running too thin to think clearly, Harry said just as icily as Dean had, "Maybe. But at least I didn't toss away my soul to play with weapons in Hell. What was it you said, Dean? You meant it every. damn. day?"

If Harry had to guess what his own expression had been at Dean's words, he would bet it was the same that flashed across Dean's face. It settled, though, into a harshness that probably mirrored his own.
Before either of them could take another jab at where they knew it would hurt, the basement door banged opened and two sets of footsteps began pounding down the stairs.

"Guys?" came Sam's voice.

"I told you they were fighting," came Cas' next.

As they walked up behind Harry, Harry finally tore his gaze away from Dean's and spun around. "I've changed my mind," he announced as he passed them. "Keep him locked up for all I care."

"Making friends, Dean?" he heard Sam sigh.

Harry thought about just storming up the stairs, but despite his pride, his curiosity was piqued with both Sam and Cas coming down there. He settled with leaning against the desk with the lamp, mostly out of view of the panic room. Night had completely fallen without him noticing, probably because he had been glaring into the panic room that was completely dark except for a few fluorescent lights lining the walls. The basement was colder, too, and Harry wondered if it was because winter was taking siege or because of Harry and Dean.

A clang of metal made Harry look back over, and he watched as Sam opened the big metal door with a loud squeak and stepped inside, leaving it wide open. Cas didn't follow him in and seemed content with just glowering in his Angel of Intense way that made his stare feel like a physical weight.

"Well, Cas, not for nothing," Dean's voice floated out, "but the last time someone looked at me like that… I got laid."

Harry huffed and crossed his arms. Nice to know Dean could just move on from a fight like it was nothing. Meanwhile, Harry was seething and already thinking about twenty more hateful things he could say to Dean to make Dean feel like Harry did. He had half the mind to go charging in there with his wand and dare Dean to say those things to him again.

"Uh, why don't you go keep an eye on Adam?" Sam suggested to Cas, voice all diplomatic and placating.

Cas, in his righteous temperate, waved his hand causing the metal door to slam shut with a high squeak and loud clang. The metal cover of the window flapped helplessly from the motion. Cas stalked toward the stairs and paused at the bottom, giving Harry a questioning look.

Sam's and Dean's voice were already drifting from the door's window, and Harry had never been one to let his curiosity slide. He shrugged and shook his head at Cas in answer, and Cas frowned but continued up the stairs anyway.

Harry carefully lifted himself off the desk and silently snuck over to the door. He thought about casting a volume spell, but he was worried it would cause their voices to echo even louder and tip them off.

"- full of flight risks," Harry could hear Sam talking.

"I'm not letting him do it," Dean said next, voice just as full of conviction as it had been, as though Harry's and his conversation never happened - as though Harry's words didn't even put a dent in things.

"Who, Adam? No, I'm - I'm not either."
"No, you're not getting me," Dean said, sounding a tired. Maybe Harry did have an impact, then.

"Oh, no, no, I get you perfectly. But I'm not letting you do it, either," Sam said sternly.

There was silence, and Harry crept closer. He could hear quiet footsteps, and after a few beats, Dean's voice said, much softer than before, "That kid's not taking a bullet for me."

"Dean -"

"I'm serious. I mean, think about how many people we've gotten killed, Sam." Harry bit his lip, willing his ears not to miss anything. "Mom. Dad. Jess, Jo, Ellen - should I keep going?"

"It's not like we pulled the trigger," Sam tried.

"We might as well have," Dean rasped. "I'm tired, man. I'm tired of fighting who I'm supposed to be."

Harry thought back to the night before when Dean asked him about destiny. It was only just occurring to Harry now that this was why he was asking Harry, who had played his role, did his duty, and left a world better for it. Harry wondered if Dean was trying to get Harry to say one way or another what Dean should do - because Harry knew the weight on Dean's shoulders, had carried a similar one of his own. A little of Harry's anger toward the man began bleeding away into sympathy.

"Well," Sam sighed, "do you think maybe you could take a half second and stop trying to sacrifice yourself for a change? Maybe we could actually stick together?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?" Sam pressed. "Dean, seriously. Tell me. I-I want to know."

"I just… I-I don't believe."

"In what?"

They fell silent again, anticipation heavy enough in the air that even Harry felt it, then Dean said, "In you."

Harry sucked in a breath and closed his eyes. Cruel. Dean Winchester was cruel.

"I mean, I don't..." Dean continued, voice cracking a little. "I don't know whether it's gonna be demon blood, or some other demon chick, or what, but… I do know they're gonna find a way to turn you."

"So, you're saying I'm not strong enough," Sam said, not a question, clearly trying and failing to keep the hurt from his voice.

"You're angry," Dean said. "You're self-righteous. Lucifer's going to wear you to the prom, man, it's just a matter of time -"

"Don't say that to me," Sam hissed. "Not you. Of all people."

"I don't want to… but it's the truth. And when Satan takes you over, there's got to be somebody there to fight him, and it ain't gonna be that kid." Dean made a humourless noise. "So, it's got to be me."

Neither brother said anything for a brief moment, then Harry heard soft footsteps approaching the door. He jumped and scrambled a few steps back. The door opened, and for his part, Sam didn't look
at all surprised to see Harry standing there. As he walked out, Harry glanced at Dean, who was wearing that same strangely mollified expression until he locked eyes with Harry. Then his face went blank, and he looked away.

Sam shut the door and locked the hatch before gently clicking the cover to the door's window shut. He sighed and turned around.

"I, uh… I take it you heard all that?"

Harry didn't answer, just gave Sam what he hoped was a commiserating look.

"Come on," Sam sighed, stepping around Harry and leading the way back upstairs. Harry took one more look at the supernatural panic room and followed.

Most of the lights in the house were turned off. Harry and Sam walked through the kitchen to get to the study, finding Adam asleep on the cot. Harry could respect that. Coming back to life was exhausting.

Cas and Bobby were talking quietly, but upon their entrance, the two turned to them, Cas giving Sam the kindest expression Harry had seen yet from the angel. Somehow, it was still intense.

Bobby rolled his chair a little closer. "How's he doing?"

Sam made a noise, obviously trying and failing to answer. He looked, for all in the world, like a kicked puppy.

"How you doing? Bobby amended.

Sam just nodded ever so slightly and looked away.

"Harry," Cas said, "are there any spells you know that can protect or hide property? I've walked Bobby's grounds, ensuring this property is hidden, but some added protection would be helpful."

Harry nodded. "I know a lot of them. I can cast a Disillusionment on the house, a Notice-Me-Not, an Unplottable, Cave Inimiaim to warn us of any approaching enemies. Essentially wards. But the Fidelius Charm would give this place the most protection."

"What's that?" Bobby asked.

"It's a concealment charm, but it's... well, technically it's concealment of information inside a living person. The person, or the Secret Keeper as they're called, is the only person who knows the information and is able to reveal it. Whoever they tell that information to can't pass it along because only the Secret Keeper can reveal it, you see. Whoever they tell is bound to the enchantment, and the spell prevents the information from being forced, tortured, bewitched, or anything like that, from the Secret Keeper. They can only give it out voluntarily - they have to want to share it. Though I guess you could torture someone until they wanted to, but magic functions off of intention. Anyway.

"So, basically, if the information you want secret is where your house is, then only the Secret Keeper or who the Secret Keeper tells will be able to find it - or even see it. But you should think long and hard about it, though, before you do that, and so should whoever agrees to be Secret Keeper because Secret Keeper can be a dangerous position. They will be the guardian of your property, quite literally, and I do mean only the people the Secret Keeper tells can find this place, even if they knew your address before. It will be taken from their memory. Not your postman, UPS, friends, no one
will know it. You wouldn't be able to write the address down, either, only the Secret Keeper can, and all records and documentation that have this address on them will be erased, and that includes the water and electric companies."

Harry looked back at the line of phones on Bobby's kitchen wall.

"I don't even know if people would be able to call here since you have mainly landlines."

"Wow," Sam said. "That's intense off-the-grid stuff."

Harry nodded.

"I like the sound of it, though," Bobby grunted. "I'll think about it."

"For now, let's just do the others," Cas agreed.

Cas and Harry walked the perimeter, the cold night air biting. Harry cast the protection spells he was oh, so familiar with, answering Cas' questions about them as they went. Likewise, Cas answered some of Harry's questions, like what in the entire fuck did he brand into Harry's ribs and explained some of the runes - sigils, Cas called them. They fell silent as they walked back through the salvage yard, clean of all the mess they made from their duel.

Harry was worried. He had been trying not to be, because this wasn't his world, wasn't his place, wasn't his concern. He told himself that the only thing he should be worried about was getting back home.

After being there a couple of weeks, it was already hard to keep telling himself that. He thought of Dylan and Paul, the blood pouring out of Dylan's neck, Paul's blood and the dirt from Paul's grave on Dean's hands. He felt like death was stalking him, even though it was ridiculous to think death could follow someone, like it could be so interested in just one person. Still, he thought about all those people who were constantly being reported dead from the catastrophes caused by the apocalypse, and he did care, he did. He cared so much, despite telling himself not to because this wasn't his world. He cared, and he couldn't stop himself from feeling like he brought death to this world with him even if he knew the apocalypse started before his arrival.

Cas opened the screen door into the back of Bobby's house first and stepped inside. As Harry held the door open for himself, he heard a hoot of an owl. He looked back out at the dark night sky but saw nothing. When no other hoot came, Harry shook his head to clear it, firmly telling himself to get with it and stop imagining owls and went back inside.

Sam and Bobby were in the kitchen, talking quietly. Harry peeked in the study, and Adam was still there, sleeping. He subtly cast a Silencing Charm on the air around Adam - now was probably the best time for the four of them to discuss what to do next.

Sam noticed him casting and raised an eyebrow.

"So he doesn't wake up," Harry said.

Sam nodded and took a long pull from his beer can.

"Any updates?" Cas asked.

Bobby shook his head. "I doubt Dean's sleeping, but he ain't causin' any trouble."

"I'll check on him," Cas said and walked out.
"Everything go okay?" Sam asked Harry.

Harry nodded, unbuttoning his jacket while he spoke then shoving his hands in his pockets. "Bobby's house is no longer on any map, no one will be able to see it from afar, we'll be alerted if anyone with ill intent comes anywhere close, and if any, well, muggle, I guess, gets close enough, they will suddenly remember an urgent appointment or something they've forgotten and rush off."

Bobby snorted. "I hope Rufus comes to visit. That'd be right funny to see."

"What do you think the spell would force him to remember?"

Bobby grinned back. "Probably that he hasn't had his damn teeth cleaned since 1983."

Sam chuckled.

Harry opened his mouth to ask who Rufus was when it happened.

Harry felt like something hooked around an unexplainable part inside of him and punched with force. He was thrown off his feet, physically flying into the air, through the study, and landed hard on the corner of Bobby's desk, causing it to jar out of place and drop him to the ground.

"Harry!" Bobby and Sam called.

Sam was by his side immediately, hovering.

"What was that?" Bobby asked, sounding mildly alarmed.

Harry groaned, pushing himself to his knees. "I don't know," he grunted. He glanced at Adam and was glad to see his Silencing Charm was working, and the man was still asleep.

"Hey, take your time," Sam said.

Harry nodded and took several moments to focus on different parts of himself, assessing damages. He figured he should at least be grateful that, for once, he didn't hit his head. He sighed and straightened, using the desk to pull himself up.

"Spirit?" Sam suggested, giving Harry some room.

"We'd've picked up on it before now, and it wouldn't've gone straight to pushin'," Bobby replied as he circled around them to the other side of his desk.

"I don't think anything pushed me," Harry said. "It felt like… I don't know." He tenderly rubbed and rotated his shoulder. Was it not going to be allowed to fully heal?

"Something pushed you, son - far," Bobby said, digging in a drawer and pulling out what Harry was beginning to recognise as an EMF reader. He clicked it on; it started making some static noises, but the lights remained steady.

"It looked like something a vengeful spirit or demon would be able to do," Sam said.

Harry moved out of the way for Bobby to inspect the area, still rubbing his shoulder, and Sam began checking for signs of demons. He demanded Harry check his anti-possession tattoo, which was still intact. It didn't take long for both men to frown, perplexed.

"Did you feel anything touch you?" Sam asked.
Harry shook his head. "It… It didn't feel like, well…” He thought back to the sensation. "It didn't feel like I was pushed, like my body. It felt like something inside of me… like, my magic, maybe, was being pushed away - but… it can't leave my body, can it? So, it was like I went along for the ride or something. I don't know. I can't explain it."

Bobby and Sam were staring at him uncertainly, though they didn't look like they doubted Harry's description.

Slowly, Sam asked, "Like… something was trying to send your magic away?"

Harry shrugged. "I guess."

Realisation visibly dawned on Bobby's face at the same moment Sam shot out of the room. Harry heard the basement door slamming open before he could even comprehend Sam's departure.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Dean," Bobby sighed. "I bet you anything."

"What?" Harry asked again, feeling dread settling in his bones.

They heard some banging then Sam thundering back up the stairs. Harry and Bobby pushed into the kitchen by the time Sam came tumbling out of the laundry room.

"He's gone," Sam announced.

"Who?" Harry asked. "Dean?"

"Yeah," Sam said, turning into the hallway and heading toward the front door, Harry and Bobby following. He grabbed his jacket off the coat rack, pulling it on as he rushed outside.

"Well, go help him, ya idjit!" Bobby barked.

Harry jumped, stepped toward the front door, paused, then spun around and charged out the back door instead, not bothering to re-button his jacket.

The wind had picked up while he was inside, still biting and now audible. Harry shivered. There weren't many clouds, but the moon was only a half one and didn't give him much light. Harry pulled out his wand, cast a silent Lumos, and began edging around the house, eyes scanning for signs of Dean. Or anyone else - which, where was Cas?

He turned away from the salvage yard and down the side of the house, stopping to check the cellar doors. They were both shut but unlocked. No doubt Dean left through them.

He continued, and as he reached the corner of the house by the front, he ran bodily into Sam.

"Whoa, watch it," Sam said.

"Sorry," Harry sighed. "The cellar doors aren't locked. I didn't see anything in the back."

Sam nodded, turning to head back to the front door and nodding for Harry to follow. He did, Nox and pocketing his wand

"The Impala's gone," Sam reported, leaping up the stairs onto the porch. "We didn't hear it start up, but he did park pretty far from the house. Could have even put it in neutral and push it further away. I tried calling, but it went straight to voicemail."
"When did he leave?" Harry asked, catching the screen door before it closed on him and shutting it and the front door behind him. "I don't understand what's going on."

Bobby met them from the doorway into the study. "Well?"

"Gone," Sam said, fiddling with the many keys on the wall hooks by the door.

"How?" Harry asked. "And where's Cas?"

Sam spared him scathing glance, though Harry doubted it was meant for him, and said, "Blown to Oz. Dean activated a sigil that banishes any angels in the vicinity. Your magic is close to Cas' powers - that's what probably threw you."

Harry swore under his breath and rubbed his eyes with both hands pushed underneath his glasses.

"Look," Sam said, addressing Bobby, as he removed two set of keys from their hooks, "we'll get Dean. He couldn't have gotten far. Just… watch Adam."

He handed one of the sets of keys to Harry, which Harry took because Sam was clearly in action-mode and probably couldn't be easily interrupted, but he frowned down at them, confused.

"How?" Bobby asked. "You may have noticed, he's got a slight height advantage."

"Then cuff him to your chair," Sam answered, some sarcasm slipping into his voice. "I don't know. Just watch him."

Bobby sighed, turning to look at Adam, and Sam reached over and steered Harry out of the house because apparently, he wasn't moving fast enough.

"You can take the blue Sedan," Sam said, walking quickly toward the line of working cars that framed the entrance to the salvage yard, Harry barely able to keep up with his long legs. "I'll take the Civic. He won't want to be followed, so he probably took 29 instead of Louise to hide in traffic. You can try to catch up with him, and I'll take 115 - see if I can cut him off."

"Wait - wait - wait - wait," Harry interrupted, jogging in front of Sam to make him stop. "You're wanting me to… drive?"

Sam frowned. "Yeah…"

"Sam, I don't know how to drive a car."

Sam looked briefly surprised, then very annoyed. "How do you not know how to drive a car?"

"We Apparate! Or fly. We don't drive - well, yes, Ron did drive once, but in a flying car, in the air, where there weren't any stop lights, or turning signals, or driving-off-the-road-and-crashing."

"No, just falling out of the sky and crashing," Sam huffed, snatching the set of keys out of Harry's hands as though Harry no longer deserved to touch them. He instantly decided never to tell Sam about how Ron and Harry arrived at school by actually crashing. "Fine. We'll take the Civic. Hurry up."

Harry had to jog to keep up with Sam the rest of the way to a white, slightly beat up looking car. He opened the passenger door and threw himself inside just in time for Sam to turn it on and begin whipping out of the parking space. Harry immediately began scrambling to put on his safety belt, distantly noticing how the vehicle smelled pine-fresh.
"Are we still taking, er… whatever road you were going to take?"

"No," Sam said, peeling out of Bobby's long drive and onto Wicker Avenue. "We'll take 29 North, see if we can catch up."

Harry pulled out his wand - why, he wasn't sure - and sat up straight, looking out the windows as though he was going to see Dean in between some trees.

"I thought you knew how to drive," Sam abruptly said, accusing.

"Have you seen me drive?" Harry countered.

"No, but - I-I mean, Dean barely lets me drive his car."

"So, you assumed I knew how to drive because Dean wasn't letting me drive?"

"No, I- … I'm saying Dean doesn't let anyone - look, it doesn't matter. Why don't you know how to drive?"

"Why would I?" Harry asked, feeling defensive.

Sam sighed, heavy and put-upon. "Nevermind. Let's just focus on getting Dean back."

"Good idea," Harry rolled his eyes. "If Dean sent Cas away, where did he send him to?"

Sam shrugged. "Not really any specific place - just far away. It doesn't take that long for Cas to recover, but it can be a few hours before he returns."

"Hours?" Harry asked. "Merlin. Does it hurt Cas like it hurt me?"

"It hurt you?" Sam asked sharply, sparing him a glance as he took another peeling turn, wheels squealing.

Harry, holding onto the centre console to keep from slamming against the door, grunted and said pointedly, "It tends to hurt when you're thrown, doesn't it?"

Ignoring the quip, Sam asked, "But did it hurt, like, your magic?"

Harry cast a silent cleaning charm on the windshield, ridding it of any dirt and smudges, which there was a lot of, and said, "Seems fine."

Sam chuckled humourlessly. "Apparently. Thanks for not leaving a glare."

"Can we, er… slow down?"

"We gotta catch up with him, Harry."

Harry clenched his jaw and double checked that his safety belt was secure. Sam seemed to be a good enough driver, but Harry couldn't help but notice that when Dean drove fast, he seemed to have a bit more control and was a lot more precise. Sam, on the other hand, was reminding Harry a little of the Knight Bus.

"Okay," Harry breathed. "Okay. Just… okay. Dean's gone - to say yes to Michael. How would he even begin to do that? Why go into town?"

Sam sighed. "Well… first, he wouldn't pray to Michael anywhere near us. He wouldn't want to tip
off the angels where we are. I-I doubt he would want to pray to Michael himself. He's going give word, but Dean - he - Dean wouldn't give away his advantage, even if he's planning to say yes -"

"Sorry," Harry interrupted. "You guys really mean pray? Prayer? As in, **pray**?"

"Yeah." Sam took another turn, much slower this time probably because it was onto a by-pass with a few lingering cars and plenty of security cameras around the businesses there. "Any angel you pray to, they hear. If you pray in general, it's pretty much an open line to Heaven."

"And if you pray to God? Wait - doesn't Cas call? With phones? If we can pray to him, why do we call him?"

"You can pray to Cas," Sam answered, switching lanes and passing cars. Harry tightened his grip on both the console and his wand. "But a prayer is one-sided. It's more like… I don't know. A summoning and more ritualistic. When we call Cas, we get his answer right away - and Cas can't find us anyway. We're hidden from angels, but he can call and ask where we are and come, y'know? Besides, Cas isn't just an angel. He's our friend."

"Okay," Harry accepted, but he privately thought that even if an angel was his friend, maybe especially if an angel was his friend, he would be praying to them all the time.

Gulping at Sam running a yellow-turning-red light, Harry sent a quick prayer inside his head, hoping that kind of prayer worked too: *Hope you're okay, Cas. Sorry Dean purged you.*

"And you can pray to God," Sam was continuing, "but I don't think God cares. Probably cut off his link to people."

"Sure - whatever - so he wouldn't pray near us, but still, why go into town?"

Sam didn't answer right away, and Harry waited tensely as Sam cut off three cars and took the ramp onto a highway, which Sam mercilessly merged onto. Eventually, Sam said, "I know all the stops of Dean's farewell tour. He'd stop by Mom's grave, have a drink at where the Roadhouse used to be, say goodbye to Lisa…"

A horn honked at them loudly as they swerved around a minivan.

"Lisa?" Harry asked.

"A woman Dean once knew. He cared a lot for her."

"Oh," Harry said, keeping his eyes on the little white lines on the road, blurring so fast they almost looked like one long white line. Then he remembered he needed to be looking for Dean's car and refocused. Merlin, he must have been tired. He cleared his throat. "And the Roadhouse? Is all of that in Sioux Falls?"

"No - no, that's… No. If he had time, that's what he would do."

"He doesn't think he has time," Harry stated, trying to follow Sam's train of thought and failing. "So, what would he do?"

"Probably have a drink," Sam said. "Somewhere he thinks we wouldn't be able to find, toast to Mom and Lisa, and the others from the Roadhouse, us, then he'd get to it."

Harry nodded, feeling uneasy. "If Dean took off right after I was thrown, had enough time to sneak the car down the drive and take off, and wants to go to a pub he doesn't think we'd find, then…” He
trailed off, thinking fast. "Sioux Falls is more like a city than a town, in this area."

"Yup," Sam agreed.

"Are you sure he'd take this road in?"

"Pretty sure," Sam said, having to slow down to accommodate a wreck on the side of the road. Both of them seemed to strain themselves looking as they passed, and both seemed satisfied at the same time that neither car was Dean's. "There's a handful of places we should check first."

It took another twenty minutes to officially get into town - city (though, Harry was hard pressed to call something barely .02% of London a city), and Sam and Harry barely spoke. Sam was busy driving as quickly as he could without crashing, and Harry was trying to find Dean's old, black car in the increasingly larger sea of cars. Honestly, Harry didn't know how in the world Dean could have beaten them but considering the disturbing fact that they weren't the only - or even the few - cars driving as fast as they were, he guessed Dean simply had the home field advantage and a head start.

Sam took a bridge downtown and parked in front of a parking meter, giving Harry coins to put in it as he wrote - texted - whatever - Bobby where they were. By the time Harry was finished feeding the meter, Sam was already walking down the street.

Harry ran to catch up then had to power walk to keep pace. "Where are we checking first?"

"Abbey's, a bar Dad took him to on his twenty-first birthday."

There was loud laughter across the street, a pulsing bass coming from one of the buildings, a layer of sound from conversations of passersby, and of course, the rumbling of engines driving up and down the street emitting a whiff of exhaust. Harry checked his watch, a newly acquired thing that was among the few items he had bought in this universe. He was surprised to see it was after nine thirty at night. It must have taken longer spelling the wards earlier that night than he thought.

He made sure his wand was indeed in his pocket again, not left in the car, and tried to keep up with Sam who was taking out his cell phone. "Here," Sam said, fiddling with the buttons on the phone, "I'm sending you a picture of Dean."

"On the phone?" Harry frowned.

Sam nodded, holding up the screen for Harry to see. That was right, one could send letters and take pictures with their phones. However… that didn't seem very useful as Harry pictured his little thing lighting up with a new message, there on his bedside table.

Harry patted his pockets again to confirm. "I don't have my phone."

"What?" Sam asked. "We told you to always keep it on you."

"Well, you didn't exactly give me time to check if I had it before you pushed me out of the door, did you?"

Sam sighed. "Do you have your wallet at least?"

"Yeah."

"Try making it a new rule for yourself to keep your wallet and phone together, that way you won't forget it."
"I didn't forget it, exactly, I just don't have the need to carry it around with me at the house -"

"We're here," Sam interrupted, obviously not caring, turning sharply and pushing his way into a rustic looking pub. Harry followed.

Tobacco smoke hit him a moment before the smell of beer and peanuts. The music being played was loud rock, and as Harry looked around, he suddenly felt a little intimidated - and a lot short. The pub, with wood panel walls, had more billiard tables than regular tables, waitresses with denim shorts and tight tank tops, an ashtray about every foot or so, and patrons consisting of mainly men in denim, flannel, torn sleeves and bandanas. They all seemed to have beards, too, and deep, manly voices. It was actually a place he felt was pretty fitting for Bobby and the Winchester brothers; however, it was definitely a place he didn't feel he belonged. They were more rough and unrefined gentlemen, in comparison to Harry being a much more, 'ello there, mate,' kind of chap.

Still, he pushed forward and around them, keeping Sam's bobbing head over the crowd in his line of sight. He earned one grunt and a couple of odd looks, but he made it to the bar. Sam was showing the bartender the picture of Dean on his phone.

"Nope, sorry," the man said, shaking his head. "Haven't seen him."

"Do you mind if I ask a couple of waitresses?" Sam asked.

The man shrugged, noncommittal, and continued down the bar to serve other people, clearly not caring one way or the other. So, Harry followed Sam around the pub like a lost puppy, or a baby duck who had imprinted on him, as Sam showed a few waitresses Dean's picture and continued to get negative responses. Meanwhile, Harry kept an eye out just in case he saw Dean trying to slip away or something. Harry didn't dare speak, though, for fear of sticking out too much and potentially becoming a punching target.

When they finally left, Harry inhaled the smell of exhaust and downtown gladly.

"You didn't have to be so nervous," Sam smirked at him, clearly teasing. "They weren't going to eat you."

"I wasn't nervous," Harry argued. "I was just playing it safe."

"You looked like you were going to hide under a pool table."

"Well, if you hadn't noticed, they're quite a lot bigger than me. A few of them had bloody guns. Just… there. Right there, on their person, out in the open."

"We have guns, Harry."

"I don't have a gun," Harry protested. "You don't have a gun on you, do you?"

Sam gestured toward the small of his back. "Always have it."

"Bloody hell," Harry sighed. "Why on earth would you be carrying it when you aren't on a creature hunt?"

"You never know when you might need it," Sam shrugged.

"Yes, you do," Harry insisted, though he knew with the hunter's lifestyle, it made sense if it was common practise to have a weapon around at all times. He felt defensive about Sam teasing him, though, so he was going to argue anyway. Besides, it was nice to think about something other
than the world might explode any moment because Dean said yes to Michael. "Walking up to a house full of demons - yes, need a weapon. Searching pubs for your brother - no, don't need a weapon."

"You're carrying your wand," Sam pointed out.

"My wand is so much more than a weapon. It's a tool. Not to mention it replaces loads of what muggles need and use every day. A gun can only be one thing: a weapon."

"Unless you use it to shoot open a lock," Sam was still smirking, "then it's a key."

"Sure, because that's what the manufacturers were thinking as they were making it. 'Oh, what a beautiful key -'"

"Over here," Sam interrupted him again, turning into another pub.

Harry huffed indignantly and followed.

This pub was an Irish one. It was much bigger and brighter than the last one, the bar prominent and the main focal point of the establishment with a large shamrock that hung above a row of televisions. The music that was playing sounded modern, but it definitely had that tell-tale Irish influence on it. There were a couple billiard tables, a few dart boards in one corner, and waitresses in all black uniforms weaving between tables. Most of the patrons ranged in ages and genders and seemed to either be on a date or a part of a group.

"This place is significant for Dean?" Harry asked as he stood next to Sam by the door, sweeping the room with his eyes to search for a familiar face.

"Not really," Sam answered. "But Dad always said Mom was fond of Irish bars, so Dean sometimes goes in them."

Harry nodded, filing that information away. Anything to do with their mother seemed to always be of great importance for the oldest Winchester.

Sam and Harry quickly made their way to the bar.

"- sister who used to be a big Steelers fan," the blonde, middle-aged bartender was telling an older patron as she refilled his drink.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Sam called.

The woman looked over, smiled and lifted a finger to tell them to wait. She refilled a few more glasses, seemed super friendly toward everyone, and eventually came back down the bar to them, smile never leaving her face. "What can I get ya, sugar?"

"Uh, nothing, thanks," Sam answered, already flipping open his phone. "Have you seen this man come in here tonight?"

The woman frowned and gently took the phone out of Sam's hand to hold it closer to her face. She made a noise, dug into her apron, and pulled out a pair of reading glasses. Adjusting them on her face, she looked at the picture again. "Can't say I have, sweetie," she said with a tone implying she hated disappointing them and handed the phone back over. "But he's cute. If he decides to come in, tell him to come find Linda." She then winked, pushed off the bar, and returned to her patrons.

"That's two for two," Sam said. "Come on."
Over the next hour, Harry and Sam checked a total of eleven places. Harry wasn't so sure Dean would pop in for a last drink, wouldn't not go straight to Michael, but Sam was. Sam was adamant that Dean wouldn't want to lose any advantage he had, which he said included making the angels sweat wondering where their vessels were, and he said Dean would take the time to write goodbye letters, probably try to post them.

It made Harry's heart clenched a little with how easily Sam said it, how easily he could reference that Dean was essentially killing himself. It made it more real to be out there, looking for Dean before Dean died. Harry tried to be helpful, suggesting other places he might have gone besides a pub, which even as he was saying it, he knew he was wrong. Ultimately, Sam and Harry formed a system where Sam would ask around, showing Dean's picture, and Harry would ask around by giving a description or simply wander around, looking for any sign of the man.

After the eleventh place, Sam announced they were going a couple blocks over to where Harry already knew was a much livelier area with clubs rather than pubs.

"I'm sorry," Harry opened, knowing he didn't sound sorry at all, "but Dean really doesn't seem like a disco club kind of person."

"He isn't," Sam agreed. "But one, if he's hiding, he might do it there knowing that would be where we look last, or he might have decided to grease his monkey one last time at some place where he wouldn't be recognised or remembered."

"Grease his monkey?"

"Yeah, y'know, sex," Sam answered, shrugging casually.

Harry spluttered just a little. "Really? At a time like this?"

"This is Dean we're talking about, Harry. He'll always make time for one last ooh-rah."

"How charming," Harry rolled his eyes. "So which club?"

"I'm not sure. Dean doesn't really have a favourite kind of a gay bar."

Harry stopped walking when Sam's words fully registered, then he had to jog to catch up again. "What? Wait, mate, what? Gay bar?"

Sam nodded and said, "Yeah," as though Harry should have already known this.

"Dean… But Dean isn't gay, is he?"

"Bi, actually," Sam answered, then slowed down to give Harry a truly seething glare. "Why? Is that a problem for you?"

"What?" Harry spluttered again and coming to a full stop once more. "What - no - no, no, of course not. No. I - no. Not at all. I mean, me too. I mean, so am I. I mean, I'm like that - I mean, well… it would be rather hypocritical, wouldn't it, of me to have a problem with - I mean, I am bisexual - well, I say that, I do mostly prefer men - not - y'know, not that women aren't a bit of alright - I mean, that is to say, I mean, I-I know I have self-loathing down to an art, but not because of - I would never -"

"Whoa-whoa-whoa, take a breath, Harry. It's okay. I was just checking," Sam said over Harry's babbling, giving Harry an odd look that Harry couldn't name.

Harry cleared his throat, rubbing the back of his neck that felt like it was on fire and mumbled,
"Sorry, I… yeah. Sorry."

Sam was still giving him that look before he turned away and started walking again. Harry rushed to keep up.

"Actually," Harry said, feeling desperately awkward and knowing he should drop the subject, so naturally Harry's mouth kept talking. "I've only ever come out to one other person. I kind of just figured things out not long before I died, so I didn't have time to tell anyone else. Ron, my best friend, Ron? Yeah, he didn't know. I'm not sure how he would have reacted, honestly. He would have accepted me, I think - I mean, with everything we've been through together, I don't think my sexuality would tear us apart, definitely not, but he might get angry with me because I'm not - I wasn't planning to get back with his sister. Hermione was the only one. My other best friend? Hermione? She was the one I told. She laughed at me. Not - not, like, in a bad way, in a - I don't know. Of course, you are, it makes perfect sense kind of way. Like she couldn't believe she didn't figure it out sooner."

The memory he had just days prior flashed through his mind again, effectively shutting him up with a pang of grief for his friends.

"Well, uh…" Sam said, beginning to sound amused, "Um, if it helps, none of us care. Dean's been out for a couple of years now. He, uh," Sam chuckled, "he came out in the worst way too. He brought a man back to Bobby's."

"He did?"

"Yeah. We saw the guy leaving the next morning. Dean said, 'any of you got a problem with it', and Bobby, like, immediately began yelling at him. Not because of the man thing - because of bringing him to Bobby's."

"I've only known Bobby a couple of weeks, and even I know not to do that."

Sam chuckled again. "Yeah. And Dean came out just before he died too," Sam added, as though only just realising.

"Really?" Harry frowned, eyes not leaving Sam's profile.

"Yeah. He, uh, well, he sold his soul, you know. To save my life, and the demon -"

"Save your life?" Harry interrupted. "Was… that was why he sold his soul?"

Harry knew Dean had sold it, but he hadn't pressed for more information. Harry didn't want to think about it if he was honest with himself. He couldn't think of a single thing that was worth his soul and doing anything that messed with the soul reminded Harry too much of Voldemort to ponder long. He didn't consider the possibility of selling one's soul for someone else.

Harry felt guilt rise up like bile in the back of his throat for throwing his hateful 'tossing your soul aside' comment to Dean.

"Yeah," Sam answered. "And, you know, when you sell your soul, the demons normally give you ten years. But this demon only gave Dean one."

"One year?" Harry breathed, staring at Sam again. "One year to live until eternal damnation in Hell."

Sam nodded. "Yep. And, well, Dean had always apparently ignored his sexuality. Our dad, he - he, well, uh, he wouldn't have liked it. And Dean, he was always trying to get Dad's approval. Anyway,
having just a year left and Dad dead, Dean decided he wanted to explore it, I guess." He huffed a small laugh. "I had to live through almost four months of gay bars, gay porn everywhere - dude, it was gross, I found three dildos one weekend, and he bought so much lube -"

Whatever else Sam was about to say was cut off by Harry abruptly, and stupidly, running right into a railing that fenced off a rubbish area, successfully flipping Harry into the pile of rubbish and knocking over several bins, spilling their contents. The heel of his palm had skidded the concrete pavement, leaving it stinging and scraped, as did his knee and elbow in an effort to prevent knocking the bins over.

"Oh my god, are you alright!?”

"Is he okay?”

"What happened?”

"Did he just fall into garbage?”

The concerned voices were barely audible over the loud laughter coming from both strangers across the street and Sam, who was attempting to help Harry up and not succeeding very well.

"Oh, piss off,” Harry hissed at him, knowing his face was red in embarrassment. "I wasn't looking where I was going."

"No,” Sam agreed, still chuckling, "and whatever could have distracted you…”

"I said piss off,” Harry hissed again, face growing warmer as he finally fought off the last bin and stood.

"Are you alright?” a woman asked among the other passersby who stopped to either gawk or see where they could help.

"Yes,” Harry nodded, rubbing his hands on his jeans and trying to give her a smile. "I'm fine. Thank you.”

She accepted his answer, and slowly the group of onlookers dispersed as he righted the bins and threw some of the spilled rubbish back in them. Then he checked his knee and elbow that, though were clothed, somehow managed to become scraped as well. The left side of his trousers was completely dirty, something liquid had gotten on his calf, and from what he could tell, the side and back of his jacket was dirty too.

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Sam, smiling, pounded his back with his large hand to knock off some of the dirt. "You okay, Harry?”

"Fine,” Harry said, a little petulantly and knocking Sam's hand off. "I'm fine. Let - let's just go find Dean.”

Sam sobered immediately, as though Harry's nose dive into the city's public trash had made him forget why they were out there. Truthfully, the revelation about Dean made Harry forget, too, and the two of them set off down the street with renewed purpose.

The clubs down the brightly lit and neon strip each had their own bass music thumping loudly, almost blending together to create their own song. The only thing louder was the joyous, scattered laughter occupying the street. It was full of life, and Harry had to briefly wonder what day of the week it was. There weren't many cars, either, Harry noticed, which considering the large number of
people, Harry doubted any driver would bother with the headache of trying to manoeuvre through it.

Sam led him halfway up the strip to a club named The Male Box that had a single black door as an entrance along with an accompanying security guard.

"IDs and thirty bucks each," the man drawled at them.

Harry and Sam exchanged a look at the price then pulled out their wallets. Harry counted his cash and said, "I only have twenty."

"I'll cover the rest," Sam said, holding out his hand. Harry put the twenty in it then passed over his fake driver's license, a mister Ray Collins, to the security guard. Likewise, Sam passed over his with the money.

The security guard stuffed the money in a fanny pack that didn't go with the image of the man at all, before he nodded at their IDs, handed them back, and opened the door for them.

If Harry felt primly in the first pub they checked, he felt downright rural inside Male Box. It was packed with men wearing tight t-shirts, or no shirts, some with cowboy hats, some with jewellery, and apparently all of them sweaty with a mouth-watering sheen coating their skin. The lights rotating and flashing around were blues and purples, and high on podiums throughout the crowd were dancers. Male dancers. Male dancers in speedos. Male dancers in thongs. The one closest the entrance had two male dancers in yellow speedos, red suspenders, and wearing fireman hats.

Harry was immediately distracted by all of it and quickly lost Sam in the crowd. As he tried to push through, several men reached out to him, or would grind on him briefly, and called out, "Hey, baby!" and, "Cute glasses," and, "Who messed up your hair, baby doll."

It rapidly became clear that Harry had no idea where he was going let alone where he was inside the club. He thought maybe he found himself in the middle of the dance floor.

*Boom clap boom-clap boom boom clap boom boom*

Harry could physically feel the beat. He made the mistake of stopping, pausing to try to get his bearings, and almost immediately hands were on his hips and someone who was all hard and sharp angles was pressed against his back.

"Hey, cutie," a smooth voice breathed in his ear.

Harry shivered from the sensation and shook his head. "Er… no," he mumbled, stepping away from the man who let him go easily. He pushed around a couple snogging - or rather one man seemed to simply be sucking the other man's tongue, and awkwardly worked his way around three men dancing together, the outer two pressed firmly against the man in the middle and the three of them moving their hips in the same timely grinding motion.

A man about four inches taller than Harry slid in front of him. He wasn't wearing a shirt and had a collar with spikes around his neck. His nipples were pierced, too, and looked perked and perfectly pink in the lighting. He smiled, lips full, and leaned over to talk in Harry's ear while his hands came up to Harry's waist to brush ever so slightly against his jacket. "You seem lost."

Harry nodded a little and yelled back, though not coming nearly as close as the man did, "Where's the bar?"

The man jerked his head in one direction, grabbed Harry's hand, and began leading him out of the humping heap of testosterone and perspiration. Once free, Harry dropped the man's hand, sighed
deeply in relief, and pushed back his now sweaty hair.

"I'm Todd," the man greeted over the music.

"Harry," he replied, holding out his hand formally.

The man, Todd, grabbed it, turned it, and brought it up to his lips to kiss it. "Let me buy you a drink?"

"Oh, er…" Harry said and blushed a little, taking his hand back. "I'm actually just here looking for someone."

"Oh?" Todd smirked, coming closer into Harry's personal space. "What kind of someone?"

"Well, er… he's about," Harry lifted his hand, paused, then dropped it, "your height, really. And he has brown hair, like… well, you. And green eyes, like… you. He looks like you, actually." Todd's face might not have been as well proportioned, but in a brief description, he and Dean did have a lot in common.

Todd stepped closer again, a soft smile playing on his lips and his eyes shining as though Harry was a kitten who just did a cute trick. "I guess you've found me," he said softly, then cupped Harry's face and leaned in-

Harry jumped, maybe made a noise, and waved his hands almost frantically. "No - no! Thank you - thanks - but no, I meant, I'm looking for an actual person. His name's Dean."

Todd pouted, pushing out his bottom lip but still taking a step back to respect Harry's reaction. "I could be a Dean."

Harry shook his head. "Sorry… he's a real person - I'm trying to find him."

Todd sighed, looked Harry up and down, then said, "If you change your mind, I'll be here most of the night."

Harry nodded, too quick to be anywhere near casual, and scattered away toward the bar that was outlined in pink neon lights.

He spotted Sam immediately, his tall frame leaning over the bar trying to get a bartender's attention. Harry ran toward him, knocking into him in a rough stop. Sam looked over and frowned at him, but as a bartender approached them, he focused on the man and began showing him the picture of Dean. The man shook his head in answer and shrugged before moving on.

"Can we go now?" Harry asked, still needing to shout some to be heard.

"Dean could be anywhere in here," was Sam's reply.

Harry checked his watch then said, "We've already been at it for over an hour. If Dean came here, shouldn't he be… finished, surely, by now?"

Sam sighed and looked back down at his phone in his hands. He blinked at it without flipping it open, only brightening it to see the small screen on the front, then nodded at Harry and jerked his head toward an exit.

Thank Merlin, was all Harry could think. This time instead of trying to pass through the dance floor, Harry kept up with Sam and followed around the edges of the club to an exit that dumped out into an
"Bobby called," Sam said, finally flipping open his phone, pushing a few buttons, and pressing it against his ear.

Harry bounced a little on the balls of his feet, rubbing his hands together against the chill, and privately filing away everything he had just witnessed for the next time he was alone and had some free time.

Sam made an annoyed sound and said, "Bobby's calling us back. He says something happened."

"What happened?" Harry asked, jogging once more to keep up with Sam and telling himself to do more cardio somehow if this was going to be a regular thing.

"I don't know. He just said to come back - that it was urgent."

Harry swore under his breath, and Sam and Harry both were just short of running back to the white car they came into town in.

Sam drove just as quickly as before, Harry once again taking the position of holding onto both the console and his wand. It still took the same amount of time, but to Harry, the drive back felt longer. The two-lane roads surrounded by country and woods were the worst, but soon enough, Sam was pulling into Bobby's drive and parking the car where it sat before.

Harry quickly got out, and on the way back into to the house, he couldn't help but look around for Dean's car.

It wasn't there.

The first thing Harry noticed when he was inside was that some of the lights were on again. The second was that Bobby was clearly waiting for them, and the third was that Adam wasn't on the cot any longer.

"Bobby," Sam greeted, shutting the front door. "What's wrong?"

"Take a look for yourself," Bobby said, backing up into the study to let them pass.

Harry walked fully in, did a spin to look around, and frowned. "Did you move Adam somewhere?" He doubted Bobby would have let him out of his sight if Adam was awake. Secretly, he hoped Adam wasn't upstairs in the guest room Harry had been sleeping in.

"Nope," Bobby answered.

"Then where is he?" Sam asked.

Bobby sighed and wheeled himself into the kitchen where a beer bottle was sitting on the table next to what Harry thought were gun cleaning supplies. "Not here. I've looked everywhere I can."

"Not here?" Harry repeated.

"Yeah," Bobby said, turning his chair to face them. "Adam's gone."

The was a beat of ringing silence, then Sam, hovering in the kitchen doorway, asked tightly, "Bobby, what do you mean 'Adam is gone.'"

"Should I say it in Spanish?" Bobby suggested, raising an eyebrow and lifting his hands.
"He's gone how?" Sam barked, taking a sharp breath and shoving both his hands through his hair before yelling, "What the hell, Bobby?!"

"Watch your tone, boy," Bobby warned. "He was right in front of me, and he disappeared into thin air."

Sam opened his mouth to probably yell again when he was cut off by a fluttering sound of feathers and a deep voice announcing, "Because the angels took him."

Harry jumped about a foot in the air and whipped around.

Castiel donned in his trench coat stood there, seemingly fine and unfazed by whatever sigil Dean had used to banish him. Beside him, however, and being held up by Cas was an unconscious Dean with a split cheek and lip, blood rolling down the side of his face and chin. It seemed obvious at first glance the cuts were reasonably deep.

As the loose papers that were disturbed by Cas' arrival settled around, Sam gestured to Dean and breathed, "What the hell happened to him?"

"Me," Cas answered before flinging Dean onto the cot.

Bobby and Sam came fully into the study, Cas stepping up to meet them.

"What do you mean the angels took Adam?" Bobby asked, sounding a bit accusing. "You branded his ribs, didn't you?"

"Yes. Adam must have tipped them."

Harry inched closer to Dean, peering down trying to see if there were any more injuries. There looked to be some bruising or something poking out from his collarbone, but that was all Harry could tell.

"How?" Bobby asked.

"I don't know," Cas said, sounding tired, and shot Harry an empathic look. "Maybe in a dream."

"So, you don't need permission?" Harry asked, crossing his arms.

"No, to enter a dream, we don't."

"Well, where would they have taken him?" Sam asked next.

Cas seemed to ponder that question then looked at Sam with an obvious light bulb clicking on in his angel brain. "The same place we took Dean when we were trying to stop him from stopping you kill Lilith."

"Why?" Harry asked, frowning. "They're angels, they have literally anywhere they could go, why choose a place Dean has been to - oh."

Cas nodded.

"What?" Bobby and Sam asked.

"You think it's on purpose - a trap," Harry answered, thinking uncomfortably about Godric's Hollow at Christmas. "They would take him somewhere Dean knows so Dean can get to them."
"Balls," Bobby groaned.

"That would mean they really did bring Adam back just to trick us," Sam said. "Use him as bait."

"Which would work," Cas agreed and sighed. "Because there's no way a Winchester won't try to save his brother."

"We need to double check before we do anything," Sam said, looking around at them. Then, he asked, "Cas, Harry, can one of you take Dean back to the panic room."

"I will," Harry volunteered before waving his wand over Dean's body and levitating him.

"And here," Sam added, rushing around them to Bobby's desk and opening a drawer. After a few moments, he threw a pair of handcuffs at Harry, who caught them with all the skills and grace of a Seeker. "Just in case."

Harry looked down at the metal handcuffs. They were heavier than he thought they would have been. He remembered a toy pair Dudley once had - he used to like to cuff Harry to things when Harry Hunting became too difficult so as to make it easier for his friends. The toy cuffs never held, but these ones were real and most definitely would.

He nodded at Sam, then summoned a first aid kit and a small vial of Dreamless Sleep. Harry was still angry with Dean somewhat, not to mention now annoyed and frustrated that Dean sent Sam and him on a wild goose hunt only to have Cas fly him back after a couple of hours. However, he didn't think Dean deserved a beating.

"Yes, but for anyone without magic, it would be ill-advisable to take more than ten ounces a month."

He nodded at him, and with another wave of his wand floated Dean through the kitchen, the laundry room, and down into the basement. He used his wand to open the panic room's big metal door and carefully levitated Dean onto the cot.

Stepping in after him, Harry could hear how his footsteps echoed even louder inside the room than one could hear from the outside. A fan spun lazily at the top, making very soft swoosh sounds, and looking around, Harry saw how Dean conducted his escape. A lamp was broken, pieces of the bulb scattered over a patch of the floor along with an overturned chair and some books, and across the room on a metal cabinet's door was the sigil - drawn in blood.

Harry wrinkled his nose.

The man's features, where they had been hard and cruel just a few hours earlier seemed almost peaceful. Beyond the injuries, Harry could see a little bit a stubble, some freckles, where his lashes curved and where his sharp jaw gave way into a long neck. What fascinated Harry most were the tiniest little wrinkles beginning to form at the corners of his eyes and between his eyebrows.

They weren't wrinkles born from age. They were wrinkles born from prolonged stress and a hard life. For all the time they've spent together in the last couple of weeks, Harry really didn't know that much about the brothers. They were orphans, like him, and discovered a world beyond the everyday
the supernatural, as it were - when they were just kids, like him. Though they did have their father growing up, but from what Harry gathered, their father wasn't really there all that much. Harry at first assumed they grew up with Bobby, but he wasn't so sure anymore. He guessed their father left Dean in charge more often than not, and though no one had said anything to confirm it, Harry didn't doubt it was true. It showed, in the way Dean could take charge, the way he would check everyone and everything over, the way he listened and responded to others, the way he seemed to know where and where not to press and when - hell, even the way he locked the doors every night and check the door chains and windows, both at Bobby's and their motels, making sure everyone was secure and safe.

Harry wasn't used to that, not really. The Dursleys certainly never cared if doors were locked unless it was to lock Harry in the cupboard, the teachers at school always seemed to have more important things to concern them, and the Weasleys, Sirius, even Remus, never seemed to take charge at the right moments.

Staring at Dean now, Harry was realising what had been a small but persistent thorn in his side since his arrival.

Dean took charge. Dean led. Dean made the unilateral decisions. Dean was who all the current trouble was over, and Dean was doing his best to sacrifice himself-

Harry groaned and let his head fall back. It wasn't Harry anymore. Harry wasn't the leader, he wasn't the one everyone turned to for a decision, he wasn't the one charging in with backup following, burrowing through in hopes of making anything in his life better.

He was the backup now, and even though Harry never willingly put himself in that leader role and never felt comfortable giving orders, not being the one doing that now had been driving Harry quietly mad this entire time.

It wasn't as though Harry envied Dean's position - he most certainly did not, thanks - and it wasn't like Harry had really earned the right to have a say in things, either, he could acknowledge that. It was just, putting aside any complicated issues he already had with authority, he simply didn't like being told what to do. If he was going to follow anyone's orders, it was going to be his own, even if his history of doing just that had mixed results. In fact, that was the irony of half the time people mocked him for having some kind of 'hero-complex'. It wasn't so much that he was set on hero'ing, but rather either someone telling him he couldn't, so he did, or someone telling him to be a good boy and wait, so he didn't.

Harry sighed, telling himself to remember that the inevitable next time he came to heads with Dean sodding Winchester, and began casting what few medical diagnostic spells he knew. He sucked in a breath and winced at the multitude of colourful aruras that popped up right away. Harry didn't know what Cas' goal was, but if it was pain, he accomplished it.

From what Harry could tell, Dean had a bruised collarbone, a few cracked ribs and a broken one, a sprained wrist and ankle, internal bruising on the stomach, and of course, the cuts and bruises on his face.

Harry moved the first aid kit to the ground and removed his own jacket before carefully removing Dean's, setting them both on a chair close by. Gently, Harry took Dean's left and non-sprained wrist and handcuffed it to the cot.

Not sure how unconscious Dean was exactly and figuring he could block a kick better than a punch if he woke him up, Harry decided to start on the sprained ankle. He untied the boot, loosening the laces down the front, and held Dean's foot up by his calf as he worked it off. Then he rolled up the denim and carefully pulled off the sock.
He winced again. The ankle was already bruised and swollen.

"Musculus Instaurabo," he cast, soothing the stretched, almost torn ligaments. "Musculus instaurabo," he cast again, then once more before he was satisfied it was healed. There was still swelling and fluid from the sprain - he had no idea how to get rid of that - so Harry conjured a washcloth and cast, "Aqua Glaciem," catching the crushed ice pouring from his wand with the cloth.

Carefully arranging it on Dean's ankle, Harry reached over and pulled the first aid kit over to him, removing the ace bandage, and began gently wrapping the ice and ankle together. As he was tying it off, he glanced up at Dean - and jumped, finding Dean wide awake, watching Harry with his arm behind him pillowing his head.

"God!" Harry yelled. "Give me half a heart attack! How long have you've been awake?"

"Since the last in-masturbato or whatever it is," Dean answered, voice very rough though his lips were quirking.

"Instaurabo," Harry corrected, unrolling Dean's jeans. "You have other injuries as well, so if you want them healed, might you refrain from making fun of my spells."

Dean shrugged slightly then pointedly rattled the handcuffs.

"Sam's idea," Harry said, moving to crouch by Dean's side. "Look, you have some internal bruising and cracked ribs. I need you to lift up your shirts and lay still on your back."

"Mmm, tie me up, get me shirtless and on my back... Who knew you were so kinky."

Harry gave Dean a flat look. He wondered if this was how normal people actually were or if it was just this universe's thing - or just a Dean thing, being so forward and blunt.

"Alright, alright. No fun," Dean grumbled, stretching his arm out then yanking his shirts up.

His whole torso was beaten up. Harry suppressed yet another wince. "Why would Cas do this?" he asked quietly, gently probing a bruise on Dean's stomach. "This doesn't look like your normal self-defence."

Dean hissed a little from Harry's probing, sucking in a breath, then said tightly, "More like letting off steam."

Harry scowled. "That's called abuse."

"Nah, man," Dean sighed, squirming a little as though to get more comfortable holding his shirts up. "Cas's a good egg. If he didn't do this, he wouldn't've stopped me."

"I see," Harry mumbled before quietly casting, "Celeritate Sanitatem," over Dean's belly to get to the bruising on his stomach. "Celeritate Sanitatem. Celeritate Sanitatem." He gently rubbed over the area, frowning and trying to decide what stage of healing it was in, distantly noticing the goosebumps rippling across Dean's skin. He began casting again.

"I thought you were mad at me," Dean said after a moment.

"I am mad at you," Harry automatically replied back. "Celeritate Sanitatem."

"Shouldn't you be lettin' me rot then?"

"Celeritate Sanitatem." Harry pursed his lips. "Africa Sanationis." Then he sighed, "I've never been
very good at healing bruises. I only know how to speed the healing process. And that's not how anger works, you know," he added as he moved up to Dean's ribs. "I don't have to be mad at you to let you rot, and I don't have to let you rot just because I'm mad at you."

"What a cute Dr. Seuss proverb, but I meant, why the hell do you even care? Just yesterday you were pretendin' none of us existed."

Harry scowled a little again. "Episkey," he said, pointing his wand at Dean's broken rib. Dean sucked in a huge breath, probably in both surprise and pain. It was a little satisfying, but Harry did consider Dean's question. He smoothed his hand gently over the newly fixed rib making sure the spell worked, thinking, then as he tenderly assessed the cracked ones, he said softly. "You asked for my help. I said I would, so I am."

Dean snorted. "And that's all it takes? Just ask, and the great wizardry world saviour is at your service?"

"Usually," Harry shrugged, then began chanting \textit{Celeritate Sanitatem} again.

After a few moments of Dean watching him, Dean said, "Y'know, that bleeding heart of yours is going to get you in a fuck ton of trouble one day, kid."

Harry paused and smiled sadly at him. "It already has."

Dean was giving him an odd look, not quite pitying, but not exactly commiserating either. There was something else in his eyes, too, maybe a protectiveness, but Harry didn't feel up to trying to figure it out at the moment.

Going back to his work, Harry said, "Besides, you can't really call it a bleeding heart if I spent an entire day ignoring you."

Dean huffed and said over Harry's chanting, "Eh, you've had a rough time lately."

"Oh, so we're back to nice Dean now?" Harry mumbled.

"What?"

Harry shook his head. Deciding to change the subject, he asked instead, "Where did you go, anyway? Sam and I looked all over downtown."

Dean snorted again and smirked. "Abbey's."

"I know," Dean waggled his eyebrows. "I watched you from across the street."

"What?" Harry spat, falling back on his haunches. Taking in Dean's smug expression, he said, "Wait… Wait… So, we were never trying to catch up with you, were we?"

Dean shook his head, still smirking.

"You were \textit{behind} us - did you even leave Bobby's before us?"

"Now, Harry, I ain't tellin' all my secrets."

"You git," Harry said, a little incredulous and nonsensically amused. Shaking his head, he asked before going back to quietly chanting, "What else happened?"
"Had a drink," Dean sighed, "like I'm sure Sammy knew I would. Made peace with a couple of things. Then went out and found a street-church loon to summon Michael. Cas caught up with me though."

"Sounds like just in time," Harry commented. He finished his spell work and poked and rubbed the ribs again. They didn't seem to hurt Dean, and they were mostly healed. He also briefly noted that Dean's nipples seemed a bit redder than the Todd guy's, but pushed that thought away. "Sit up," he ordered, scooting back some to make room for Dean's legs.

"I think you got the worst of it," Dean protested but sat up anyway.

"No offence, but you haven't seen your face. How's the collarbone?"

Dean rotated his shoulders some then shrugged. "Fine."

Harry accepted that, not really knowing what he could do for it anyway. He pushed himself up into a kneeling position in front of Dean to be almost face to face with him, and gripping Dean's chin, studied the cuts on his face. They were surrounded by bruising already showing themselves, similar to the rest of the bruising Cas left. If Harry had to guess, he would bet the cuts came from punches, which made Castiel the Angel of Intense a bit more intimidating and, well, intense.

They weren't near fatal, however, so *Vuln ora Sanetur* would just cause more damage. Leaning a little closer and squinting at the split lip, Harry silently waved his wand at his side to clean away the blood.

"Oh," he said, surprised. "They aren't actually that bad."

"Wha- oh," Dean suddenly jerked his face away and cleared his throat. "Yeah, no shit. Cas wouldn't permanently scar this cute face. Just look at me." He winked.

Harry rolled his eyes and lifted his wand.

"Whoa!" Dean yelped, jerking back again and bringing his non-cuffed hand up as though to block the wand. "What did I just say? Cute face - get that thing away from it."

"I just want to close the cuts," Harry tried to reason. "It's the same spell I used on Sam's arm, on the way to the Whore's town. After the demon raid, remember?"

Dean eyed Harry's wand critically before slowly nodding.

Before he had time to jerk away for a third time, Harry quickly grabbed his chin again, pointed his wand, and said, *Signationem Pellis*."

"Hey," Dean winced, tenderly touching his cheek and lip.

"They're scabbed over, so don't pick at them," Harry instructed, moving over to pack up the first aid kit.

"Thanks? I guess."

Dean hissing again made Harry look over. He was rotating his wrist, frowning at it.

"Bloody hell, I forgot," Harry said, crouching once more in front of Dean. "Let me see."

Dean offered his wrist, and Harry carefully held it, casting the diagnostic spell again to see where it was sprained. "*Musculus Instaurabo,*" he spelled, then pushed the heel of their respective palms
together to test it - only to hiss himself.

He stared down at his own scraped palm, the memory of his Chaplin-worthy dive into rubbish rushing back into his mind. He blushed.

Dean chuckled. "Yeah, you, uh… what did you do? Trip out in Bobby's salvage yard?"

"No," Harry said honestly, taking back Dean's wrist and more carefully testing it. "Musculus Instaurabo."

"You kind of stink too."

"Piss off. Musculus Instaurabo. There, it should be fine. It isn't as bad as your ankle."

Dean's eyes were narrowed, taking in all of Harry's appearance, though he looked amused. Ignoring Harry, he said, "You smell a little like a dumpster. It's faint but there. You didn't go dumpster diving lookin' for me, did ya?"

"Piss off," Harry said more sternly, cheeks still warm. He snatched up the first aid kit to set on the desk as he finished putting it back together.

Dean laughed but didn't say anything else. Instead, he got settled back on the cot, the handcuff rattling a little. Harry put the first aid kit aside and turned the shattered bulb on the floor. He banished the pieces with a wave of his wand then picked up the lamp and books, putting them back where he assumed they belonged and righted the chair.

He then turned to look at the sigil.

"So," Dean opened, clearing his throat some. "Sammy says he did the math and that you'd be around eighteen, right?"

Harry shrugged, not looking over. "Yeah."

The centre of the sigil looked like a T with an overgrown, crooked tail attached with a circle around it. Around the circle were other symbols, most of them simple, resembling letters like N and Z and even the number 3.

"So, uh…" Dean said, "you leave behind a girl back in your world?"

Harry spared him a glance. "Er, well…. No," he said honestly, going back to the sigil, "but I did leave a girl behind who would be really mad to hear me say that." Dean chuckled as Harry pointed to the sigil. "Where did this come from?"

"Something Cas taught us. Banishes angels," Dean dismissed. "Not your type of chick?"

Harry shrugged. "She is a chick." He pointed specifically at what looked like an incomplete infinity sign. It looked familiar. "What does this one mean?"

"No clue," Dean answered. "So, the problem was that she was a chick?"

"I realised I like something else better," Harry said distractedly, tilting his head at what could have been an almost upside down, messy 6 or a sodding proofreader's mark. The 'delete' symbol, he thought. "I think I know this one," he said. "That with this," he pointed at the triangle on top, "but what was it?"

"You'll have to ask Cas. So, by something else -"
"Thanks for this, by the way," Harry snapped, suddenly remembering. "This thing threw me across
the room."

Dean frowned, sitting up. "What?"

"Yeah," Harry scolded. "It tried to banish my magic."

"Your magic?" Dean's eyebrows went up. "Is it okay?"

"It's fine - it couldn't leave my body, but it did a bloody good job trying to take me with it."

"Huh," Dean said, looking back at the sigil with interest. He did not look apologetic. "Are we sure it
was that?"

"Pretty sure, yeah," Harry said heatedly. "It happened when Cas disappeared, and you made your
great suicide escape."

Dean blinked. He leaned back again almost defiantly and raised a challenging brow.

Harry opened his mouth to yell, probably something about how it was pointless going through all of
that since the angels took Adam anyway, but he stopped. Currently, Dean was stable and seemed
content to wait at least a little bit before he tried escaping again. If he knew Adam was gone, that
would change in an instant.

He closed his eyes and made himself take a deep breath.

"Here," he said, crossing back over and pulling the Dreamless Sleep from his pocket. "Cas said
muggles shouldn't have more than ten ounces a month, but you can take a sip or two and be safe."

Dean took the vial, looking cautious. "It's got beetle eyes in it."

"Technically, by the time it's at this stage, the eyes have long since been dissolved. It's like they aren't
there."

Dean made a face.

"Just drink it," Harry sighed. "It'll help you heal, you'll get some rest, and we'll get a few hours
without having to worry about you. You don't have to take much, just enough to get you to sleep."

There must have been something in Harry's tone because Dean relented. He used his mouth to open
the vial, took a small sip, then used his mouth again to cork it, handing it back to Harry.

"Yack," Dean smacked his lips. "Does taste purple."

"Told you," Harry smiled a little.

"Night, I guess," Dean grunted, lying a little awkwardly down on his side to accommodate the cuffs.

"Sleep sweet," Harry mumbled, grabbing his jacket and leaving. He looked back before shutting the
big metal door, wondering if he could care about this world without getting attached - or wondering
if it was possible to get attached without letting go of home.

…

When Harry left the basement, he went upstairs for a very quick shower and to finally change out of
his rubbish clothes. He was, of course, not at all surprised to find Bobby, Sam, and Cas huddled in
the study, flipping through maps and discussing plans of action.

Harry had to take a moment to wonder if this was how it always was with them - constant action and fighting until they were shot, or eaten, or fell over.

In this case, though, Harry was with them. It was disturbing that the angels could have approached Adam in his dreams and taken him, like physically take him away. He didn't like the idea of leaving him in their hands.

"How's Dean?" Sam asked.

"Sleeping. I didn't tell him about Adam. I healed what wounds I could, but Cas will need to heal the rest."

Cas huffed but didn't disagree.

"We thought maybe you and Cas can do a recon on the place, see what you see."

"Sure. We have the advantage of night, might as well use it. Let's get going, then, shall we?" Harry looked at Cas.

Cas nodded then reached out and placed two fingers on Harry's forehead.

Like the last time Cas flew them anywhere, Harry was overcome with a terrible dropping sensation. He blinked, opened his eyes and looked around, but he had to squint to adjust to the lack of lighting.

"Cas?"

"I'm right here," Cas answered to Harry's right.

"So, where are we exactly?"

"Van Nuys in California."

"Right," Harry said, looking around. "Yeah, I don't even know where to begin to put that on a map."

"It's not far from Los Angeles."

"What's here?"

Harry could make out a large building, and there didn't seem to be too much around.

"This is an abandoned factory that was a part of a car chain. It's in the middle of a mostly abandoned area. The closest houses are about two miles from any side."

"Okay, so there's little chance of muggles coming around, right?"

"Yes."

It turned out, Harry couldn't have picked a better location himself. The weather was pretty perfect and not chilly at all to Harry. They were far enough from any town life that there weren't even any street lights around, cloaking the area in darkness. Even in the daylight, it would be all too easy to hide from muggles, if not also the angels - of which there were nine.

Harry and Cas inspected the entire area. There were five guarding the area near the left loading dock of the factory where Cas said Adam would be. Four others were patrolling the perimeter, one of
whom nearly stumbled upon them. To Harry, it seemed angels tended to favour business and professional types as their vessels. Even Cas wore a suit. Harry wouldn't think it would be an attire suitable for fighting, but it really didn't seem to bother the angels. That in itself made them seem a little more otherworldly.

It was clear to both of them that, whether or not Adam was what the angels were guarding, there was something there of value. Harry eventually snuck onto the roof on the left dock's factory floor and cast a few detection spells to confirm there was a regular muggle inside. Figuring that was the best they were going to get, Harry and Cas used their respective means of travel to go back to Bobby's.

By this time, it was just before four in the morning. Sam had coffee on and ready, and Bobby had made eggs and sausages. Harry ate while Cas and he told the other two about the area even though he wasn't all that hungry. He was beginning to learn that Bobby could be as bad as Molly Weasley when it came to feeding the underfed, but whereas, Molly would yell and guilt-trip, Bobby would silently and unwaveringly stare daggers until Harry ate.

Cas was standing, leaning against the counter, Bobby was at the head of the table, and Sam and Harry were sitting on either side. Having finished his food, Harry was gently sliding his coffee mug from one hand to another.

"This isn't good," Sam finally said.

"It could be worse," Cas answered.

"How are we going to take on nine angels?" Bobby asked him.

"We don't necessarily have to take them on," Harry suggested. "We just need to lure them away from the room long enough for someone to go in and get Adam."

"Adam wasn't alone in the room, you said that yourself," Cas pointed out. "There was another angel with him. In all likelihood, that angel is Zachariah."

"And Sam, if you go in there without Dean, you and Adam might not come back out," Bobby said.

"Wait, who said Sam was going in," Harry frowned. "Zachariah doesn't know me or what I am. He won't be expecting my magic. I could probably spell him long enough to grab Adam and go. I could Apparate us quickly."

"Then why don't you Apparate inside the room right now and get him?" Bobby asked, and Harry could tell it was a little mocking.

"I haven't ever been in the room, so I can't picture it enough to Apparate. But once I'm in, I can Disapparate from it."

"But that exposes you to the angels," Sam countered. "They've brought Adam back to life - only to, what, have their plan foiled by something they've never encountered before? They wouldn't stop until they learn everything about you, and we lose our edge."

"You do realise the angels are going to have to learn about me eventually, right? Besides, if I don't go in, then I would be luring the others away, wouldn't I? They would still learn of me."

"The others at the factory are low-level security," Cas said. "They aren't seriously meant to keep us out. I doubt anyone would believe them. I know Zachariah. He would assume the Winchesters simply had backup with a specialised weapon."
"But if you go running in there to Zachariah, he'll see for himself that you aren't just a regular human," Sam said.

Harry crossed his arms. He didn't like this - he didn't like being side-lined and not being the one to go directly to where the threat was. He didn't like the idea of arguably the weakest out of the three who would be going - because no way was he letting Bobby go - be the one to take the riskiest chance. Harry knew he could hold his own against Zachariah, with or without the Elder Wand. With the Elder Wand, he knew he was the only one who held the certainty of completing the rescue. Because Bobby was right, if Sam went in sans Dean, Zachariah would most likely either kill him and be done with it or capture him, too, ensuring Dean would come for both brothers.

Which he pointed out with Bobby and Cas agreeing immediately.

Sam nodded slowly, then said, "Which is why I think Dean should come."

"Say again?" Bobby barked at the same time Cas frowned, "What?" and Harry asked, "Excuse me?"

"Hear me out," Sam requested, lifting his hands briefly and looking around the room at them. "There's too many angels there for just me, Cas, and Harry. They might be low-level when it comes to rank, but they're still trained soldiers. They're likely to put up a good fight, and if they see Dean isn't with us, I can't see where that ends good."

"But you can see a good ending by hand delivering them their prize?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Sam said with confidence. "I see us all coming home."

There was a beat of silence, then Harry incredulously said, "Have you gone round the twist? They're doing this to make Dean say yes - and he will. If he goes in there, he'll be doing it to take Adam's place."

"He won't," Sam disagreed.

"Oh? Do you know something we don't?"

"I don't think he will. Dean can go back and forth, but in the end, he always makes the right choice."

Harry turned incredulous eyes to Bobby who was frowning at Sam. He did not look convinced, and that was enough to keep Harry arguing. "And you have a bundle of evidence of that? Because as far as I can tell, Dean has made his choice. His mind is made up."

Sam shook his head. "He won't do it."

"What makes you so bloody sure?"

"Because he's Dean Winchester," said Sam with conviction.

"Oh, what?" Harry scoffed. "That's not enough. Who someone is, is not a good enough recommendation - trust me, I've had to learn that the hard way."

"You don't know him like I do."

"I don't have to know him like you do. I know him enough."

"You don't understand," Sam pressed, his unyielding faith shining brightly in his eyes. "Dean knows the consequences of saying yes better than anyone. He won't do it."
"He's told me the consequences plays directly into why he wants to say yes!"

"He didn't mean it."

"And what, you don't think he meant what he said to you either?"

Sam clenched his jaw, obviously becoming angry. "No. He didn't. Just watch. Dean'll impress you."

"Impress me?" Harry scoffed again. "All I've seen so far is him running away from a bunch of demons and failing to assist a servant of Heaven kill an evil creature."

"That's not true," Sam barked. "You were there with us when we cleaned out that farmhouse."

"Yeah, where Dean failed to keep Dylan safe!"

Sam slammed his hands on the table - hard - and was suddenly towering over Harry. "That wasn't his fault."

Harry stood, too, not backing down. Sam's height could definitely be used to Sam's advantage against anyone else, but Harry had stared down Hagrid before. Sam's height was nothing in comparison. "He was the one who said he'd watch over Dylan," he argued. "And his fault or not, he failed to do that. He failed to help Pastor David. He failed to help Paul. And if we bring him, he will fail us too."

"That's not fair," Sam growled. "None of those things were in Dean's control - but this is, and Dean won't mess it up."

"He's already messing it up!" Harry yelled. "Michael would have him right now if it wasn't for Cas!"

"He's right, Sam," Bobby put in. "We just got him back. It's too risky."

"Well, I don't think it is," Sam declared. "And if I'm going in that room, I'm going in with my brother."

"Fine, then you aren't going in that room," Harry said.

"Harry," Cas warned. "The reasons why you won't be going in that room still stand. If you're coming, you'd be best served helping me fight the other angels."

Harry opened his mouth to argue, but Bobby cut in, "Don't be an idjit, boy. We've already got enough risk factors here."

Harry huffed. "Well, what do you propose?"

Bobby and Cas seemed to have a silent conversation, then Cas sighed, loud and put-upon, as Bobby said, "I guess Dean's coming."

"What?!" Harry yelled. "Are you all insane? Dean will say yes. Adam is the angels' ultimatum, you realise this, yes?"

"Yes," Cas said. "I agree with you, Harry… but it's the best chance we have."
"How?" Harry demanded.

"Exactly how you already pointed out. If Sam goes in without Dean, then anything else we'd do would be pointless. Bringing Dean is Sam's only shot at getting Adam out of there. Think strategically - the big picture."

Harry made a sound, possibly a nonhuman one, when his next words died in his throat. Cas was right. Harry was right when he pointed it out first. Logically, losing Dean would be a blow to their efforts, but it wouldn't be an end. It wouldn't win the angels the war. If Sam continued to withstand Lucifer, they still had a chance to find the answers before the prophesised fight. Even if Sam didn't withstand Lucifer, Bobby, Cas, and Harry still had a chance - a much smaller one, but still one nonetheless. If Dean was determined to say yes one way or another, and Harry went in alone to rescue Adam, revealing what he was, then they would be sacrificing major leverage and the element of surprise on their side that they most definitely needed, especially if Dean was going to say yes one way or another. They wouldn't know to search Dean's head about Harry, so unless Dean volunteered that information, which Harry somehow instinctively doubted, there was a good chance of them not learning about him.

On the same token, either brother saying yes would be counterproductive any way he looked at it, but ultimately, it wasn't Harry's decision what Dean should or shouldn't do. He couldn't decide Dean's fate for him, and he couldn't stand in Dean's way if Dean wanted to 'fulfil' his 'destiny'. After all, that was what Harry did, and no matter who felt what about it, Harry was going to do it regardless - the moment he learned he was a Horcrux, that fate was sealed. Who was he to tell someone they couldn't do the exact thing he did - even if he wanted to shout that he should be the lesson and they should learn from his mistakes.

Thinking that, though, Harry knew he would do the same thing if he had it to do over.

"I don't like it," he finally said.

"None of us do, kid," Bobby said.

"It'll be fine, you'll see," Sam insisted, obviously relieved Harry stopped fighting it. He knocked his knuckles against the table then left the kitchen, heading into the laundry room and most likely going to the basement. To his brother.

Harry sat back down, suddenly feeling very tired.

Cas sat, too, taking Sam's now empty spot. "Harry, when we collected Adam the first time, the light that shone when the angels died didn't bother you?"

Harry winced. "Losing their eyes? How?"

"They burn out of the skull."

"Lovely," Harry mumbled and was somehow thoroughly unsurprised. "It's bright, but I could see it just fine. It's similar to one of our most powerful light spells."

"What would that be? Can you show me?"
Harry pulled out his wand, spared Bobby a glance who shielded his eyes, then cast, "Baubillious."

White bright light burst from his wand, almost encompassing everything with it. Staring at it, Harry realised it wasn't just similar to the white bright light the angels emitted while dying - it was the same white bright light. A light filled with magic and power.

He cancelled the spell and gaped at Cas, who was gaping back - as much as he supposed Cas could gape.

"I don't know about you two, but from what I could tell, they look 'bout the same," Bobby said, rubbing his eyes. He didn't look at it directly, but he clearly got an impression of the light.

"Indeed," Cas nodded. "It is becoming clearer why you need wands. The magic inside your kind is too strong for humans to control themselves. I wouldn't have thought it possible for a human to hold so much power," he added almost thoughtfully, tilting his head at Harry.

"What can I say, we're a wonder," Harry said, feeling slightly uncomfortable with being subject to Cas' studious gaze.

"That will come in handy," Cas said with a nod to Harry's wand, clearly continuing the conversation about the white bright light. "So will be the fact that you can look at it directly. You can probably see and talk to angels in their pure form. Tomorrow they'll be in vessels, however. We'll have to take down the other four angels before making a move on the five inside."

Harry tensed. "And by takedown… you mean…"

"Kill them."

Harry gulped.

"We can give you a couple of angel blades, which is one of the few things that can kill us. Do you have any experience in hand-to-hand combat?"

Harry shook his head. "Not really, other than the occasional brawl."

"Then keep the blades on you but try not to get into striking range until you're sure you can stab them."

"Okay," Harry agreed because he didn't know what else to do. Argue about killing? It was hardly the time. He thought, all things considered, he had up to that point had it pretty easy in the killing department. He had always preferred to restrain the enemy or opponent. Neutralise them and move on. He understood there were times when killing was called for, but he never thought killing should be the first answer.

His subconscious had been thinking about it ever since Dean spat it in his face but killing didn't bother him nearly as much when he watched someone else do it. He felt like that had changed slightly since the Whore, but Harry had to remind himself that he didn't mind too much when Cas killed all those demons in front of him. Given, there was a difference between other things and creatures of such pure evil that Harry could sense the wrongness of them, but it was a thought to cling to.

In this case, thinking of his duel with Cas and how difficult going up against nine angels would be - not to mention that anything Harry did to restrain or neutralise them would most likely not hold - he was rapidly running out of other possible ideas.
Killing did solve the problem.

He groaned a little and said, "Actually, I think I'm going to get a little sleep before we do anything. Adam's obviously safe for the moment."

"Good idea," Bobby agreed. "Go get a few hours. We'll wake you if anything happens."

Harry gave Bobby a grateful smile and went upstairs.

... 

Having not taken any Dreamless Sleep, the few hours of rest Harry got were plagued with strange and confusing dreams. He couldn't quite call them nightmares, but they were disturbing enough. Especially when he considered a particular part where Harry was duelling a red devil in heels while men in speedos danced in the background.

Regardless, it was still a more restful sleep than what he was normally experiencing in this universe.

He dressed in plain trousers and a green Henley, pushing the sleeves up. He took a moment to consider his arms and hands. The long scar that ran down Harry's right inner forearm could very well have an entirely different connotation than what it actually was - a scar from a rat-faced traitor taking his blood to bring a monster back into the world. It was one of the reasons why he was self-conscious about it. Any time he caught someone looking at it, he wanted to shout, "I didn't do it! I didn't try to kill myself!" Or whatever else they might have been thinking.

The guest room at Bobby's was modest and small. It had a double bed, a plain wooden dresser, a couple of wooden chairs, and that was it. There were two other bedrooms on the second floor, and Harry assumed one of them used to be Bobby's room; the wheelchair took that away from him along with, Harry was learning, so much more.

Harry walked over to the closet door and pulled it open to see his reflection in the mirror that was hung on it. He lifted up his shirt and turned some to look at his tattoo. It looked extra black against his skin. He turned even further, searching out his Uncle Vernon scars. He made a face and poked at one. Then he sighed and let his shirt fall, looking his reflection in the eye.

"Why are you here?" he asked it.

When no answers came, he closed the closet and walked to the window, looking out at the bright autumn day.

God.

Sam and Cas thought God brought Harry here. "If you did," he found himself praying out loud to this elusive Creator, searching the bright blue sky as though he could search God's own eyes, "would you take me back? If I help save this world, can I go back to mine?"

As though as in reply, a bird shat on the window.

Boots on, cell phone in pocket, and Hagrid's pouch safely around his neck and shrunk to be less obtrusive like he normally did, Harry crept down the stairs. He found Bobby asleep on the cot, a
half-empty bottle of Jack keeping his seat warm in the wheelchair next to him.

Harry hunted for a bottle of water, then walked the house while sipping on it, seeing if he could find Sam or Cas. Eventually, Harry spotted Cas stalking the perimeter.

The house was quiet, far off wind chimes and a ticking clock the only sounds. He knew from his trip to the loo earlier that Sam wasn't upstairs, and he wasn't downstairs apparently either. Obviously, that meant either he left or was with Dean. Not particularly wanting to join Cas guarding a warded house, Harry decided to go spy on the Winchesters.

Harry got halfway down the basement stairs, casting to keep his steps silent, when he heard voices floating up. He crouched and peeked down and over to find the door to the panic room wide open. He cast a volume spell, turning up their voices ever so slightly since there was less chance of it becoming extra echoy with the door opened.

Dean was speaking. "- to make me say yes, or it's not a trap and I'm going to say yes anyway. And I will. I'll do it - fair warning."

"No, you won't," Sam replied easily, voice still full of faith and confidence. "When push shoves, you'll make the right call."

There was silence as, he assumed, Dean processed that. Then Dean said, "You know, if tables were turned, I'd let you rot in here. Hell, I have let you rot in here."

Sam sighed, "Yeah, well... I guess I'm not that smart."

"I-I don't get it. Sam, why are you doing this?"

"Because… you're still my big brother."

There was a long pause after that, Harry lowering himself onto the steps to keep from getting a cramp as he waited. Finally, Dean said, "Well, aren't we just a regular Full House episode. I can almost hear the music."

Sam chuckled. "I mean it, Dean."

"Yeah, yeah," Dean dismissed. "Where are the others?"

"Cas is taking watch, as usual, and Bobby and Harry are sleeping."

"Dude, that Dreamless Sleep? That shit knocks you out."

Harry smirked and cancelled his spell, quietly going back upstairs. It sounded like Harry missed most of the important bits of their conversation, and he didn't think he would gather any information that would be useful. At least, not to his overall purposes. They were focused on Adam and the mission, so Harry doubted they would discuss more theories as to how Harry had gotten here and why.

He knew they would circle back to it soon, though, if Dean didn't say yes like he said he was going to, and he knew they were likely to spitball and discuss it privately before involving him - involving anyone. Harry refused to be left out, particularly about that, so if he had to spy, he had to spy. It wasn't like that was something he needed to entirely make peace with.

With a couple of flicks of his wand, Harry filled the coffee maker and turned it on. He felt reasonably calm, and he was happy that it seemed he was going to get some alone-and-recharge time before the day got started. He sat at the table and was just debating about pulling out his map and catching up
with Hogwarts when a grunt came from the study.

He peeked over and saw Bobby sitting up, apparently attempting to haul himself into his chair.

"Need some help?" Harry asked.

"Nah, nah - I got it, I got it."

Bobby grunted again, pulling the chair closer to him, almost tipping the thing over. Cas, perhaps having sensed stirring in the house, came waltzing in through the front door then, looking ready for anything. Five minutes later, two sets of footsteps came pounding up the basement stairs, and Dean, followed by Sam, joined them.

No alone-and-recharge time then. Seemed about right.

Dean and Sam showered and changed while Cas waited unhappily and impatiently, going over tactics with Harry, and Bobby drank. Harry spent the time trying to familiarise himself with the angel blades. He hadn't really thought about what they were going to do - he figured, it was best not to. He was detached from it, not quite connecting, and he thought that was probably best for all parties involved.

When the brothers came down, it seemed like Dean was wanting a private word with Bobby and Sam, so Harry politely removed himself from the kitchen and went to lean by the hallway in the study. Cas joined him.

"What do you think?" Harry asked. "You think he'll say yes?"

"Yes," Cas said solemnly, if not a little sulkily. "That man in there is the broken shell of the man he used to be."

Harry frowned at the harsh tone and words. He glanced in the kitchen where Dean, Sam, and Bobby were still having a moment. "How did he used to be?" he couldn't help but ask.

"Strong." Cas answered. "Loyal. Dean had values, and he never wavered. I thought he would be the answer."

Harry could hear the slight betrayal in Cas' voice, but that just made Harry feel for Dean.

"And you've been thinking I'm the answer recently," he said, some indignation threading through his voice making Cas look over. "That's not fair, mate. It's not fair to put that kind of label on anyone. We're only human."

"I suppose you're right," Cas allowed, but then said bitterly, "but I guess we'll never know."

Harry huffed and rolled his eyes.

Dean clapped his hands, coming into the study with Sam and Bobby in tow. "Alright, let's get this show on the road. Cas, Harry, it's been fun."

"I hear you're gonna kill some feathery dicks," Dean said, stepping up closer to Harry now.

Harry shrugged. "Unless I can come up with a spell to undo their wards and we banish them, then I guess I have to."
Dean narrowed his eyes a little and asked tightly, "You alright?"

Harry squinted. "Afraid I'll cry and run away?"

"Something like that," Dean snorted, though he seemed to relax a little at Harry's attitude.

"Y'know, some people would consider difficulty killing others as a positive quality."

"Yeah, I know," Dean smiled. "I've been to their funerals."

Harry swatted Dean's arm. "Prat. I'll be fine."

Dean's eyes turned serious for a moment. "See that you are."

Then, as quick as it came, it was gone, and Dean was stepping back and giving Harry a long, appraising once over that gave Harry goosebumps.

"Damn," Dean said, "and right here at the end credits. Too bad."

"Er…" Harry said, shifting a little and furiously fighting the blush that Dean was pulling out of him.

"What?"

Dean smirked. "Do us both a favour and go back to that strip club, will ya?"

"What?" Harry said again. "Wait, Sam told you we checked there?" And told him what, exactly? That Harry was probably clearly flustered at the club. Or did he see him with someone - with that Todd guy? Or maybe about Harry's embarrassing rubbish tumble and coming-out babble. Turned out there was a pretty long list of things from the night before that Harry truly didn't want Dean knowing.

Dean gave a casual nod. "Go back, let loose. Maybe it'll help ya pull that stick outta your ass… and you can find someone to help you it push back in. Over and over." Dean waggled his eyebrows and winked.

Harry gaped. "What?" he asked again, a bit higher and little breathless.

Before Dean could continue with whatever the hell else was going to fall out of his mouth, Sam was there and smacking Dean upside the head.

"Ow!" Dean protested, rubbing at the abused spot.

"Seventeen," Sam said through clenched teeth. He was giving Dean a look that for all the world said We've-talked-about-this.

"Hey - hey, I was just giving him some friendly advice," Dean smirked. Sam rolled his eyes.

"Idjit," Bobby barked. "Get out of here before you make me not miss ya."

"Right, let's get a move on," Dean said loudly, ceasing their conversation, and Harry shook his head, deciding to make sense of that later. He looked back at Harry. "Got your stick? The blades?"

"And a handgun and two knives," Harry rolled his eyes. "You're not going to make me show you how to load the gun again, are you?"

"Damn straight," Dean said seriously and crossed his arms. "Start with the safety."
Harry grumbled but still pulled out the gun and showed Dean he knew how to work it. Dean then made Harry show him where he had the knife holsters, that the thigh holster for the spare angel blade was secure, and that Harry knew where to stab that would ensure a quick death.

That last one Harry didn't actually know, but he knew of enough spots that Dean seemed satisfied.

After finally passing inspection, Harry gave Dean one last annoyed glare and Apparated to the factory. Cas was coming as well, and after they got rid of the patrols, they would fetch the brothers. Or, so was the plan.

Cas had intimate knowledge of how the angel security would work, so Harry picked an Apparation point that was between his two targets, inside some storage closet, or what was left of it. He knew better than to try to gauge his chances with either of them based on their choice of vessel - big or small, male or female. So, Harry's decision on who to kill first was a strategic one based on their stations. He would kill the one less out in the open first, then use the sound of his Apparation to draw in the other one.

He silently crept down the old hallways, the paint chipped and discoloured on the walls. He quickly cleared an old office before carefully making his way through stacks of old, broken filing cabinets to get to the windows, only having to swipe through spider webs a couple of times. Casting a silencing charm, Harry noiselessly broke the windows, wiped and pushed away the glass pieces, and crawled out through it. There were overgrown bushes right outside, and despite a branch making a valiant effort to trip him, they proved good cover.

After crawling around, Harry eventually found his target.

The vessel was a middle-aged man, white, with gelled blonde hair and a clean-shaven face. He was in a black suit and stood ramrod straight.

Harry felt like his heart was in his throat. Remember the demons, he told himself. You didn't care about the demons. You didn't care about the angels. They're bad guys. He would kill you if he saw you right now. Remember the demons. Remember the demons.

Forcing himself to think of why they were there - Dean's face swimming briefly in front of his eyes - Harry tightened his grip on the blade and bounced a little in his position to get ready to pounce. Though fleetingly distracted by what he knew was a shriek of an owl, Harry still sprang forward before he could lose the nerve, jumping onto the angel's back with his left arm quickly securing itself around the angel's neck, and burying the blade in his back, up his ribcage, and into what Harry knew to be his heart, pushing the blade in all the way to the hilt. It took more force than he thought it would to stab someone so completely, and it took just as much force to yank it out again.

The angel cried out as Harry jumped back, blood an ominous and morbid outline of the white bright light that poured out of the wound momentarily before it also jetted from the angel's face, and a noticeable click cut through the air. The angel fell down, dead.

Harry watched, mesmerized, as dark scorch marks of wings burned themselves into the concrete. He had to quickly get out of the way as it stretched, as though the angel's massive wings were unfolding themselves, wilting with their owner's death. Harry didn't remember seeing this with the other angels, but that was in a forest. There on the pavement, there was no way to not see them.

"Fuck," Harry rasped.

"I-i-i-i-eek," came a high-pitched screech of an owl, making Harry jump. His head shot up to look at the sky, spinning his body in place. There, in the distance, was a white owl heading straight
toward him, flapping its wings frantically. "I-i-i-i-i-eek!" came the warning again, a forceful shriek to signal distress that was so achingly familiar, right down to Harry's bones. "I-i-i-i-i-e -"

Just like that, in one blink, she was gone.

Harry's breathing picked up as he stood there, frozen. He blinked a few more times, then jerked his head back down to the dead angel. Then he quickly turned his back to him, clutching his achy side-

Why? Why did his side hurt? It felt like a cramp - his breathing. He was breathing too fast, his diaphragm was cramping - how could he be breathing this fast and not feel like he was getting any oxygen - hyperventilating - hyperventilating - hyperventilating, that was the word-

Screams, a blaze of green light on every side: Hagrid gave a yell and the motorbike rolled over. Harry lost any sense of where they were: Streetlights above him, yells around him, he was clinging to the sidecar for dear life. Hedwig's cage, the Firebolt, and his rucksack slipped from beneath his knees-

Concrete. His hand and knuckles were on concrete. Scraped hand. Bleeding hands. Burnt concrete. But then, through the mist in front of him, he saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron.

There was pounding. A pounding like a pulse. It was daytime, and there was concrete, and there was some wind, and there were some cicadas, and there were bushes, and there was a knife in his hand - a blade. A weapon. He had a weapon. A sharp weapon. He tightened his grip on it.

The enormous serpent, bright, poisonous green, thick as an oak trunk, had raised itself half in the air and its great blunt head was weaving drunkenly between the pillars. Harry trembled, ready to close his eyes if it turned.

On his feet. He needed to be on his feet. Because someone was coming. Because he wasn't alone. He didn't have a wand, but he had a blade. He would fight. He had to fight.

"Harry! Harry! Stop it! Stop! Stop fighting me!"

"Petfrificus Totalus!" yelled Harry, struggling to cling to the smooth, soaked surface of the island as he pointed his wand at the Inferius that had his arm: It released him, falling backward into the water with a splash; he scrambled to his feet, but many more Inferi were already climbing onto the rock, their bony hands clawing at its slippery surface, their blank, frosted eyes upon him, trailing waterlogged rags, sunken faces leering.

"Petfrificus Totalus!" Harry bellowed again, backing away as he swiped his wand through the air; six or seven of them crumpled, but more were coming toward him. "Impedimenta! Incarcerous!"

"Harry! HARRY. STOP."
A few of them stumbled, one or two of them bound in ropes, but those climbing onto the rock behind them merely stepped over or on the fallen bodies. Still slashing at the air with his wand, Harry yelled, "Sectumsempra! SECTUMSEMPRA!"

Harry gasped a huge breath as he felt like he just did a somersault from boiling deep water right into a shallow freezing pool. His back was flat on the ground of some hard surface, and an incredible weight was on him. His arms were painfully stretched crisscross across his chest, someone holding them straight out by the wrists, and something was putting enough weight on his thighs that he thought maybe his feet were going numb. He was panting, felt soaked through his clothes, and Harry knew for damn sure his face wasn't that wet just from sweat.

He choked an ugly sob before his vision cleared enough to see who or what had him trapped. It took scrunching his face a couple of times to realise who he was seeing.

Castiel.

"C-Cas?"

Cas seemed to almost collapse in relief. "Harry," he breathed. "You're back."

"Wh-what…" he began, barely remembering how to think, let alone string thoughts together long enough to figure out how to ask what he wanted to know.

Cas let go of his wrists and sat up and away from him, placing two fingers on Harry's forehead. It wasn't until the sensation was gone that Harry realised his shoulders, both of them, had been screaming in pain. That they had been dislocated, and Cas just healed them. That Cas must have dislocated them in the first place. To stop Harry from…

"D-did I… was I attacking you?" Harry gulped, shaking, Harry's head pounded with the memory of Inferi, which Harry could have sworn just moments ago were right there, right in front of him. But they weren't there, and Cas apparently was.

"Yes," Cas said, albeit gently, helping Harry sit up. "It's alright. You were having a flashback."

"Flashback?" Harry sniffed, roughly rubbing his tear-soaked face.

When Harry looked back up, Cas was staring at him both gravely and with that same kindness from the day before. "It would appear that you have been through a lot more than we realised."

"I'm fine," Harry grumbled, feeling embarrassed. "I'm sorry I attacked you," he added in a small voice.

"It's alright," Cas assured. He lifted two fingers up again questioningly.

Not entirely sure what he wanted but feeling too weak and too guilty to refuse him, Harry simply shrugged a little and nodded.

Cas pressed the fingers against his forehead again, this time several sensations passing through Harry. By the time Cas was done, Harry felt… It was like night and day. He felt a million times better. He felt… fine. Like him again. Like what had just happened didn't just happened.

"What did you do?" Harry asked.

"Cleaned you up," Cas answered, standing and holding out his hand to pull Harry to his feet. "Healed the rest of the injuries you sustained while attacking me. And I balanced out your amygdala
and hippocampus for the moment so that your body is no longer suspended in its fight-or-flight reflex, exacerbated by your acute anxiety and recent panic attack, that will hopefully prevent any more hallucinations. You also had a significant reduction of serotonin and norepinephrine that I replenished."

"Er… my what?"

"It's not a cure. It's a band-aid for the moment. If your magic didn't resist me, I probably could do a lot more, but ultimately, trauma disorders often affect most mental facilities angels cannot reach easily and emotions angels cannot change."

"I… I don't know what you're trying to say."

Cas sighed, patience visibly running thin. "You appear to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and though I have helped head off the symptoms for today, I cannot heal you."

"Oh… Oh, er, well… thanks? I… okay. So, okay… God, I'm so sorry -"

Cas held up a hand to stop Harry. "As much as I hope you get better, this is not a good place to continue this discussion. We're already late retrieving Sam and Dean."

Harry blinked, remembering himself and what had happened just before the - what? flashback? - occurred. He spun around and stared, a little open-mouthed, at the dead angel on the ground, then jerked around to the patch of sky he knew for certain he saw a white owl.

"I took care of the other three," Cas reported, "and went looking for you when it was clear you weren't coming to where we agreed to meet."

"Sorry," Harry mumbled again, picking up the angel blade on the ground and turning it over in his hand. The blade seemed to be a natural blood repellent, and a couple of flicks cleaned it of the remaining blood. With some manoeuvring, Harry was able to sheath it with the other blade in the tight thigh holster.

"Are you alright?" Cas asked, eyeing him as though searching for something he missed.

Harry nodded. "Yeah. Yes. Thanks, Cas, really." He smiled. "I feel loads better. I really appreciate it." Cas nodded, but before Cas could say anything, Harry quickly pressed, "But, er, sorry, but could we, er, n-not… not tell the others what happened?"

Cas frowned. "They should be aware. This could happen again in a dangerous situation -"

"I know," Harry was fast to reassure, "and we can tell them, y'know, later… Perhaps. That something like that is a possibility or something, maybe, when I learn more about it, but, er… could we not tell them exactly what… happened?"

Sighing, Cas said, "It's nothing to be embarrassed about -"

"Please, Cas." Harry was not above begging. He could only imagine the mollycoddling Sam could do, the humouring Bobby could do, and just the idea of Dean throwing that truly terrible experience in his face already made his teeth hurt. "Please?"

Cas closed his eyes briefly then said, "Alright, Harry, I won't tell them, but something like this is dangerous. You could get them and yourself killed."

Harry felt a chill go through him. He swallowed then tried to smile. "But not today, right? Because
you balanced out my hippos or something."

Cas shook his head a little, features softening. For a second, Harry thought the angel was going to smile, but then his face turned super serious once more. "There are still five angels guarding the room. We need to retrieve Sam and Dean and continue before the other angels find the ones we've killed."

Harry nodded. He bounced a little on the balls of his feet, shaking out his hands, and refocusing on the plan. "Alright," he said. "I'm ready."

Cas nodded once sharply, and with a fluttery sound of feathers and a loud crack, the two disappeared.

Harry reappeared again instantly on the other side of the factory, and a mere few seconds later, Cas was reappearing with Dean and Sam.

"Any problems?" Sam immediately asked.

Cas and Harry shared a significant look that was probably a moment too long, but then Harry shook his head and said, "Nope. Just took a little longer than expected."

Sam and Dean exchanged a look that told Harry they didn't miss the one passed between he and Cas, but then they both nodded as though to accept it and the four of them began to make their way closer to the factory, coming out from behind large stacks of crates as an airplane went by overhead.

"Where the hell are we?" Dean asked, squinting around.

"Van Nuys, California," Cas answered, mood obviously souring now that Dean was there. Because they all knew why Dean was there.

"Where's the beautiful room?"

"In there."

"The beautiful room is in an abandoned muffler factory in Van Nuys, California?" Dean asked incredulously.

"Where'd you think it was?" Cas countered.


"It would have to be somewhere you could get to, wouldn't it?" Harry presented what he thought was the obvious. "But blade of grass does sound neat."

Dean and Sam frowned at Harry. He might have sounded a bit more peppy than usual, he realised. Probably even more so for the situation. He couldn't help but be brightened by his current mental reprieve, however. He felt great. He made a mental note to talk to Cas and find out more about the balance of whatever's. He had heard of PTSD before, but he honestly didn't know much about it.

Ignoring them, Harry turned to survey the factory once more, deciding if he still agreed with the entrance they had planned.

"Right," Dean drawled. "Now, why again aren't we just shazaming Adam out?"

"There are at least five angels in there," Cas said.
"So? You guys are fast."

Harry narrowed his eyes. If he didn't know any better, he felt like Dean was giving them one last chance to stop him.

"They're faster," Cas answered. He nodded to Harry, who pulled out his wand, ready. "Harry and I got them. You two sneak in and grab the boy."

"You're really going to take on five angels?" Dean asked, concern outweighing his sarcasm as his gaze danced back and forth between Cas and Harry.

"Yes," Cas answered, a challenge.

"Isn't that suicide?"

"Rich, coming from you," Harry couldn't help but jab. Dean scowled. "Look, we're just going to try to distract them, lead them away from the room. We don't have to win, just need to keep their attention until you…" He trailed off.

"Until the boy the safe," Cas finished for him, glower firmly in place.

"Until we're all safe," Sam softly corrected.

"I'm sorry, Sam," Cas sighed. "I don't have the same faith in him that you do."

Dean's face was unreadable. Sam cleared his throat.

"This is where I'll go in," Cas continued. "Sam, Dean, you two can watch from here. Harry will come in from over there," he gestured. "When you get your opening, go."

They nodded, and Harry began to walk away, needing to get in position before Cas went in. He made it a few feet before wheeling around.

"Dean?"

Dean looked over at him.

"Don't do it." He noticed Dean's jaw twitch, so he pressed, "Don't… don't mean it."

Confusion briefly flashed across Dean's face before understanding dawned, and Harry turned back around before he could see too much of the regret and sadness that already seemed to settle in Dean's eyes. He figured Dean wouldn't let it show for long, and Harry didn't need to see it.

He already felt a little of it himself as he was pretty sure that was going to be the last time he ever spoke to Dean.

As Harry approached the already broken windows to a sectioned off area of the factory floor, he cast *Specialis Revelio* and the Supersensory Charm like he did before his duel with Cas. Just as noiselessly as before, Harry pushed away what glass he could and pulled himself through, having to scoot over some soggy boxes carefully with his foot to allow him down.

He flattened his back against a wall and peered through a crack between it and a long, clouded and dirty panel of glass that was probably once there for supervisors to watch the workers on the floor. Sunlight was coming through at just the right angle that if Harry attempted to stand in front of it, the angels would see an almost perfect Harry shaped silhouette.
A door creaked loudly and echoed throughout the empty floor from the opposite side. Sunlight poured in through the door as well, giving way to a Castiel shaped silhouette, and Harry had to give the angels a little credit for the location. If Harry was any bigger, he wouldn't have been able to hide like he was. Breaching from any angle would be seen.

The extra sunlight also illuminated a perfectly square looking… tiny house? Old and beaten down with a flat roof, door, and boarded up windows located out on the other side of the floor close by the door Cas just entered.

The door slammed behind Cas, a little late to the punch to be entirely natural and not conducted by the two large men Harry knew to be waiting there, and thanks to Harry's increased eyesight, he noticed it bounce a little but didn't close all the way, meaning Dean and Sam would be watching through the crack.

Cas' footsteps were loud in the large, empty area as he steadily walked deeper in, peering around the tiny house with a critical look. An unnecessary critical look, Harry realised. Cas had known of this place before, and he was high enough in the ranks once to have had a hand in creating it. He appeared appropriately cautious for someone planning on entering the supposedly beautiful room.

Harry saw the angel silently sneaking up behind Cas and noticed with interest the way the angel was using energy to muffle his own footsteps. He also noticed energy pulling tightly together protectively behind Cas where the angel was approaching, meaning Cas knew he was there too.

The angel straightened, blade in hand, and slashed it down. Cas ducked expertly, turning around in his crouch, and shot back up to capture the angel's wrist of the hand holding the blade. As the angel tried to twist out of his hold, Cas twisted back, allowing the angel to bring their arms down but turning it at the last moment to let his own momentum help stab the angel in his leg.

The angel stifled a cry but continued to grunt in pain as Cas dug the blade in. They struggled with it before the blade was wrenched out - by which angel, Harry didn't know - and Cas briefly got the upper hand by pulling their arms up and almost stabbing him in the chest. The angel was able to stop him before the blade penetrated, however, and they wrestled with it until Cas began to push the angel down to his knees with his strength and pressure over the angel's wrists, getting enough leverage to push the blade home. White bright light flooded out of the angel's eyes and mouth, not quite drowning out his cries as they echoed around, and Cas stood over him until the click of an angel dying happened before yanking the blade back out, keeping it in hand.

Cas carefully walked further into the floor, away from the beautiful room, spinning around as though wary of who else was there.

Harry might not have known a lot about military things, but if these angels were lower level, he thought it spoke to Cas' once apparently very high level in ranking if they were showing a singular enemy as much vigilance as they were him.

He also felt unbelievably grateful for Cas' earlier help. Harry didn't even slightly feel like Cas had been in his head - he felt like Cas soothed his head. Like he protected his head from itself. He felt like he was watching with a clear mind, a less confused conscious, and a stronger backbone.

That in and of itself finally showed Harry what Ron and Hermione had spent the better part of a year trying to help him realise: there was something wrong. He wasn't a nutter, but he wasn't recovered
either. Thanks to Cas, for the first time in a long while, he honestly did feel a balance in his mind. Moreover, he felt an old confidence back in him, and with a small amount of relish, he took his cue.

He whistled, no tune coming to mind except some song he had heard over the radio in the last few days, but he whistled all the same, strolling casually across the panelled glass, knowing he was capturing everyone’s attention. He stopped in the middle of the glass and turned to face it. Lifting his wand just a little, he cast, "Reducto."

The glass shattered as though a wrecking ball just slammed into it, pieces bursting away from Harry and soaring across the floor. Harry noticed two angels stayed hovering close to Cas, but the other two had come forward, obviously to confront Harry and not at all expecting the glass to shatter.

Harry took the opportunity his entrance granted and pointed his wand at the two closest angels. "Relashio," he spelled immediately, causing the angel blades to fall from their hands. Then, "Magicus Extremos," before attempting an Immobulus. He hit one angel who clearly had no idea what was happening, but the other angel seemed to have recovered more quickly because he had picked back up his blade and was charging at Harry.

He didn't have time for another Magicus Extremos, so Harry Apparated to just a few feet away to give him the time before spelling, "Magicus Extremos! Flipendo!"

The angel stumbled, scowling at Harry in confusion, but still came at him. The other angel had broken his Immobulus and picked up her weapon as well. Harry could hear the grunts of pain and sounds of fighting coming from where Cas was. Resisting the urge to check on him, Harry threw a Conjunctivitis Curse at the angel in the woman’s vessel who jerked her head back when hit, then faced the angel in the male vessel who had paused a little more than an arm length away, ready to strike but waiting to see what Harry was going to do.

Harry heard the clanging of the blades from where Cas was, but he couldn't hear anyone sneaking in. Keeping an ear focused on any sound of Dean and Sam, or from the room, Harry cast, "Levicorpus," dangling the angel upside down and had to jumped back from the woman vessel as she charged at him with her blade, clearly disgruntled by the curse to her eyes.

Harry threw up a shield charm, attempted another Immobulus that she seemed prepared for, tossed a Deprimo which she dodged, and continued to scramble to keep from getting in stabbing range while the male vessel angel found a way to get down and right himself.

He fell behind Harry, and Harry could sense him approaching, so he Apparated again to appear behind the angel instead so that the two were in his sights and cast Orbis to suck the angels into the ground. It only worked to about their ankles, but it kept them there long enough for Harry to yell, "Lacarnum Inflamaral," sending large and bright balls of fire to both angels. Three of the balls missed and sped toward the factory wall, hitting and scorching the area but not catching it on fire. Two hit, though, strong and true in Harry’s aim, pushing the male vessel over, his suit catching fire, and causing the angel in the woman vessel to flail in her attempt to put herself out, and drop her blade.

It was at that time that Harry heard the door creaking open quietly and the soft tread footsteps of Dean and Sam approaching the room. He spared a glance, seeing Cas jumping back and sideways to avoid a swipe of a blade and almost making the angel slash the other instead in an impressive move, then to see Dean testing the doorknob to the tiny house/beautiful room, nod to Sam, and open it, stepping inside.

With a growl of frustrated rage, the male Harry was fighting got the jump on him, throwing them
down onto the floor. Harry struggled with him while the angel seemed to be trying to simultaneously disarm Harry of his wand and stab Harry with his blade.

Panic sparked through Harry - not about getting stabbed, but at being disarmed. This was exactly how Harry won the Elder Wand's allegiance in the first place. The angel, in all his angelic discernment, seemed to notice. He paused briefly, squinted at Harry, looked down at the wand, then smirked.

"No!" Harry cried. He redoubled his grip on his wand, not even trying to block against the blade any longer as it cut and practically gouge some of the skin on Harry's biceps, and just as the angel was applying his far superior strength, instantaneously fracturing Harry's wrist, white bright light burst from his eyes and mouth, a scream exploding from his throat, and then the deadly click snapped, Harry vibrating underneath him with it.

With a grunt, Harry pushed the now dead body off him, seeing an angel blade sticking out of his back. Harry looked over and saw Cas refocusing on the two he was fighting, dropping his own blade into his hand. He had obviously been fighting with the blade he used to kill the first angel and had just thrown it to save Harry.

Harry barely had a moment to be grateful, however. The angel in the female vessel was on Harry in a heartbeat, and Harry on instinct yelled, "Expelliamus!"

Her blade flew out of her hand, and Harry caught it. He quickly stuffed his wand in his pocket not willing to risk almost losing it again while she stood frozen in shock, then he yanked the blade out of the fallen angel's back and stood, a blade in each hand.

"What are you?" the angel growled.

"Er… a no-plan Joe in stolen trousers?" Harry offered.

She glowered and lunged for him only to have to immediately jump right back as Harry swiped at her with a blade. She pushed out her hand, sending a crash of energy to Harry that had him flying into the air and landing on his back. With only time for a groan, he scrambled back up, ready to strike again or be pushed again, whichever was coming.

The windows, loose boards and bricks of the building began rattling.

"Harry!" Cas called, blocking a hit and then disappearing only to reappear beside him. Cas snatched the blade from Harry's right hand and said. "Michael's coming. Use your wand."

Harry huffed but pulled out his wand anyway. Cas and he stood back to back as the three leftover angels formed a circle around them, prowling once more. The rattling turned into shaking and the ground began to tremble.

"Michael's coming?" Harry wanted to confirm.

"Yes."

Harry blinked, noticing the energy around them was beginning to be absorbed by something - something coming from above. Yet… Harry squinted at his wand. His wand was absorbing energy as well - stealing energy and collecting it steadily. It was stealing energy directly from Cas - Cas' power, Harry realised, and it was pulling at the power of the angels circling them, using the energy like a shield.

*The wand cannot be defeated because it used its opponent's power against them,* Harry realised. As
well as borrowed from allies, apparently. It made perfect sense, and Harry didn't know whether to be awed or terrified.

"Bloody hell," Harry breathed, glancing at Cas. He didn't seem to notice something leeching his power.

"We don't have time for this," Cas said before he lunged at one of the angels, pushing her back, and Harry backed up with him, seeing that Cas was trying to get the three angels on one side. It worked, of course, and Harry and Cas stood side by side facing the three. A faint ringing began sounding from somewhere, increasing rapidly, and Harry in a hurry to not have his eardrums burst cancelled all his spells. His senses went back to normal, and he could no longer see the energy around them. The trembling ground began shaking more and glass was shattering.

"I have an idea," Cas announced. "Harry, block them, cover me until I'm ready."

"Okay," Harry agreed. "Magicus Extremos! PROTEGO MAXIMA!"

Harry's magical shield burst out, pushing the three angels back. The one in the female vessel he had been fighting landed gracefully on her feet, but the other two were unprepared and fell to their knees. With confused scowls, they narrowed their eyes at him.

The Elder Wand felt hot in Harry's hand, and as the angels tentatively attempted to approach them and Cas was fiddling with something, Harry realised he was feeling the heat coming from Cas as well - could feel the wand attempting to gather that heat. It was Cas' power still, Harry realised.

Harry adjusted his shield charm to include it, immediately feeling his wand become less hot. The angels paused in their advancement, patting the air in front of them, clearly bewildered as to why they couldn't come any closer. Harry turned his head to the side while still keeping the angels in his peripheral to see what in the world Castiel was doing.

Cas' tie had disappeared. He had his white button-up shirt unbuttoned and open and had box cutters in his hand. Box cutters he got from Merlin knew where and, he was…

It took a couple of beats to process.

_He was digging the blade into his chest_ - into his flesh, cutting swirls and corners of a sigil into his skin.

"Cas! What the fuck!?!" Harry cried.

Sparing Harry only a fleeting glance, his back toward the angels, Cas said in a flat, matter-of-fact tone, "When I activate this, I and the other angels will be blasted away. Hopefully, it'll be enough to slow Michael down, give Sam and Adam more time."

"Blasted… blasted away?"

Harry had to give his shield a boost of energy to keep one angel from penetrating. They were beginning to figure out what he had done to the air around him and Cas to create such a barrier. Michael was obviously getting closer. He knew he and Cas didn't have time for explanations, but Harry figured 'blasted away' deserved pause.

"Yes."
"What do you mean?"

Cas made an annoyed sound, not pausing in his work, and said, "Exactly what I said."

"But, like, are you saying you'll explode?"

"Not necessarily. I'm not sure what it will do to me."

"Cas! That could kill you!"

"Yes," Cas agreed.

"No. No, you can't do that. You can't sacrifice yourself!"

"Why not?" Cas countered. "I was under the impression that the whole reason you are in this universe is because you did the same thing."

"That's different! That was me! I-I didn't have a choice. But you - we can still fight, Cas. We might could still win!"

"Not if Dean said yes, which would be the only reason Michael would be coming. After I do this, make sure to get Sam and Adam out of here."

"But -"

Cas dropped the box cutters, finished, and fixed Harry with the most intense look Harry had seen from the angel. "I don't want to stick around and watch Dean fail us."

Harry blinked.

The next handful of moments were surreal. Probably the most surreal Harry had ever experienced.

Cas slapped his hand against the middle of the sigil on his chest, and impossibly bright white light appeared around all the angels, their persons fading right before his eyes. Harry could feel them being flung away - far, far away.

However, just like the sigil Dean used to get rid of Cas, this one affected Harry too. He was thrown by it as soon as the angels were snapped from there, completely knocked off his feet for the third time in less than twenty-four hours, and he landed hard across the other side of the large factory room. His ears rang, his vision blurred, and he knew he had hit his head - probably landed head first. He knew what receiving a concussion felt like, and whatever the sigil did made it feel a hundred times worse.

At the same time, it felt like Harry was awoken from a deep sleep.

That tightly closed space in his mind, where Harry existed, that Harry had surrounded with layers of avoidance, denial, and refusal of his situation and apparently a shit ton of PTSD and unbalanced hippos, popped open, and Harry's new truth finally made itself known - fully, completely, and entirely encompassing.

Harry died.

Harry died, and he wasn't going to wake up in the forest and resume his life. Harry died; he was killed by Voldemort. Harry died, and he met with Dumbledore at a Heavenly King's Cross. Harry died, and he was flopped down into the Winchesters' motel room. Harry died, and he was staying with complete strangers, was trusting them, was fighting with them - fighting for them. Harry died,
and he was here, in this universe, still at war. Harry died, and he had used the Killing Curse. Harry
died, and he was in this factory with the impending arrival of an archangel whose powers were equal
to that of the Devil and was coming here to help wreak havoc on earth, destroying all who stood in
his way.

Harry died, and someone Harry had duelled with, with whom he had had many conversations,
alongside whom he had fought, and one of the only people Harry had in his life right now, probably
just killed himself.

Harry died, and another one of the only people Harry had in his life anymore was giving himself
over to be a meat puppet. Essentially killing himself as well.

Harry died, and for the first time since his death, Harry was well and truly present.

He tried squinting open his eyes, to see past where he was cradling his head, but all he could see was
just more of the white bright light, seemingly having taken over everything, and possibly some
shadows within it. All he could hear was a ringing, both in his head and outside it. He laid there on
the floor, squirming, trying to get a bearing on what was going on - how he could help - how he
could save two out of the four only people in his life anymore.

Distantly, finally, he could hear yelling, and he could tell for a certainty that the ground was really
shaking that badly, that it wasn't just his head messing up reality for him.

"Dean," he tried to yell, but his mouth barely formed the word. "Cas," he said louder. "Cas!"

"No!" he heard someone scream.

"Dean!" he tried again.

Without warning, the white bright light just disappeared, and the result of having it removed threw
Harry's vision into almost complete darkness. So much so that Harry briefly panicked that he just
passed out and was no longer any use to anyone.

A few blinks brought back natural light, however. The ringing around the room was gone as well,
but the ringing in his head wasn't.

He groaned and slammed his eyes shut, still a pathetic heap on the floor. Did this mean Michael was
gone? Did he take Dean with him?

"Harry!" he heard someone call, but he couldn't tell who.

"Oh, goddamnit!" he heard someone else yell much louder, and something in him unclenched. He
knew that voice, and it was a voice he was fairly confident just a little bit ago that he would never
hear again.

A hand then was on his shoulder, shaking him a little.

"Harry," came Dean's voice again, much softer - kinder. "Harry, open your eyes. Look at me."

Harry groaned again and carefully blinked.

There, in front of him, were green eyes, some freckles, and a hard expression.

"Harry, where's Cas?"

"Did something," Harry slurred. Both his hands were still clutching the back of his head. He kept
Dean frowned. "He flew away?"

"Blew away," Harry slurred again. "Cut something into his chest and blew all the angels away."

"What's wrong with him?" he heard Sam's voice somewhere near his feet.

"What's wrong with you?" Dean passed the question along.

"Head. Sigil threw me, and... head."

Dean swore under his breath, and next, Sam was crouching beside them, requesting gently, "Harry, let go. Let us see."

It took a tremendous amount of effort and will, but Harry eventually let go of his head, letting his arms slap onto the floor.

"Back of his head is bleeding," Sam stated. "Harry? Harry, look at me. Yeah, there you go. How many fingers am I holding up?"

Harry looked, but he honestly was having trouble keeping anything in focus. It took him a minute, but then he answered, "Three, but you're all wobbly."

"Concussion?" Dean suggested.

"Oh, definitely," Sam agreed.

"We gotta get out of here."

Yes, Harry thought. They needed to search for Cas, make sure he was alright, be sure he didn't kill himself. He tried sitting up, failed, and fell back down with a groan.

"Watch it," Dean said, hand back on his shoulder. "He can't aperate like this."

"Apparate," Sam corrected.

"That too," Dean huffed. "Sam, go get us a car. I'll get our Mr. Wobbly out of here."

Sam must have agreed because Harry heard a door opening after a few moments.

Dean started gently shaking him again and asked, "Can you get up?"

"I don't know."

"Alright, I'll carry you."

"What?" Harry asked, enough strength coming back in his voice to sound a bit incredulous. "Like a lady?"

Dean snorted. "It's either that or you get your dainty ass up."

"I'm not dainty," Harry argued, though he was so overwhelmingly grateful to still have three out of his four people that there wasn't any heat behind his words. He slowly began pulling his arms underneath him.

"I don't know," Dean disagreed, giving Harry room to fight his slow battle with gravity. "I've seen
you twirl."

"When have I ever twirled?"

"Before you pop away. You do that little twirly thing."

"I do not do a twirly thing," Harry argued, still slurring a bit from the blow to his head, but now able to push himself up on his elbows a little. "I Apparate. It's a spin. A spin, mind you, that propels me through atoms and molecules and… things. It's instant travel. It is not a twirly thing."

"It's a nerd pirouette."

Harry was on his knees now, Dean hovering close to help catch him if he fell. He was able to shoot Dean a glare. "Let it be known for the record that in a conversation about who is dainty, you are the one who used the word 'pirouette'."

They bickered, lively and with feeling, as Harry learned to stand on his feet again and Dean helped him out of the factory, only stopping to pick up Harry's dropped wand, and they pushed out into the punishing light of day.

"Oh, bloody hell," Harry groaned, throwing a hand over his eyes to shield them.

"I think that that just now is the most British I've heard you," Dean commented, pulling Harry forward and making him keep walking.

"Sod off, you twit."

"Yeah, that didn't help your case."

"There is nothing wrong with being British."

"Doesn't mean I can't laugh at it."

"Pff, like you're any better, saying 'awesome' every other word."

"Hey," Dean said, sounding mildly stung, but in the dramatic way that Harry was learning to be false. "'Awesome' is… awesome."

"You're a tosser and a pillock, and I don't know why I was worried about you."

Harry's own statement made him freeze, realisation making his hand fall and uncaringly forcing him to suffer the sunlight. They had come here, originally, because there should be five of them.

"Where's Adam?"

Dean's face fell from where it was looking mildly amused. "Michael took him."

"What?"

"The door shut before he could get out. Michael came and went, and Adam's gone."

Harry closed his eyes and allowed himself to lean completely on Dean. "So this wasn't a trap then?"

"No, it was a trap. Just didn't go as planned. Got to kill Zachariah, though, so there's that."

Harry's lips twerked at Dean's words, finding the dichotomy of his statement and the gentle hand.
rubbing Harry's back a little amusing.

"What do we do now?"

"Now?" Dean seemed to take a moment to consider. Harry still hadn't reopened his eyes, so he didn't look over to see for himself. "Now we get you back to Bobby's, we'll recover and regroup, and we'll go from there."

"Dean…" Harry began, finally looking up at him again. "We have to look for Cas. He said what he did could kill him. He might be dead."

Dean slid an arm fully around Harry's shoulders, squeezing them just for a moment and keeping his arm there. "He's not dead," he said confidently. "Cas has survived worse than this. We'll find him."

"I don't think he used the same sigil as you did last night. We'll have to look up what it was. I think I might remember some of it."

"Good. We'll do that later. Let's just focus on getting back to Bobby's."

Harry made a small noise of acquiescence and allowed Dean to continue moving them forward. Despite his agreement, though, Harry still pondered and worried about Cas. It helped to have Dean's warm body there, a real physical reassurance that at least they didn't lose Dean too.

He didn't know how long they walked. He thought he might have actually passed out at one point. Dean seemed determined to get them as far away from the factory as possible, and when Harry asked how Sam was supposed to find them, Dean said they already had a system in place for this kind of thing. After what felt like hours but could have possibly been only twenty minutes or so, Dean stopped them and helped Harry sit down on a low rock wall that seemed to be decades old and fenced in a lawn that no longer supported a house.

"You know," Harry slurred, blinking heavily, "I feel quite drunk."

Dean chuckled from where he was sitting to Harry's right. "Yeah, a blow to the noggin will do that to ya."

Harry nodded a little only to stop immediately and grimace at the pain. After a moment, he said, "I don't think I've ever actually been drunk, but I've drank enough to know. You know? So, I know."

Something soft and cloth-like was pressed gently against his head where the worst of the pain was throbbing. Harry had to focus harder than he would have liked to realise Dean had taken off his overshirt and was pressing it against the back of Harry's head. He didn't even notice him taking off his jacket.

"I'm not going to be able to remain conscious," Harry realised.

Dean hummed a noise as a reply, and then the hand that wasn't holding the shirt in place was on Harry's forearm, a thumb rubbing slow, soothing circles there.

"If I die again, do you think I'll go home?"

"You're not dying," Dean said firmly. "And don't start thinking like that. You'll probably end up on - I don't know - Mars or something."

"If that happened, I wouldn't be able to breathe," Harry pointed out. "I'd just die again right away."
Will you shut up and just try to stay awake?"

Harry shrugged but wasn't completely successful at staying awake as they waited, and by the time Sam had pulled up in an old truck and he and Dean were helping Harry into the middle seat between them in the truck's cab, Harry decided he didn't much care. He let unconsciousness pull him under, both a bit disappointed and immensely relieved that for all his dizziness and concussion drunkenness, he was still present and more aware of his situation than ever before.

Harry smelled cotton, like fresh laundry. A light and almost worn off aftershave of some kind. Also, the smallest hint of unidentifiable spices.

That was the first thing he noticed as he started to wake.

The second thing was that he wasn't motionless, and his stomach didn't like that. It took an arguably unreasonable amount of time to realise he was in a motor vehicle. A loud motor vehicle. And that was when he noticed how much pain his head was in.

Horrifyingly, the next thing he realised was that he was pressed tightly against someone. His left leg was tucked underneath his right - his left thigh right up against someone else's thigh, his knee resting fully on it. His head was on the same person's shoulder, the person to his left, and Harry's body was turned inward toward them.

This wasn't the first time Harry had woken up to find he was cuddling someone. Usually, if he shared a bed with someone, which had really only ever been Ron a handful of times, he somehow throughout the night sought them out and removed all space between them. Hermione had theorised that Harry was 'touch starved'. That his childhood had left him touch deprived or something and caused him to be awkward at best with touching during the waking hours and a snuggle-octopus during the sleeping ones.

He was at least pleased that this time, his hands were to himself since his arms were crossed across his belly.

He was too tired to move though. His head hurt - his body hurt, and he just wanted to go back to sleep. So, after he concluded that whoever he was cuddled up to had to be the one driving, and therefore awake and allowing it to happen, he decided to remain where he was and try to get back to sleep.

"- finally taken to someone. Maybe he'll start to trust us. You, at least."

"I just don't think he has ground beneath his feet yet, y'know? I mean, it's not like there are self-help books out there about getting over your own death."

He did go back to sleep, but what felt like mere minutes but could have been hours for all he knew, whatever had woken him up in the first place occurred again. The person he was sleeping against was talking, and it didn't take long for Harry to realise that that person was Dean.

Harry felt like he should have been more surprised by this than he was. He also noted that he must look awfully pathetic if Dean hadn't pushed him away. That, or Sam had told Dean to let Harry be. Whichever, he was grateful.

"- the world's ending, the walls are coming down on us, and I look over to you and all I can think about is… 'this stupid son of a bitch brought me here.' I just didn't want to let you down."
He had to be talking to Sam.

Harry had witnessed sibling relationships, the Weasleys were a good lesson in family, but he didn't think he ever really witnessed the close bond between siblings who only knew each other.

Who only had each other.

To hear this now, to realise Sam's faith was not misplaced, it was touching. Heartbreaking, in a way. Gave Harry a run of emotions that, frankly, made his head pound.

"You didn't," Sam said softly, but firmly. An affirmation. Then added, in an almost playful way but still falling short, "You almost did… but you didn't."

"I owe you an apology," Dean suddenly said, cutting through the peaceful silence that was just beginning to fall in the truck's cab.

"No, man. No, you don't -"

"Just… let me say this," Dean interrupted.

Sam sighed but didn't try to speak again.

"I don't know if it's being a big brother or what, but, you know, to me… you've always been this snot-nosed kid that I've had to keep on the straight and narrow. I think we both know that that's not you anymore… I mean, hell, if you're grown up enough to find faith in me… the least I can do is return the favour."

That peaceful silence was returning, along with an extra charge in the air. It felt like something was shifting.

Something was changing.

Harry realised then that he woke up to them talking about what had to have happened in that room, with Adam, with possibly Zachariah, and eventually Michael. This wasn't just a moment between brothers.

This was, for lack of better term, a precipice. A deciding moment that could quite possibly change the course of the entire war.

Dean's next words proved that he wasn't wrong.

"So, screw destiny, right in the face," he said, voice hard and thick with conviction. "I say we take the fight to them, do it our way."

After a moment, Sam said, clearly with a smile, "Sounds good."

And Harry had to agree. As far as he was concerned, he was included in the 'our way'. There was a life back in him, and it wasn't going to be ignored. His entire life - his old life - had been completely taken over and dictated by fate. Destiny. Prophecy, whether he actively made choices because of it or not, because other people made the choices for him.

Not anymore. Walking into that factory, head cleared of all that had been done to him, showed him a whole other side to how he had been living before.

Yes, screw destiny. Damn those bloody angels and the apocalypse. He had no leads on getting home besides Cas who could be dead, had no idea if it was possible to go home, and if he was to be alive
in this universe, in this world, he'd be damned if he let another megalomaniac bastard rule how that life was going to go.

He would fight, with everything he had, and if he couldn't find a way home, he would make another home somehow.

And if that meant an *Avada Kedavra* right into the Devil's face, so be it.

Chapter End Notes

JKR's prose that I edited: "As Harry trembled, ready to close his eyes if it turned, he saw what had distracted the snake." to "Harry trembled, ready to close his eyes if it turned."

YEAH???

If I made anyone laugh PLEASE tell me. I love hearing it.
How did the fight between the angels and Cas and Harry go? And hell, the fight between Dean and Harry? And hell, all of it?? My friend helped me type them: Dean as ESFP and Harry as ISTP - if anyone wants to hop onto that ongoing discussion, feel free!!

The PTSD thing... I was looking it up, trying to learn about it, and I told my mother who told me about a friend of hers that had it. It was actually heartbreaking. She was there this one night when he stepped outside for a smoke, saw the hills in the back, and suddenly he was back in war. Thought I'd try to honor him some by making Harry go through it too.

Again, owl not a PTSD thing. If anyone can guess (assuming I'm doing this right) the thing in common with it every time the owl appears, I'll... think of a prize. Or you name the prize! Will be posting audio of an owl shrieking like I tried to describe on le Tumblr.

If anyone spots miscontinuity, feel free to point out. If anyone's worried about timeline things, the next chapter literally starts with "In the month that followed the events at the abandon factory..."

Last thing: next SPN episode is Hammer of the Gods... that's right - GABRIEL.

(Is it sneaky suspicion, sneaking suspicion, or sinking suspicion?)
Runes, Gods, and Archangels

Chapter Summary

The new trio tackle the apocalypse their way, Harry gets another tattoo, then a storm forces them to stop at a hotel.

Chapter Notes

I cannot possibly express how much I love you guys and the response to this!!!!! Hm, for once, I don't think I have any beginning notes. :/

Oh wait, I thought of one. The opening case in this chap isn't one from the show. I made it up, so feel free to use any of it if you want. Same goes for any spells I've made up - feel free to use and steal.

There will always be mistakes with me, but feel free to point any out and I'll correct it!

***We now have fanart, guys!! The fanart below is by the lovely and extremely talented Myrkky! Check them out, guys, and if anyone comments here to compliment them, I'll be sure to pass it along!

(the artist and I both favor POC Harry. I'm limited to pics of Daniel Radcliffe, naturally, for my poster and collages. I have tried to balance descriptions of Harry among the actor, canon, and other 'golden' depictions. The fanart is more POC Harry, which is beautiful and I am in full support of. Bring on all versions of HP! We love you, Harry!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes
In the month that followed the events at the abandoned factory, Harry had decided four things.

First, voodoo priests and priestesses were creepy, usually dead wrong about what they were talking about, were mostly fake and pulling elaborate cons, and Harry had no use for any of them in his life. He agreed his opinion of them was a bit harsh after a solid ten-minute rant, but as one did try to lock him in a basement because she was convinced Harry was the illegitimate offspring of the voodoo god Agwe, he felt he was a bit justified.

Harry and the Winchesters had been up and down the coasts on either side of the country, and the closest thing they had found to helpful in the voodoo department was that inhaling the smoke of burning chicken feathers with lama beans could lessen a headache.

Harry swore, if Bobby called one more time with yet another voodoo lead, Harry was going to find a way to send hexes through the cellular airwaves.

Second, if he ever had a chance to send his younger self a message, to tell himself something that could help him better prepare for what laid ahead, it would be: *for the love of Merlin and all the Celtic gods, take Ancient Runes.*

Harry gathered as many books as he could on symbols and other things to figure out what it was about angels' sigils that affected him so much. A bunch of the symbols and pairings looked familiar to Harry, but the more he studied, the more confused he got.
He could have really used Hermione.

The thing was that they didn't affect him the way they were supposed to affect angels, but they messed with Harry's magic just enough to possibly become a bigger problem.

Add to that, if he knew what the symbols meant, he could use his magic to play around with them, potentially create a new sigil, one that was strong enough to impact, say, archangels.

Perhaps to dampen or even take away some of an archangel's power.

Generate enough energy to open a cage, maybe.

Even possibly create a portal home.

That last one he didn't truly think would work, but it was nice to daydream.

Third, and this was just theory, the Winchesters were telepathic. That was the only way he could explain it. Harry would answer one of Sam's questions, explain something or give an update, with Dean nowhere around, and yet, when he saw Dean next, Dean knew about it.

Harry finally broke down and asked at one point, but Dean only smiled that newly familiar winning smile and winked at him.

Which brought Harry to his fourth.

Dean Winchester was the most infuriating, aggravating, maddening, confusing, stupid, big giant git Harry had ever met, and he was glad Sam was teaching him how to fight hand-to-hand because someday, possibly someday soon, Harry was going to punch him.

The infuriating part was because Dean wouldn't let Harry do certain things, but then would turn around and ask why Harry wasn't being more helpful.

Harry wasn't allowed to question or interview other people because, according to Dean, he didn't have the experience, wouldn't know what to look for, and simply because Harry looked too young to be a federal agent - or any other profession they pretended to be experts in. People wouldn't believe it. Which, okay, that point Harry could concede, but still. There was glamour after all.

Harry wasn't allowed to touch certain weapons, wasn't allowed to clean the guns (and sure, he had given into his curiosity and turned the gun over so that it was pointed at his face and he could see down the barrel, but the safety was on), and wasn't allowed to go with them to check out certain things when they seemed fishy - had to stay and wait in the motel or hotel room like a good little boy and let the adults handle it.

But then, they'd be at a standoff with some unhappy voodoo priest or begrudged psychic, and Dean would look at him and ask, "Are you just going to stand there?"

Honestly, it was one or the other, flip-flopping between treating Harry like he was an ill-behaved child who had to be supervised to their own personal bodyguard and some powerful secret weapon to pull out at the last minute.

The aggravating part was because Dean was bossy - and moody, which was not a pleasant combination. It had to be Dean's way, and he very rarely caved. The Dean he had met a month and a half ago was a nearly defeated Dean who was ready to give up. This Dean… This was a determined, stubborn beast of a man who wasn't afraid to stare Harry down until Harry did as he was told.
Harry, of course, never backed down from a challenge like that, so their staring contests could last a good while. Usually, it was Sam who broke it up, and he did so with a louder sigh each time.

That wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the moody part. For example, at one point while checking out a clairvoyant, something left a scratch on Dean's car. Harry could understand being unhappy or disappointed by that - he did grow up with Uncle Vernon after all - but there was no accounting for Dean's reaction. To make matters more ridiculous, when Harry said, "Calm down, it's just a car," Dean gave Harry the silent treatment for a full twenty-four hours.

Literally wouldn't say a word to Harry. He even went as far as, "Sam, could you ask Harry to pass the salt?"

It probably didn't help any that Harry had ordered the last pie slice at the diner, but even though Harry knew Dean ate pie enough for it to make up at least a fourth of his food groups and should be polite enough to let Harry have it since Harry rarely had pie (the closest thing to treacle tart he could get apparently), Harry said he was happy to share if Dean would open his mouth and ask him.

There was just no accounting for it. None at all.

The maddening part was, for all of Dean's treatment of Harry like an incontinent toddler, Dean sometimes was no better than a child himself. He could be so immature.

He outright baited a wiccan priest just because he noticed he was getting a rouse out of him and was enjoying it, which resulted in the three of them needing stitches, Signationem Pellis or no.

They lost five hours of road time because Dean had to stop off at a Cave City, Kentucky to see a dinosaur-themed amusement park, and Sam and Harry weren't allowed to not go with him.

Harry caught Dean - saw with his own eyes - humming along with and swaying his hips to some song by a musical artist named Lady Gaga. Which, have at it, get on, Harry couldn't care less what Dean liked to listen to, but when Sam came back from the laundry mat, Dean told Sam that Harry was listening to Lady Gaga, that Harry was a Gaga fan (Harry believed Dean's exact words were, "He's coo-coo for Gaga"), then proceeded to make fun of Harry for it despite Harry's adamant protests that it was Dean, not Harry. The worst part, Harry had no idea who Sam believed, and even though he knew for himself he had never listened to Lady Gaga, he somehow got wrapped up in Dean's immaturity and really, really wanted Sam to know that he was not a Lady Gaga fan.

Dean pranked Sam at least once a week, and Harry had learned the hard way not to say anything about it. He had no idea what was in that bottle, but it was not Pepsi, and though watching Sam jump a good foot in the air and yelp from waking up to a fake head right next to his, Harry ate one of those toothpaste Oreos. It was not fun.

He purposely mispronounced almost anything that had to do with wizardry, and he never used the word wand. Never. It was always a stick or twig, or - when he noticed Harry blush once when he did this - a thinly veiled and often public innuendo that implied the wand was Harry's penis, and Harry liked to wag it around until stuff came out of it.

It was… maddening. It was just maddening.

The confusing part was that Harry couldn't get a reading on the man, and he had no idea how Dean was going to treat him from day to day.

Some days they seemed to be bonding or something. Not necessarily getting closer or becoming friends, but they would share space and laugh at funny things. Harry would try to explain a
complicated enchantment or describe some creature from home while carefully avoiding mentioning anything about his life, and Dean would see right through that and call Voldemort 'Malibu Voldie' or something similar. Some ridiculous, disrespectful name that would make Harry smile.

It was always when they were alone.

Dean could drop some of his bravado Harry suspected he just kept up for Sam and let the parts of him that worried and had doubts show, and Harry could let the parts of himself he generally avoided peek through as well, like the part of him that could perform the Killing Curse or the part of him that fell asleep on Dean's shoulder.

The best part was that Dean wouldn't ask him questions.

(Not serious ones, anyway. He would ask silly ones, of course, that somehow made a lot of sense… that Harry didn't know how to answer. Like, why didn't the school just fence off the Forbidden Forest to stop kids from going in? Or, if they had portraits that were alive and moving pictures, why didn't they have their own version of movies? And, if they had stairs that could move, why didn't they have their own escalators outside of just the headmaster's office?)

All of that was over the moment they weren't alone any longer or had something relating to the apocalypse they needed to focus on. Some wall or another would be thrown up, on both sides he might add, and things went back to a tentative normal.

Harry knew why he had walls. He needed to focus on finding a way home and a way to stop the archangels. He had work to do. He shouldn't be socialising. He had his friends back home - they were who he cared about - not that he didn't care about people here. Dean, on the other hand, had no reason to throw himself behind his own walls and turn clipped, almost cold, toward Harry.

Harry couldn't figure it out.

The stupid part was because Dean, for all his intelligence, sometimes seemed to lose every ounce of common sense he had.

Dean was definitely intelligent. Sam was more scholarly, yes, but Dean seemed to put two and two together a lot quicker than any of them. He loathed research, got bored easily, but he usually took what Sam and Harry brought him and made something with it. Not that he didn't do his own research, of course. His process, though, was one Harry couldn't follow - Dean's way of research often led him down a rabbit hole from which Dean would emerge with a fountain of useful knowledge and an even bigger fountain of useless but mildly entertaining stories.

That wasn't the problem. The problem was Dean usually preferred hands-on research. Literally. Dean had to touch things. Poke at things. Charge through, leap before thinking, and usually ended up regretting it and causing a headache for all of them. And yes, okay, Harry was not one to talk when it came to that kind of reckless behaviour, but even he knew better than to try on a mask of the god Zaca that was sitting in the middle of an obvious ritual.

Harry felt like he finally understood how frustrated his friends would get with him, how worried they were for him, never knowing if Harry was going to run and do something without a moment's notice. However, and this was a big however, Harry felt like the majority of his recklessness was at least somewhat thought-out beforehand, and more importantly, was for more noble and just reasons than because 'it looked fun to play with'.

For example, at another point, Sam, Dean, and Harry walked into a church dedicated to some wiccan goddess, and the moment Harry saw the warrior ship encased in an embossed bottle, Harry just knew
Dean was going to do something with it, something Harry wouldn't have done. At least not before magically checking it first. Something that was going to cause trouble and delay their actual mission. He just knew. He thought about hiding it, but he wanted to see if he was right.

Sure enough, Sam and Harry spent a whole day and a half trying to get Dean out of the sodding bottle.

One little thing, though, Harry would admit was that his own habit of acting like a dog with a bone and charging in head first may have encouraged Dean at some points, and poor Sam… Harry couldn't have apologised enough for their behaviour getting Sam locked inside a coffin for a few hours.

Still though.

"For the last time, I cannot Apparate while my sodding ankle is chained!" Harry snapped, voice echoing through the cellar they were locked in.

He was sitting on a dirty concrete floor, wandlessly attempting to undo said chain because when the bloody things seized them and pulled them under, Harry had dropped his wand. He was pretty sure Sam would find it when he came looking for them, so he wasn't too worried. After all, that seemed to be the pattern they had settled in. It also helped tremendously that he knew just picking up a dropped wand wouldn't win its allegiance.

"Y'know, " Dean hollered back, "for some kind of God-sent-apocalyptic-solution, you sure are limited."

Harry made an annoyed noise. "I'm only ever a God-sent-apocalyptic-solution when you're backed in a corner."

"Yeah," Dean said, pointedly rattling his own chains, "backed in a corner."

"I don't have my wand, you prat. I'm trying."

Dean made an annoyed sound now and Harry could hear him messing with his chains in earnest. "You seriously need to find a fuckin' holster for that thing, Harry."

"Considering I had it out and in my hand when you got us trapped, I don't think a holster would have helped us any."

"Me? Nuh-uh, this one's all you, buddy. I was complimenting the chains. You're the one who called them useless, rusted clumps."

Harry scowled down at the useless, rusted clumps that somehow managed to look pleased. He pressed his palm against the lock and yelled, "Alohomora!"

The chain just seemed to glint mischievously at him.

"And aloha to you too," Dean quipped.

"You know, you could help," Harry snapped.

"Right, because I'm just sitting here gettin' my nails done."

"I wouldn't put it past you to have a nail file on you. Use it to pick the lock or something."

"You really don't know the first thing about pickin' locks, you know that? Everyone knows hairpins
work way better than a nail file."

How the hell Dean could sound like he was enjoying himself, Harry would never know. Harry considered himself an easily adaptable person, but nothing compared to Dean. Dean, Harry thought, could find himself in almost any situation and somehow twist it around to entertain him. Which part was that, now? The maddening or stupid one? Harry would sort it out later.

They were currently in a town called Baton Rouge in the state of Louisiana having tracked down a supposed hoodoo expert that fled from them in Mississippi. That, of course, was a sure-fire way to get Harry and the Winchesters immediately suspicious, thus turning their lead into a case.

The expert, Dominic, left a trail of people he had 'helped' behind - or rather, a trail of victims. In reality, he was stealing the muggle's best talents for himself and selling them to others. It was a mess to sort which talents belonged to whom and tracking down a roller-derby skill was what brought Dean and Harry to a temple of a Slavic Deity Perun, not believing it to be a coincidence Dominic would come here of all places.

Struggling with the patronising rusty chains now, Harry was realising that no, it wasn't a coincidence - it was just the fastest way to preoccupy them, most likely while Dominic fled town again.

"Abrerto!" he tried, baffled nothing was working. Whereas back home, Harry could perform some wandless magic with enough practise, here, Harry was powerful enough that he could do almost all elementary magic wandless and wordlessly. The fact that it wasn't working now disturbed him.

"Real impressive there, slick."

Harry jumped, whipping his head around to gape at Dean, who was chain free and leaning casually against the open bars of Harry's cell.

"Bloody hell," Harry said. "How are you free?"

Dean smirked and held up two thin metal pieces he recognised were from Dean's lock-picking set. Of course Dean would have it on him. Harry swore Dean could stow away on his person as many things as his trunk could hold.

"Move," Dean instructed, still smirking, and walked in. Harry stood and hobbled out of the way as Dean crouched and began fiddling with the chain around Harry's ankle.

Harry sighed and looked up at the hole the chains had pulled him through. "We fell quite a way," he commented.

Dean snorted. "Yeah. Note to self: stone slides aren't fun."

"Well, there wasn't any slime, and we aren't inside the building's plumbing. It could've been worse."

Dean paused in his work to give Harry a questioning look. "Let me guess," he said. "Long story?"

Harry sighed again, knowing Dean thought he had too many 'long stories'. "Yeah… long story."

Dean shook his head and went back to picking the lock. "How far down d'you think we are?"

"I don't know," Harry answered. "I doubt we're deeper than a well, though."

"There," Dean said as the chain clicked. They snapped off Harry's ankle and slithered up the wall and through the hole, presumably to go back to their decorative place in the temple.
"Thanks," Harry said, rotating his ankle, satisfied it wasn't injured.

"Come on," Dean said, leading the way out of the cell. He pulled out his cell phone and flipped it open. "No service."

"Shockling," Harry mumbled. He squinted and took a few cautious steps toward what looked like a deep, dark tunnel. There were cells on either side of them, but the cellar seemed to only have a total of six. There was nothing but cracked concrete behind them, and the only amount of light they had was through similar holes on the ceiling of the cells like Harry had.

Harry pulled out his cell phone as well, flipping it open and pointing the lit-up screen toward the tunnel. Dean, stepping up next to him, did the same.

"Well, we just used our get-out-of-jail-free card. So, I guess it's, go straight down the dark, creepy tunnel - do not past go, do not collect two hundred dollars. Awesome," Dean said.

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Familiar. Movie?"

"Board game," Dean snorted. "How do you not know monopoly?"

"Oh, monopoly! No, I remember that. God, it's been years."

"No one who has ever played monopoly can forget fuckin' monopoly," Dean scolded.

"Well, I never exactly played," Harry shrugged, looking back forward and making his way into the tunnel, phone still lit. "My cousin liked to throw the pieces at me though. I think it was… what? Five hundred pounds if it hit my head?"

"Those relatives of yours just get more and more charming," Dean commented in a clipped tone.

Harry repressed a sigh. Every now and then Harry would let something slip about his time with the Dursleys, mostly when he was bickering with the brothers about muggle things. They didn't know the half of it, but Harry thought it was pretty telling that what little they did know about the Dursleys, they held with disdain.

"How long do you think this tunnel is," he asked, changing the subject.

"I'm more concerned about where it leads than how long it takes to get there," Dean answered.

Harry pushed one of the side buttons on his phone to keep it lit. He could hear some dripping water echoing off the walls somewhere. "Do you think we're below the sewer lines?"

"Fuck, I hope to hell we aren't. I fuckin' hate sewers."

Harry chuckled. "Then definitely remind me to tell you about the Chamber of Secrets."

"Chamber of Secrets? That sounds like dungeon porn."

Harry wrinkled his nose. "I really didn't need dungeon porn and the Chamber of Secrets linked somehow in my mind, thanks."

"Glad to be of service," Dean teased, and Harry could almost hear the eyebrow waggle in his voice.

"Remind me not to tell you about the Chamber of Secrets then."

"Party pooper," Dean grunted. "Hey, hold up. I think I see something."
Harry turned to face Dean, who was pointing his lit-up phone at something on the ceiling, squinting at it. He walked over to squint at it with him.

"It looks like an old-timey version of a vent," Dean said.

"It is an old-timey version of a vent," Harry replied. "We had them in the dungeons at Hogwarts. Personally, I thought it made them a bit drafty, but - hey, what are you doing?"

Dean was reaching up and yanking at the concrete bars of the perfectly rectangle hole. With a loud snap, one of them broke off. "What would need to be vented?"

"Oxygen," Harry rolled his eyes, feeling himself becoming less and less surprised at Dean's general destruction wherever he went. "There tends to not be a lot of that underground, doesn't there?"

"So, if we follow the vents," Dean said, ignoring Harry's sarcasm, "we can find our way out."

"Good as theory as any, but I doubt any of them would be big enough for a person."

Dean stood on the tip of his toes, peering inside the hole. "We don't necessarily have to be inside them. Come on."

Harry followed as Dean more quickly made his way further down the tunnel, keeping the light of his phone more toward the ceiling to clearly look for more vents. Harry kept his light straight ahead, figuring Dean could hunt for his vents, and Harry would watch out for danger.

They continued like this for a good half hour, having easy conversation about how to play Monopoly and passing quips back and forth. Harry was pretty sure if anyone saw them acting so blasé in the situation they were in, they would inquire after their mental health.

Harry's mental health, now, that was an entirely different box of worms. Whatever Cas had done to his head had stayed with Harry for a good long while. He had felt more at ease, more capable, and like he had a good handle on things. Slowly, though, it had been drifting. Harry looked up some of the things he remembered Cas telling him that day - once he figured out how to delete search histories on the google - and short of finding a muggle therapist or robbing a pharmacy of its antidepressants, Harry was struggling to find a way to cope.

Which Harry knew was smart and the right thing to do, and he made promises and vows to himself that if any inkling of anything like that started happening again, he would tell them.

It didn't help anything that Cas was still nowhere to be found. He desperately wanted to talk to Cas about it all, yes, and get as much help from him as possible, but more than that, he was worried about the angel. Really worried. He prayed to Castiel every day, and as the weeks stretched with no signs of the angel, Harry was starting to have dreams about some kind of hellish angel afterlife.

They searched for signs of Adam, too, but, even though he didn't say it, Harry felt like that particular cause was a lost one.

So, every day Harry did the only thing he knew how to do - he focused on what was immediate and at hand. He would wait to address his mental health issues when Cas returned, and he was going to have faith and hold out hope that Cas would return.
"Finally," Dean sighed, pointing his phone to a large size hole in the ceiling.

Harry joined him, looking up. "I can't see the top. What d'you think's up there?"

"Dunno. Only one way to find out." Then, without preamble, Dean tossed his phone up the hole, jumped, hung there a moment, then started pulling himself up.

Harry watched him with a frown.

Once up, Dean stuck his head down at Harry. "I'm going to take a look around. Wait here."

"What?" Harry asked. "No. Don't be ridiculous, we don't know what's up there."

"Exactly. So, I'm going to go find out then come get you if it's safe."

Harry crossed his arms. "No, Dean. That's not how this works."

"Dude, you ain't got your twig."

"But I have three daggers and a .45."

Dean raised a surprised eyebrow then immediately narrowed his eyes, suddenly suspicious. "Did you take my Fairbairn-Sykes?"

Harry smirked.

"You shit. I blamed Sam for that."

"I needed a smaller knife with these trousers," Harry defended himself half-heartedly. In truth, he just liked the way the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger looked better than the Seal knives the brothers normally had.

"Bull," Dean saw right through him. "I told you to get your own when we were in New Mexico."

"With what money? That was the weekend that palmist robbed us, and we went straight to Bobby's after."

"And you didn't say anything when we went looking for Dominic?"

"I already had yours by then."

Dean opened his mouth, probably to argue, but froze, snapped his jaw shut and pointed at Harry. "This isn't over. Now, stay here, I'll be back."

Harry huffed, frustrated, particularly since he knew he wouldn't be able to jump up and grab the edge of the hole like Dean had and follow him anyway. He had trouble with his magic in that cell, so he most definitely wasn't going to risk splinching himself to follow.

"Don't give me that look," Dean glared.

"What look?"

"That fuckin'… Harry-needs-a-hug look. Wipe it off your face."

"I don't have a Harry-needs-a-hug look," Harry protested.

Dean pressed his lips together, an odd expression creeping in. Dean sometimes looked at Harry like
that, but Harry couldn't ever figure out what that expression meant. Well, if Dean could name his
scowl Harry-needs-a-hug then Harry could create a name for that look. Maybe Dean-needs-a-smack-upside-his-head look. Or, Dean-needs-a-punch-in-the-face. Or, Dean-needs-a-hex-in-the-bollocks.

Then, doing what Dean usually did after giving Harry that look, Dean shook his head and walked away.

"I don't have a Harry-needs-a-hug look!" Harry yelled after him.

He tried jumping up and grabbing the ledge a few times, failing miserably. He tripped at one point, dropping his phone and chipping a corner of it. Eventually, he gave up and just sat where he stood.

Harry was sore, but he was learning that was just the general constant state of being when one stuck with the Winchesters. He thought it was fascinating how his body was changing though. For one, he was filling out. He already had to magically adjust his clothes twice now. His skin was back to its natural colour, too, and even though it was almost officially winter, in the southern states of the country, Harry was getting sun. His face was no longer sunken in WHATSOEVER, and the dark circles under his eyes that seemed a permanent fixture for quite some time weren't nearly as prominent. He was also gaining muscle. There was no way around it either because Harry was learning that the reason Dean and Sam were so fit was that it was a natural consequence of their line of work.

And a natural consequence of them never slowing down.

If he was honest with himself, he was looking forward to becoming as strong as they were. Hell, Harry once saw Dean crack a walnut with his bare hand, and it was quite… impressive.

Impressive. That was the word.

"Yo, Harry!" Dean hollered. "You still down there?"

"No, I decided to Apparate to Paris."

"Ooh, monsieur," Dean replied in a terrible and thick French accent. "Ze Pari-e. Hey, why don't you twirl us outta of here? The chain's gone."

Harry glared at Dean's head that popped over the edge of the hole. "My magic hasn't worked down here. I don't want to splinch us."

Dean winced. "Yeah, let's not risk that. Here," Dean flopped down on his stomach and stretched his arms through the hole.

Harry pocketed his cell phone and stood. Gauging his aim with the small amount of light Dean's phone provided on the ledge, he bounced once then jumped. Dean's hands expertly caught his arms, and without so much of a grunt, began pulling him up. Again, strong. Impressive.

When Harry was close enough, Dean switched his grip to under Harry's arms and seemed to effortlessly lift him. Harry grabbed hold of the ledge and was able to pull the rest of himself up, though Dean still had a hand on his back. Once Harry was up and straightened, Dean clapped his shoulder and said, "Right. This way."

They both used their phones again to light their path, the water dripping sound getting louder.

"Are we close to the sewers, then?" Harry asked.
"Not that I could smell, but half the damn town is up against the Mississippi River. That might be close."

Harry sighed, trying to get a better look around. It was still just a dark, creepy tunnel though. "What did you find?"

"Just more of this," Dean said, finally sounding frustrated, still keeping an eye on the ceiling. "I'm thinking that hole back there once had a ladder, so we should be able to find another one."

They did. They found three, in fact, each time Dean going up and checking around, leaving Harry to wait. Eventually, after Dean made countless references to ant farms and a game called Snakes and Ladders, they made it to a tunnel that wasn't nearly as dark and were able to put away their phones.

Harry's stomach was just starting to growl while Dean was explaining the Croatoan virus to him, something that turned people into strong, fast flesh-eating type of zombies, when they heard the faraway voice of Sam, "Dean? Harry?"

"Sam!" Dean shouted.

"Where are you guys?" answered Sam. Both Dean and Harry started jogging toward the voice, and though it was obvious Sam was shouting too, it was distant.

"Down here! Acting out the most boring version of *The Cellar* in history!"

"Just follow my voice!" Sam shouted back, obviously understanding Dean's reference. "I'm in the temple's basement!"

Dean and Harry ran toward his voice as Sam told them that Dominic was there and that he was unconscious and tied up. Harry yelled out the question of why he was unconscious, to which Dean snorted and said, "Really, Harry? You think he just laid down for a nap?"

"What do you - oh," Harry realised. "Sam knocked him out."

Dean chuckled as they approached yet another hole, but this time, Dean crouched with his hands together to boost Harry up. Harry made an irritated sound, frustrated that apparently now that Sam was there, Dean was going to trust that it was okay for Harry to go first. He didn't say anything though. Now wasn't the time to start up that on-going argument.

Stepping into Dean's hands and using his shoulder to balance himself briefly, Harry grabbed onto the ledge and heaved himself up. Dean jumped, pulling himself up, and Harry reached out a hand to help even though Dean didn't need it. Dean didn't brush him away, so there was that.

Not for the first time, he wondered what he would have to do to win the man's trust the way he seemed to trust Sam and Bobby.

The next hole was the one to the basement, and it did have a ladder. Dean made Harry go up it first, and once out, Harry took stock of himself and grimaced at how dirty he was. Beyond just the regular dirt, grime, and sweat, his trousers were ripped at the knee and his lower back was scraped from where his shirt had lifted up on the stone slide down.

Sam chuckled at the two of them, clapping Dean's shoulder to pat off some dirt. "Let me guess, the big, scary chains up there?"

"Yeah," Dean coughed before shaking his head and ruffling his hair as though to clean it. "How'd you do?"
"Fine," Sam said, coming up to Harry and holding out his wand. Harry took it with a small smile of thanks. "Dominic was planning on taking over this temple. I think he wanted to use its tombs for shelving the talents."

"Makes sense," Dean answered.

Harry waved his wand to clean both himself and Dean, causing Dean to make a surprised noise the way he always did when Harry snuck a spell on him. Then he pocketed his wand and looked around.

The basement was unremarkable, the only seemingly functional things in it were the stairs down and the wooden trapdoor to the tunnels, or tombs, as Sam had called them. Dominic lay on the floor, tied by rope, his large face bruised and slack-jawed. By the look of the scattered and disturbed dust, Sam had quite the fight while Dean and Harry were ascending from the cellar. Harry looked Sam up and down quickly and was satisfied that he didn't seem to be injured. In fact, Dominic seemed to have gotten the worst of it.

"How'd you find us?" Dean asked, walking over to squat beside Dominic and look him over.

"Well, you know I went to check out the bar the meter maid said she saw Dominic go into. The waitress there remembered him, said he spent hours just ordering coffee and looking over some old city maps. When I tried calling you guys and got no answer, I figured something must have happened."

"Ya think?" Dean raised an eyebrow and straightening.

"Yeah," Sam rolled his eyes. "I broke into the county clerk's office and searched some of the town's old maps myself. This was the only thing that would've been on Dominic's radar."

"Why, though?" Harry asked. "This is a Russian temple - I doubt hoodoo and this would mix well."

"But it's secure," Sam answered. "Get this, those chains? Those were Rasputin's."

"What?" Dean asked, part incredulous and excited. Of course he'd be excited by that.

"Yeah. The clerk's office had records of the immigrants that built this place. I did some digging before coming here, and Perun was one of Rasputin's favourite gods. The immigrants believed that the spirit of Rasputin would protect them, and they built the tombs for Perun sacrifices."

"Let me guess," Dean said, crossing his arms. "Six sacrifices at a time?"

"Yeah," Sam nodded. "How'd you know?"

"Because there were six cells," Harry answered, gesturing toward the tombs. Then something on their wooden door caught his eye.

Sam nodded. "Well, thanks to those sacrifices, those tombs would be the most secure place in hundreds of miles."

"Awesome," Dean sighed, then nodded to the man on the floor. "Well, what are we gonna do with him?"

Sam shrugged. "He's human, Dean. And he's stolen talents, not killed anyone."

"We don't have any proof of anything to get him locked up," Dean added.
They began discussing ways to handle Dominic, but Harry's attention didn't follow them. He got closer to the wooden door, squinting. On it was several runes, obviously very old. They were repeated over and over in rows, and though most of them were as unremarkable as the rest of the basement, one stood out like a beacon. It was an upside triangle connected to a vertical line at its tip, four horizontal lines crossing the vertical one.

A couple of months ago, Harry wouldn't have given that symbol a second thought. Now, however, he knew that symbol. Knew it intimately. Saw it every single day, even counted and depended on it. Because it was one of the symbols on the Elder Wand.

"Harry?"

Harry jumped at his name being called and spun around. The brothers were watching him with a frown.

"What is it?" Sam asked.

"Nothing," Harry said with a shrug, glad his voice sounded so casual. "Just looking at the markings on the door. Do you think Dominic would know what they are?"

Dean and Sam seemed to accept that answer and shrugged easily at Harry's question. They both knew he had been pouring himself over rune research for the past month, so it wouldn't have come as a surprise that the markings got his notice. He just had to make sure that the uneasiness he felt at seeing the symbol wouldn't show.

"Hey, pea brains, wake up," Dean hollered, kicking Dominic.

It took a few more kicks, but eventually, Dominic was sputtering and blinking his eyes open.

"You lose, asshat."

"We've found all the talents you stole," Sam joined. "We know how to return them to the right people. It's over."

Dominic scowled up at them. "There'll be more," he said in a rough voice and southern accent. "There'll always be people wishin' they could do what someone else can. Grass is greener and all that."

"Maybe," Dean conceded, "but you won't get your paws on them."

Dominic's smirk faltered, probably at how confident Dean sounded.

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "See, it's been a crazy couple of weeks for us. We've really gotten pretty far into your world, including meeting a voodoo priestess who happens to be the priestess of the Iwa."

"We know you hoodoo types don't make it a habit of practising the religion, but I don't think the spirits who oversee human experience would appreciate your work," Dean continued.

"You wouldn't," Dominic breathed.

"We would," Dean and Sam said at the same time.

"Harry," Sam looked over. "Mind dropping Dominic off at Priestess Viva's?"
"Not at all," Harry smirked. Muggles obviously weren't used to anything close to the feeling of Apparation. Unless Harry warned them, they generally had a bad reaction. Harry didn't think he would warn Dominic. "First, though," he added, gesturing toward the door.

"Right," Dean said. He grabbed Dominic by the arm, pulled him to his feet, and roughly pushed him forward. "What do those mean?"

Dominic's jaw clenched defiantly.

Dean rolled his eyes then punched Dominic hard in the gut. "Answer me."

"I don't know all of them," Dominic coughed.

"Tell us the ones you do know."

"Th-that square one means to seal power. The round one is a kind of lock. The triangle one is for channelling power. A-and I think the twisty one there means protection."

"Any others?" Dean asked.

Dominic shook his head, eyeing Dean's hands as though awaiting another punch. Dean smirked, clearly recognising Dominic's fear of him, then pushed Dominic to Harry.

"Right, then," Harry nodded, wrapping his hand around Dominic's upper arm in a tight grasp. "I'll meet you back at the motel."

Dean and Sam both frowned again at that - Harry normally just came right back to where they were, but they agreed nonetheless. They probably figured Harry just needed the toilet or something. That suited him just fine.

Harry pictured Priestess Viva's big, purple Victorian home, and with a crack, Apparated him and Dominic to her stoop.

"What the fuck!" Dominic hissed, doubling over.

Harry chuckled, not letting go of the man's arm, and rang the doorbell.

Priestess Viva, in her shawls and Gele, answered almost immediately. She smiled widely at Harry, the same gleeful glint in her eye she had the last time Harry saw her. It made him uncomfortable. Frankly, it creeped him out. Merlin, how he hated voodoo.

"I was wondering why the spirits were so restless," Viva greeted.

"Yeah," Harry nodded, shoving Dominic to her. "That would be because of him. He's been stealing and selling talents."

"Oh no," Viva tisked, fully accepting Harry's report, probably because she already knew if the Iwa really were restless, and rested a hand seemingly gently on Dominic's shoulder. Harry knew she had her own magical grip of some kind there. Dominic wasn't getting away. "You'll have to answer for your crimes, child."

Dominic gulped.

"You can take care of this?" Harry asked.

"Yes, dear." She gently pulled Dominic inside then opened the door wider in invitation. "Why don't
you come in? Have some tea?"

Harry shivered unpleasantly. She did that the last time, too, and Harry had absolutely no doubts that she would put something in that tea. She found Harry way too fascinating not to collect him, but despite how creepy she was, she was one of the good ones. One of the real ones too. She would only collect him if he was willing, and Harry had never been less willing for anything in his life. Or, lives.

"No, thank you," Harry declined politely. "I have to get back."

"Shame," she cooed, eyeing him. "Hope to see you soon, child."

"Er… sure, maybe. Bye." Then Harry Disapparated, possibly quicker than the last time he fled from her.

Harry didn't go back to the motel, however. He Apparated to across the street from the Russian temple, behind some bushes. Dean and Sam were coming out of the front door, Harry having not been gone long at all, and he watched quietly as they got into the Impala. Sam probably took a taxi to get there, Harry realised.

Once they drove away and were out of sight, Harry Apparated back to the basement. It was dark, late, and the only light just as before was from some street lights shining through the small, high windows. Pulling out his wand, Harry cast *Lumos*, then he crouched down at the trapdoor, fingers running over the symbol, looking between it and the one on his wand.

They were identical. Dominic had said the triangle one meant channelling power, and it was the only one on there with triangles. Assuming Dominic was right, it would make sense. The Elder Wand protected itself by using its opponent's power against them. If it had a rune on it that channelled power, that would make it possible.

Harry could kick himself. This whole time he had been focusing on the symbols in the angels' sigils. How could he have been ignoring the runes on his own wand? The other symbols on the door also explained why his magic hadn't worked down there. These symbols were blocking it - probably stealing his power, and if Dominic knew what to do with Russian magic, he possibly could have taken it like he took his victim's talents.

That thought made him shiver again.

Sighing, Harry stood and pulled out his cell phone. He had gained some more contacts over the last few weeks, but his top main four were still Sam, Cas, Bobby, and Dean. He stared at Cas' name for a moment, sending him a quick prayer as was becoming habit, then he stared at Bobby's name.

He knew the brothers would call him and give him an update, but they would wait until they were in for the night and could relax. It wouldn't be unusual, either, for Bobby to lend Harry a hand. He was mostly busy with the apocalypse, and Harry didn't like to take away his time, but with something as important as what was carved into his wand, he knew he needed help.

He just didn't have to clarify it was for his wand.

"Yeah?" Bobby answered on the third ring.

"Hey, Bobby," Harry greeted. "Alright?"

"As alright as I can be. Where you boys at?"

"Just wrapping things up. Listen, if I send you a photo of some symbols, can you help me find out
what they are?"

Bobby huffed, "I can try. What's so important about them?"

"Other than they affect my magic?" Harry deflected.

"Fair enough," Bobby sniggered.

"Thanks, Bobby," Harry said with a genuine smile.

"Course. Talk to ya later."

"Bye."

Once off the phone, Harry turned it over in his hands, looking for the camera button, then held his wand light over the symbols to take the picture. He sent it to Bobby with no message. Honestly, to text took forever anyway. Muggles seemed obsessed with it, but Harry didn't know what was so convenient of having to push a button three times, then another four times, then another twice, then another three times, and onward just to spell out one bloody word. (Though the brothers did have a few phones with very tiny keyboards on them that would make it easier if he broke down and bought one. The touch-screen ones were beginning to catch his eye too.)

Predictably, the brothers weren't at the motel when Harry Apparated in. He took the opportunity to shower and get into comfortable clothes. He was on his desk-transfigured-into-bed when the brothers came in, having been flipping through one of his seemingly endless books on sigils, mind still preoccupied.

The brothers had pizza with them, though, so he shot up and joined them at the table.

"Everything go alright?" Dean asked.

"Yeah," Harry said, helping them clear some space for the pizza boxes. "Viva still bloody creepy. Tried to get me to come inside again. Dominic will get his though."

"Good," Sam said.

"Aw, still resisting Viva's little crush? Afraid of the voodoo cooties?" Dean teased.

"One, it's not little," Harry said, sitting down with the other two. "She would have me as an accessory and a trinket, and you know it. Two, if only it was just cooties - you didn't see her stockpile of orbs, or the jar of butterfly wings -"

"Dean," Sam sighed, "I told you not to get him started."

"I wasn't trying to. It's just too easy," Dean sniggered around half a pizza slice in his mouth.

"Fine, I'm done," Harry acquiesced and picked up a slice. "I won't say anything else."

"For now," Dean continued to snigger.

They had two pizzas, one packed with meat, the other with vegetables. He happily ate between the two, sometimes picking up a stray veggie and putting it on a meat slice or vice versa. As they ate, they went over Dominic's victims, making sure they weren't forgetting anyone and agreed to do the ritual to right things in the morning.

"We should have everything we need," Sam said, studying his notes on the ritual.
"We should check in with a couple of the victims, to make sure it worked before we leave town," Dean added, standing and stretching his way over to his duffle. He picked it up and tossed it on his bed, digging through it.

"Agreed," Sam said. "There's this one girl, Annie - her skill with the flute was what was going to put her through college."

"Band nerd, huh?" Dean snorted.

Harry watched as Dean methodically got comfortable for the night. Harry found his general routine, that he had no matter where he was, pretty interesting. He was more of a shower-in-the-morning kind of guy compared to Harry's habit of showering at night, especially if Harry charmed them clean like he did earlier. Dean also wasn't body shy whatsoever and didn't usually change in the loo. He yanked out some soft trousers and a t-shirt before he started stripping.

"We'll have to do this at the highest point in town," Sam went on.

"Like on the roof of one of the office buildings?" Harry suggested, watching as Dean pulled his last shirt over his head, revealing the hard muscles of his back rolling with the motion and what seemed like miles of warm, smooth skin and a straight waist.

"Most likely," Sam answered. "Unless there's a water tower on some hill we don't know about."

"Did you look for that when you checked out the city maps?" Dean asked as he toed off his shoes and socks and unbuttoned his jeans, back still turned to them.

"I, uh, was kind of busy learning about the Russian temple to save your ass," Sam answered.

Dean huffed. "We'll go back and check in the morning then." He dropped his jeans, stepping out of them to stand in nothing but his pants, which were black briefs that were well-fitted. All of Dean's pants were well-fitted, Harry had noticed, and seemed to highlight his solid thighs and straight, defined hips. Dean turned slightly to grab his pyjama bottoms, showing Harry that the bulge in the front was still more prominent in those pants than in some of Dean's others, though Dean's grey ones were probably the tightest fit to Harry's knowledge.

"Harry, do you think you could Apparate the things we need up to- …and you're staring and not listening again," Sam sighed.

Harry blinked, frowned, then looked over at Sam, who was rubbing the bridge of his nose. "I wasn't staring at anything. I'm listening," Harry confirmed, confused as to why Sam seemed suddenly frustrated with him. "I can Apparate the things we need up to the roof or wherever. That way we won't look so suspicious carrying everything up anyway."

Sam nodded, hand falling away, looking tired.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Everything okay, Sammy?" Dean asked then, stepping back up to the table now donned in those soft trousers and t-shirt.

"Yeah," Sam sighed again. "I'm getting used to it."

"Used to what?" Harry and Dean asked at the same time.

Sam shook his head and closed his eyes. "Nothing. I just have a headache. Anyway," he continued,
shuffling his notes to put away, "we'll make sure where's the highest point, then Harry can Apparate everything for the ritual up there. We can go to Annie's right after, make sure it worked."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Dean said. As Sam was speaking, Dean had gone back to his duffle and was now tossing a bottle of aspirin to his brother. Harry's first thought was that he was going to change again, and he had to stare at the aspirin bottle a few moments to realise what it was.

He decided he must have been tired. He also didn't think Sam was telling the truth about his headache, but he assumed Sam wouldn't say in front of him anyway. At least not at first - Harry was generally the last person they pulled in on anything. It could be aggravating, but on the plus side, Harry's spying had gotten a lot better.

"But they're still gods, though?" Harry was asking.

They had made good time back to Bobby's, and currently, Bobby was at his desk, Sam was in the chair on the other side of it, and as the small couch that had been pushed aside to accommodate the cot was stacked with books, Dean and Harry were on the cot. Dean had his back against the side, leg bent and knee resting on the bedding, and Harry had pushed himself all the way back to rest against the bay window, bare feet dangling off the edge. He had a large tome in his lap, a rare book dedicated to Judaism.
Once again, the four of them were engrossed in research. It was a few days after Dominic and the Russian tomb-maze. Dean and Sam were already lining up the next lead to follow up on, but it was getting late, so Harry doubted they would jump into action that night. It wouldn't have been the first time if they did, but their next lead looked less than promising. He guessed they had a few days.

He was exhausted - it was like the brothers never slowed down. Well, no, it wasn't like anything at all - the brothers never slowed down, full stop. It wasn't hard for Harry to keep up, but he still didn't bother to stifle his yawns.

Nor did he field his questions either, despite knowing the others were just as exhausted. There was so much to this world, seven weeks or so was hardly enough time to learn anything.

"Yeah, they're still gods," Sam answered him, not looking up from his laptop.

"But, like, they aren't as powerful as archangels and, y'know, the God," Dean followed up.

"And God created them along with everything else? Why are they named gods then?" Harry asked.

"Because people used to worship them," Bobby answered this time. "Gods are basically just really powerful creatures that feed on humans, but they get off at the attention. They would use their powers to help or punish people, play the role of a god, as long as the people kept them fed."

Harry yawned again, rubbing his temples. "Do they gain any extra power by people worshipping them?"

"Some do," Dean said. "We've run across a few desperate for a following."

Harry accepted that and closed the tome, electing instead to look over his journal, maybe add something.

The Winchesters had a journal of their father's, similar to the ones Bobby kept, where they recorded the monsters and things they had come across, how to stop them, etc. Harry hadn't been allowed to even touch the journal at first, and though now he thought they probably would let him see it if he asked, he hadn't tested that theory.

It did, however, the first time Harry attempted to read it (and was caught, stopped, and shun by Dean for a few hours) make him realise that so much information from his world, about spells and charms and potions and everything he had learned over the years, was nowhere to be found in this universe. So, after debating with himself whether he actually wanted to fool with the trouble or not, Harry eventually broke down and bought a journal of his own.

From there, he wrote down more spells, attempted to organise them by category, got bored, wasted an entire page drawing out Quidditch plays, then just started writing down spells when they came to mind.

Then, around the middle of the journal, having left several blank pages in an attempt to crudely create sections, Harry decided to write about the creatures from his world and what he knew about them. This time, he was able to categorise them, mainly because there were only three categories: evil creatures, not evil creatures, could go either way. He simply made a list of the boring ones, like
flobberworms and billywigs, with no descriptions of them whatsoever so far, though he did draw a picture of a drunken bowtruckle swimming in a bottle of Bobby's brew.

One day, on the long drive from Virginia to Nevada, he took up two pages drawing Buckbeak, and he planned on writing the descriptions and care guidance of hippogriffs around the drawing, he just hadn't gotten around to it yet.

Finally, starting at the back and moving forward, Harry was recording potions. He began first with the recipe for Dreamless Sleep, then Polyjuice Potion, Draught of Peace, and Pepperup. It was the recipe for Skele-Gro he was on now, and he was having a hard time remembering if it called for a dragon horn, which he would never be able to get here anyway because as far as he could tell, there weren't any dragons.

He began doodling, drawing first a little Snitch, then a little talking cell phone, and finally, he began sketching that symbol, over and over in the margins. Bobby told him that morning while he and Harry prepared breakfast that he was able to confirm it allowed for channelling power.

"Hey," Dean interrupted his thoughts, kicking his leg with a socked foot. Harry looked over at him. Dean had his own laptop in his lap, and he was gesturing Harry over. Harry glanced around, saw that Sam and Bobby were in the kitchen, then scooted over. Their shoulders and thighs pressed together as they looked at the screen. He really liked that he didn't seem to have to worry if doing that was awkward or anything with Dean. He never seemed to mind the contact.

"You're Tumbling?" Harry asked, seeing Tumblr opened on the internet browser.

"Yeah, look," Dean pointed to a couple of pictures on the screen.

The top picture was an old photograph of a couple of horses pulling a carriage. The second picture was a modern one of a truck pulling a metal horse carrier with two horses inside. Underneath the pictures, someone had written, 'Well played, horses. Well played.'

Harry sniggered. "Brilliant."

"Blog's hilarious," Dean commented and began scrolling down.

They laughed quietly to each other as Dean clicked through memes, sniggering like twelve-year-olds at one sexual joke they read, and when Harry heard Sam and Bobby making their way back to the study with drinks, he scooted back to where he was, sharing one more smile with Dean.

Harry looked back down to his journal. He was using a gel pen, one that wrote smooth, leaving thick black ink in its wake. It reminded Harry of the black of his tattoo.

Something in his mind started connecting more dots as he doodled. It was something he read in a book about Native American culture and rituals, studying their runes. They often tattooed runes onto them, and as Harry frowned at his drawing, he tried to remember what it was that he read.

The book stated that there some theories that suggested tattoos started for healing purposes, something having to do with a spiritual process to the healing, what Harry guessed were the purpose and meaning of those runes.

Unhappy he couldn't remember anything else, he silently and wandlelessly *Accio* the book, almost hitting Bobby in the head as it glided into the room from upstairs.

"Sorry!" Harry said, gracefully catching the book at the same time Bobby griped, "Watch it!"
"Little warning next time?" Sam suggested.

"Yeah, of course, sorry," Harry said again.

Bobby waved him off, and he and Sam continued whatever conversation they were having.

Harry got comfortable on the cot again and opened the book, flipping through until he found the passage about tattoos and healing.

'Of course,' it read, 'this meaning changed during the migration, with some tribes using tattoos for rituals and others thinking of it as art with no magical purpose.'

He flipped back a few pages to the start on the section of tattoos and continued reading:

'...harness the energy and power’ ... 'embodied with tutelary and protective spirit power’ ... 'talismanic tattooing’ ... 'created magical tattoos and various techniques they used’ ... 'tribal scarification’ ... 'tribal tattoo designs permeated with various forms of power'.

Then Harry read what was probably an all-around insignificant part for the authors, but was incredibly important to Harry:

'Several tribes had both multiple spiritual tattoos, each with a different meaning, and a combination, creating new symbols with multiple purposes. It is theorised that by doing this, they were creating an unbreakable bond between them and the spirits.'

Unbreakable bond. Combination of runes, creating a seemingly new rune, but are just multiple ones tied together.

"Bloody hell!" Harry hissed as he scrambled out of his seat and took off up the stairs, book and journal in hand.

It made sense now. Not the angel sigils, he already knew those were a combination of symbols, but his wand. His wand, created by death himself apparently, had specific runes etched into it to work together for one purpose: to be unbeatable. Because that was what the Peverell brother wanted, a wand more powerful than any other, one that could not be beaten.

Not to mention, the wand was a part of a set, a set of three, and considering he thought he remembered there being symbols on the Stone, and he definitely remembered the patterns on the Cloak, it was very possible that the symbols connected them together. Of course, now that he thought about it, that made perfect sense; after all, it was said that anyone to possess all three was Master of Death, so they had to connect to each other.

"Harry? You okay?" yelled someone from downstairs, but Harry couldn't be bothered to process who.

"Yeah," Harry threw over his shoulder, scattering books onto the floor after he threw the Native American one on the bed and hurriedly flipping through them as his body worked overtime to catch up with his brain.

He just needed to find the runes that made up the wand's pieces.

"Slow your roll, you're going to get a paper cut."

Harry jumped at the closeness of the voice, not expecting Dean to be there, in the doorway. Mind still going a mile a minute, though, Harry just sent him a glare for making him jump, not slowing
"What are you looking for?" Dean asked, sounding mildly concerned.


"That's quite the grocery list."

Harry hummed, tossing a useless book aside and picking another up. He immediately tossed that one aside, too, though, and tried for one on ancient Chinese markings.

"Uh… are you trying to memorise all of them at once, or is there a particular one causing your frenzy there?"

Harry didn't bother looking up, just quickly flicking through pages after pages, either slinging them to the side or onto the bed, depending on his quick assessment of helpfulness.

"What was it Dominic said? The round one was, what? A lock?"

"Huh? Oh. Yep."

"But it was just round, right?"

"… Yeah."

"What about a circle? A circle with a dot inside it?"

"Dunno."

Harry froze when a thought occurred to him. The Stone. Was it meant to represent the Stone? The circle in the Deathly Hallows sign did. He shook his head, that he could ponder later.

"What about, like, an arch thing?" Harry asked, moving his arm to indicate it.

"Uh… I don't know no arch-thing sigil."

Finding more triangle runes in a book about African art, he threw that one on the bed and picked up one on Anglo-Saxons.

Would it make sense if there were symbols from around the world to create whatever was on his wand? Maybe, if the maker wanted to pull power from each place, making it the most powerful wand in the world. That would make sense if the maker was a wizard. The story, however, said…

"If it was actually him…" Harry said out loud, trailing off and freezing to stare into nothing again, to think. If something like a personified death could be a real thing - like, apparently, God was a real thing - then why wouldn't he use power from all over the world. After all, everyone in the world would be his one day anyway.

"Who him?" Dean said in a voice that implied that was the second or third time he tried to get Harry's attention.

Harry spared him a glance, too in his head, and mumbled, "Really, either way… a possibility…"

"You do realise you aren't using full sentences, right?"

Harry turned and looked at him, thinking out loud. "Magic is magic. Power is power. Ultimately, it
doesn't matter its particular origin, because power is power, and power can be repurposed."

Dean crossed his arms, obviously trying to see where Harry was going with this. "Yeah. That's exactly what we've been doing. Rounding up powerful shit to repurpose them."

Harry frowned. "What are you talking about?"

Dean frowned as well. "What are you talking about?"

Harry opened his mouth, paused, then shook his head. Harry was talking about the Elder Wand, but he was still sticking to his decision of *tell no one*. "Nothing. I, er... I think I'm going to turn in for the night."

Dean narrowed his eyes and his face hardened some. "And by sleep you mean you're gonna hide up here and act like a procrastinator with a term paper due?"

"Uh huh. What are you doing, Harry? What's going on?"

"Nothing," Harry sighed, throwing the book in his hand on the bed to join the others. "I guess... I have to learn about these symbols, Dean."

"Why?"

"Wouldn't you want to know if they affected you like they do me?" Harry tried for the same deflection he used on Bobby.

"Yeah, and I'd be acting like you've been about it too. But not randomly go all," he gestured around the room and mess Harry had made, "unless I found something."

Harry took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I haven't found anything. That's kind of the point."

"You still aren't making sense, Harry," Dean said, sounding truly frustrated now. "Well, I don't want to make sense," Harry answered, putting his glasses back on and stepping up to push Dean away from the door with a hand to Dean's chest. "Besides, I'm not going to make sense until *it* makes sense, so..."

Dean didn't budge, just stared down at him.

Harry pushed harder. "Seriously, Dean. I just need to be alone."

Dean continued to stare, but when Harry added a quiet, "Please," he relented and stepped back. Harry shut the door and waved his hand to wandlessly lock it. He had a lot of reading and thinking to do.

... 

The Winchesters and Bobby apparently crashed during their research, sleeping where they fell in the study. Harry himself hadn't slept a wink, but he did at least find most of the answers he was looking for.

Using a Silencing Charm, Harry soundlessly crept into the kitchen and left a note on the table where it was sure to be found:
I'm out for the morning. Be back later today.

-Harry

The sun was barely up, and Harry knew they wouldn't be asleep for much longer. He honestly thought himself lucky to be finding an opening to sneak out at all.

Harry did feel a little guilty. Over the past few weeks, there were a few times Harry had wanted to open up more, maybe tell the others about his wand, confide in someone about his fears concerning it, mainly consisting of someone or something else winning its allegiance from Harry. He hadn't though, for the same reasons he had from the beginning. It was dangerous. Just the information about the wand was dangerous. If word got out, both he and them would become targets, at the very least, and the Winchesters might use him just for his wand.

Not to mention, Harry wanted to trust them, but when he thought back to his track record of trusting people, he was beginning to realise he shouldn't have done it so blindly. Harry had been learning a lot about the brothers, and they had been teaching him a lot as well. They were forming a rather good rapport, he thought, learning the ins and outs of how they worked and functioned. Harry didn't doubt them having his back going into a dangerous situation, but those were just situations. The job, as it were.

Truth was, Harry didn't truly know them, and he figured until they trusted him enough to bring him in on initial discussions about things, Harry wasn't going to feel too bad for not letting them in on the Elder Wand.

He walked down Bobby's drive before Apparating into an alley by the tattoo parlour the brothers once took him to. He had to stop by there first because he couldn't remember when they opened, and upon seeing he had a few hours, he pulled out his cell phone and called one of his newer contacts.

Leonard Quinhagak was a witch doctor in Oregon Harry met a couple of weeks back. Their introduction was an accident - Leonard was in the backwoods of a building they were in, and he witnessed Harry Apparating. Curious, he came over and introduced himself. He was a stoic, strong Native American, and he and his son took care of the majority of the townspeople and even neighbouring counties. He was the one who gave Harry the book on Native American culture in the first place.

Unsurprisingly, the man was awake, and he readily agreed to speak with Harry. So, Harry then Apparated to Leonard's cabin where the man was waiting on his front porch.

He led Harry inside to his small kitchen and began boiling water for some tea… or, his version of tea. Some kind of herbal mix, really.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Potter?" Leonard asked in his rich, smooth voice. He sat down across from Harry gracefully, his long, grey hair loose and covering his shoulders.

"I've come to ask you about tattoos."

"Ah," Leonard nodded, pushing up his long sleeves and revealing several tattoos of his own. "If you came for a recommendation of an artist, I have plenty."

Harry smiled. He liked this man; he had a way of putting Harry at ease. "No, actually, but thank you. I know which artist I want to use. I'm here about this."

He pulled a carefully folded piece of paper out of his pocket on which he had drawn the runes of his wand. Leonard took it silently, studying over the image with the air of unlimited patience before
handing it back.

"That is powerful magic."

"You know what these mean?" Harry asked, surprised.

"No idea," Leonard smiled. "But anyone who would take such care drawing them would have no illusions about its strength."

"Er," Harry frowned. "Thanks?"

"You're very welcome."

"So, my question is, if these were carved into an item, and I got a tattoo of these… what would happen?"

"You would be bonded to the object. Or, you would be vowing yourself to it. Or, possibly nothing."

Harry snorted at Leonard's honesty and dry humour.

The water began boiling, so Leonard stood and continued as he made their cups. "It would solely depend on the item itself. If it demands a following, you would be vowing your servitude to it. If it's an item to represent a place or spirit, likewise, you would be vowing your services."

"And if it's an everyday tool that I also use to defend myself? Something very powerful that has given its allegiance to me, but can be stolen? Allegiance taken away?"

"Then you would be giving your allegiance to it, and it can no longer be stolen," Leonard answered as he gave Harry his cup.

"Really?"

"It might be physically stolen, but you will not lose its allegiance. You would be performing a bond, you see."

"Would that be all?"

"Of course not. I'm sure there would be several other reactions and opportunities."

"Like what?" Harry blew on his herbal drink and took a sip. It tasted like muggle cough syrup to him, but he made sure not to make a face.

"Again, that wholly depends on what the object is."

Harry hummed and continued to sip on his drink while he thought. There could potentially be some dangerous side effects. It could be the stupidest thing in all universes to get the markings of the bloody Elder Wand tattooed on his skin. However, if there was a way to ensure its allegiance stayed with Harry, wouldn't it be the stupidest thing to not do it?

"This is a big decision for you," Leonard observed.

Harry shrugged.

"Keep in mind it is only a tattoo - not a burn or scar. If it turns out to be the wrong decision, you can break the lines with more ink."
"True," Harry agreed.

"The only question you have to ask yourself is: come what may, will it be worth it in the end?"

Harry bit his lip as he turned that question over in his head. He kept seeing that angel, though, the one at the factory who almost disarmed him. The panic he felt in that moment was astronomical, and he could not imagine the amount of harm the wand could cause in the wrong hands. Admittedly, the thing scared him a little.

"Yes," he eventually answered. "Come what may, it'll be worth it."

Leonard smiled and offered Harry some toast. He chatted with the old man for a while, Leonard telling him stories of magical tattoos and some of the stories behind his own, then when Harry was sure the shop was opened, he bid Leonard goodbye. He left, to go do either the stupidest or smartest thing he would ever do, with the help of a blue hair receptionist and an artist named Mike who thought Harry was a drummer in a band.

With Harry's right forearm wrapped and the purchase of Tattoo Goo to aid in healing, Harry Apparated to Bobby's backdoor and entered without knocking.

"That you?" Bobby asked. Harry could hear him digging in the fridge which was close to the hallway and backdoor.

"Yeah," Harry said, knowing he meant Harry unless one of the brothers had left, which he doubted. He shut the backdoor with a kick and began pulling off his jacket as he strode around Bobby and
into the kitchen.

"You hungry? We're having a late lunch."

"Sure," Harry agreed. He tossed his sack of Tattoo Goo on the table, threw his jacket on the back of a chair, and began helping Bobby set sandwich stuff on the counter.

"Where've you been?" came Dean's voice.

Harry glanced over his shoulder to find Dean and Sam both leaning against the large doorframe separating the kitchen and study. Sam looked reasonably relaxed, or as relaxed as Harry figured Sam got, but Dean had his arms crossed and was looking at Harry suspiciously.

Feeling immediately defensive, Harry said, "What? Am I not allowed to leave your sight now?"

"I'm thinkin' it's better to stick to the house or to us, yeah," Dean answered.

Harry huffed, setting down a jar of sliced pickles a bit harder than he meant. "Are you serious?"

Dean lifted one shoulder unapologetically, "If we wanna keep you safe and out of the line of fire."

"Out of the line of fire?" Harry asked incredulously. "That was the goal, was it, when you had me shoot at a possessed monk? Or when you baited that voodoo priest and then had to teach me how to sew up my own skin?"

Harry vividly remembered that lesson too. The wound on his thigh wasn't that bad, but it combined with the alcohol they used to disinfect, and also ease the pain by drinking it, made the skin where Dean's hands touched him hot, and the needle cold.

"Fine, out of the line of sight," Dean corrected himself. "We need to keep you hidden."

Harry scoffed. "What the bloody hell do you think I was doing? Buying a billboard to put my face on it next to the words: Harry Potter, This Planet's One and Only Wizard?"

"I doubt you stuck to the shadows the whole time you were out."

"I didn't have to," Harry argued, crossing his arms only to uncross them due to the soreness of his new tattoo. "I didn't speak to anyone I didn't already know."

Dean raised an eyebrow. "You've only been ET for a couple of months, exactly how many people do you know?"

"Leonard, for one."

"Who? You mean you've been gone since sunrise to hang out with some old witchy Indian?"

"Don't be purposely bigot and ignorant," Harry spat, knowing full well that was what Dean was doing just to get a rise out of Harry and make him forget his own arguments. Dean had learned quickly that was the easiest way to get Harry worked up and therefore, unreasonable, and Harry learned just as quickly to counter it by simply calling him out. "And it just so happens Leonard is an early riser."

"Must be nice for someone who was up all night anyway," Dean said pointedly.

Before Harry could throw in his own jab, Sam interrupted, "Did you get another tattoo?"
Sam had moved over to the table and was holding out the Tattoo Goo. Harry was so focused on Dean he didn't notice, or he would have snatched up the bag before Sam had a chance to grab it. He should have gone upstairs right away and shoved it down into one of his bags, but Bobby had mentioned food. Getting the tattoo was relaxing, as well, and Harry found that Mike was easy to chat with. He had come back without thinking about the tattoo too much.

Sam was looking at Harry, frowning and curiously confused, as was Bobby where he watched by the sandwich supplies.

Harry hesitated. He wasn't exactly going to hide it - just like his scars, he knew they would see it eventually; he just didn't have a ready excuse for it yet. He hadn't even held his wand and tested what it did. Therefore, when Harry opened his mouth then froze, he knew he looked well and truly caught.

"What did you do?" Dean growled, suddenly very serious and looking livid.

"What?" Sam asked, frown deepening.

Dean stepped into the kitchen finally, stalking to Harry and making Harry feel like he was prey trapped right in the predator's gaze with nowhere to run. "Please tell me," he snarled, "you didn't go and do something incredibly fucking stupid like tattooing one of those fucking symbols on you."

Harry gulped but squared his shoulders. "You're the one who had me get a tattoo of a symbol first, weren't you?"

Sam and Bobby groaned as Dean snapped, "Where?"

"To get really fucking bad advice," Dean snapped, grabbing Harry's wrist and yanking his arm and shirt sleeve up. Harry tried to pull his arm back and protest, but then Dean fixed him with a furious glare; Harry couldn't help but become pliant underneath it.

Dean carefully unwrapped his arm, letting the wrappings fall to the floor, then stared down a moment at the ink, seemingly shocked. Harry glanced down, too, as Dean turned his arm over. Harry had the runes wrapped around the middle of his forearm like they wrapped around his wand, the two ends meeting on either side of his graveyard scar.

He admired the black ink and the slightly raised and reddened skin around it, then jumped sky high when Dean yelled in an incredibly deep voice, "What did you do?!"

"Harry," Sam opened carefully. He and Bobby had come closer to see as well. "That's not just a symbol… That's a bunch of them."

"Will all of you get off my arse?" Harry snapped, finally jerking his arm back. "There is a reason I did this, y'know. I didn't just randomly pick pretty shapes to have poked into me with a needle gun."

Dean opened his mouth, clearly about to yell, but Bobby interrupted, "He's right, son. He must have a good reason."

Harry realised then that Bobby would have recognised a couple of the symbols, and he was surprised Bobby was defending him.

"Good reason?" Dean spat then pointed at the two largest runes - the symbol from the Russian
temple's trapdoor, inked twice above the rest. "He didn't even know what that was a few days ago. He got this idea last night, and here he is, sleeving it up with some sigils." He glared at Harry. "You didn't even test this shit first either, did you?"

"Oh, like you're one to talk!" Harry yelled back.

"Enough, guys," Sam waved an arm between them. "Just… why, Harry?"

Without looking at Sam, eyes still boring into Dean's, Harry pulled out his wand and held at the wrong end, so its handle was up where the runes could be visible to all of them.

Dean seemed like he wanted to just continue to glare, but after a moment, his eyes snapped to the wand and his angry face faltered.

"They're from your wand?" Sam asked, and Harry didn't answer, just watched as Dean clenched his jaw, eyes darting between the wand and Harry's forearm. Waiting for Dean to make up his mind where he was going to land with this.

Honestly, how could Dean forget they were on there anyway. It was just a couple of weeks ago that Harry came out of the loo in one of their motel rooms to find Dean, in exactly the same place he was before, only with Harry's wand a good foot from where Harry left it on the table and a spectacular red spot on Dean's forehead, having clearly been playing with the thing. He denied it, of course, but for all of Dean's stupid instinct to touch and play with things that put him in danger, he was usually extremely observant of them. Looking at the symbols as something that he apparently thought he had a right to get angry at, though, it wasn't like Dean to not make the connection right away. Like he was taking this more personally.

"What does this mean?" Dean finally asked. "What does having that on your skin do?"

"It keeps this mine," Harry said simply. He tossed the wand up in the air to flip it around, catching it easily and cast a simple and silent *Lumos*.

His wand lit immediately, and Harry gasped at the sensation. The runes on his skin became pleasantly warm for a brief moment, almost as though his wand had brushed him in some way. Harry could feel the connection to it right down to his core. It sent an almost ominous chill up his spine.


"Wow?" Dean parroted. "What wow? The light came on, that's it."

Harry shook his head. "No, that wasn't it." He rotated his arm, looking at the tattoo a little in awe as another warm brush passed over the runes. He had to admit, it was a bit intimidating.

"What?" Dean snapped again. "What did it do?"

"Like I said," Harry answered a bit distractedly, holding the wand in both hands, "it makes it mine."

"What does that even mean?" Bobby asked.

Harry sighed, pocketing his wand and taking off his glasses to clean them so he wouldn't have to look at any of them. "It means it can't be stolen. Look, it's done, alright?" He put back on his glasses and looked back at Dean. "It's done. So, is this going to be a thing, or is it, after all this time, I'm not going to be trusted with my own wand and body?"

Dean seemed to be struggling with himself a little, like he wanted to continue to fight, probably
because of Harry's tone, and a bit like he was tired and was already accepting this situation. Harry was pleased to see the accepting part win over, and Dean sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Fine. But if your ink gets us blown up or something, I'm kickin' your ass."

Harry snorted, relieved and relaxing. "Deal." Then he smiled at Bobby and nodded to the counter. "Lunch?"

"Better pack it to go," Sam said, sounding tired himself as he dropped the Tattoo Goo back in its bag and tossed it back on the table. "We gotta get to Missouri before our lead goes cold."

"What, now?" Harry asked. "I thought I was getting another driving lesson today?"

Harry rolled his eyes but decided to let that jab go. Missing the days when he thought a full course load and Quidditch practises were exhausting, Harry dragged himself up to the guest room he had unofficially claimed as his and packed up.

The storm seemed to come out of nowhere.

Harry was sitting in his usual spot in the car behind Sam, spending the ride trying to remember different species of dragons and attempting to draw one. He was lost in his head, thinking about his fight with Dean and wondering if he actually won that one or not, and only barely gave it notice when it began raining. It was Sam griping about the storm messing with the service to his blackberry, one of the five cell phones Sam himself had, that pulled him back into the present.

The storm quickly became violent and dangerous, and Harry knew it was only the apocalyptic climate change that prevented it from being pure snow and ice.

It was already dark, the sun setting earlier and earlier as winter took over, and Dean's headlights weren't enough to guide their way. If it wasn't for the lightning, Harry was sure they would have gotten stranded there on the road.

Just as the wind was picking up enough to almost physically push the car, they saw a bright neon sign shining through the storm: THE ELYSIAN FIELDS HOTEL

"Awesome," Dean said. "Let's stop here for the night."

"We should keep driving, Dean," Sam said. "If we push through the storm, we can be in Missouri by morning."

"Dude, this thunderstorm is makin' us its bitch. We could at least wait it out and see if there's any floods."

"I don't know," Sam said.

"Well, I do. Come on," Dean replied as he pulled into the hotel's parking lot.

"It is getting late," Harry put in. "We can stop for the night and take off early tomorrow."

"There ya go," Dean said happily, throwing a smile at Sam.

"Alright," Sam agreed, sighing.
Deciding to wait to see if they could even get a room before fooling with their bags, Sam, Dean, and Harry made a run for it but were completely soaked by the time they pushed through the double doors inside.

"Whew," Dean huffed.

Harry grunted a rough agreement with the sentiment, shaking his head and running a hand through his wet hair to keep it from sticking to his forehead.

They walked deeper into the lobby and paused to look around. Harry was surprised, to say the least, at how nice it looked. Normally, the places they found to stay in out in the middle of nowhere were run down dumps at best. This place had a sleek, modern check-in area, and their sitting area by a large, warm looking rock fireplace had soft, white leather chairs and sofa. The lobby was full of people, too, and none of them looked too unhappy about having possibly been stranded there by the storm.

The hotel was playing rather cliché sounding hotel music, though, that Harry thought ruined the experience a little.

"Nice digs for once," Dean commented.

Sam nodded, huffing a small laugh.

"Yeah," Harry agreed. He subtly cast a drying and warming charm over them, making the brothers shiver, though, to their credit, they seemed to be expecting it. "Big too. I think I'll try to get my own room this time if I can."

"Need more of your super-secret alone time?" Dean raised an eyebrow.

Harry merely shrugged and made his way to the counter. Truth was, he did feel like he needed some alone time. The Winchesters were go-go-go, and he needed to recharge - and staying up all night studying symbols was not recharging. The idea of sleeping in a big, comfortable bed without the hum of research going on below him was not only welcoming but fairly needed.

"Hello," he greeted the man behind the counter. Chad, by his name tag. He was in a bowtie suit and stood very straight, typing quickly on the keyboard of his computer.

"Checking in?" Chad asked, barely sparing Harry a glance.

"Yes, please. One room, single." Harry already had his wallet out and slid his ID and credit card to the man after double checking they were under the same alias.

Chad picked them both up quickly, setting them in his line of sight, and began clicking away, glancing between them and the screen. Sam and Dean were waiting behind him, murmuring softly about the furniture and fireplace. Harry drummed his fingers on the counter, trying to wait politely. His stomach growled.

After several moments, Chad pushed a printed paper to Harry, asked for him to fill out a billing address and sign, and once he did, Chad was passing Harry's ID and credit card back to him with the addition of a room keycard and receipt. "Enjoy your stay at the Elysian Fields Hotel, where we hope you will be filling."

Harry frowned at the odd, and perhaps misspoken, phrasing, but slid down the counter to make room for Sam and Dean regardless, opening his wallet to deposit the items just handed to him. He stepped a little further away still as he waited for the brothers, checking out the next room that looked to be a
dining area.

Chad began clicking away at his keyboard again, sounding like ferocious, insistent pecking of bird's beaks to Harry. He spared Chad a possibly judgmental look.

"Busy night," Dean commented.

"Any port in a storm, I guess," Chad replied. "If you could just fill this out, please."

Harry edged closer to the doorway, and when he saw that the next room was indeed a dining area, along with what looked like a buffet, he caught Sam's eye and gestured that he would be in there. Then he made a beeline for the roast.

He had half a roast sandwich and most of his green beans and carrots eaten by the time Dean and Sam joined him with their own plates.

"Smell that?" Dean grinned at him, wafting his hand over his plate. "Ribs, man. Barbeque ribs."

"You could try to add a vegetable in there," Sam said.

Harry repressed a grin of his own. Dean had stacked his plate with nothing but ribs; whereas, Sam had a full spread of well portioned roast, salad, and a corn on the cob.

"I'm a man, Sammy," was Dean's only reply before he tucked in.

Like Harry, Dean practically inhaled his food, and by the time he got up to grab dessert, Harry had been done for several minutes and was talking to Sam about their lead. It didn't pass Harry's notice that Sam barely touched his food.

"There doesn't seem to be too much flooding," Sam said.

"That's good, I guess," Harry said, watching Dean at the dessert table. He seemed to be having a problem picking which pie he wanted, and it didn't seem to be a problem that bothered him one bit.

"We might could check in with Missouri," Sam suggested.

Harry watched as Dean made his selection and not so subtly stole a round, chocolate topping off another, popping it in his mouth. "We're already on our way there."

"No, I meant," Sam began, then stopped. Harry saw him follow his line of sight from the corner of his eye and frowned when Sam sighed.

"What?" Harry asked, looking over at him.

"Nothing," Sam shook his head, going back to his phone. "I meant Missouri, the woman, not the state."

"Oh," Harry said, remembering stories of the psychic they knew. "Sorry."

He went back to watching Dean as Dean was making his way back to their table. Dean stopped dead in his tracks, though, then backed up a few paces and began talking to a woman in a red dress. He was giving her a charming smile and was leaning toward her.
"I should learn to flirt," Harry blurted.

Sam snorted. "What?" Harry saw him follow Harry's eye line again, and they both watched for a moment as Dean's charming smile waned and he began to look a little embarrassed. Sam chuckled. "That's not called flirting, Harry. That's called striking out."

"Still though," Harry said, still watching as Dean got rejected, Sam going back to his phone once more. "He's doing it. He goes after what he wants."

"And... you want to go after what you want?" Sam asked, sounding cautious for some reason, making Harry look over again.

"Not necessarily," Harry answered, feeling himself blush a little. "I mean, I don't want to turn into one of those men at the Male Box. I just have next to no experience. It would be nice not to die a virgin. Again."

Sam shook his head, looking amused. "Well, if you ask Dean, I'm sure he'd love to give you lessons."

"Give him lessons in what?" Dean asked, flopping back down at their table.

"Oh, just -"

Harry swiftly kicked Sam under the table, not knowing what Sam was going to say and not wanting to risk it. Give Dean just an inch to take a mickey, and he'd often run a mile. So, Harry rushed, "Combat. Fighting, and things."

"I need to finish teaching you how to throw knives first," he answered, then teased, "What, Sammy give you a bad grade?"

He turned to grin at Sam but frowned instead. Sam had already gone back to his phone.

"Sam, unpucker, man. Eat something."

"We should hit the road, Dean," Sam said seriously.

"In this storm? What? It's -"

"It's Biblical. Exactly," Sam interrupted. "I-it's freakin' Noah's Ark out there, and we're eating pie."

"Only Dean is," Harry tried, "and there's nothing we can do about the storm."

"We could press on," Sam countered. "Get a step closer to ending this."

"How many hours of sleep did you get this week?" Dean asked, picking up his fork and stabbing his dessert. "What? Three? Four?"

Harry snorted at the exaggeration, though currently, it felt truer than not. Sam slumped back in his chair, letting his phone drop down to the table, and Harry found himself literally crossing his fingers that Sam would give in, let them stay the night.

"Look," Dean continued, "Bobby's got his feelers out, okay? We have talked with every hoodoo man and root woman in twelve states."

"Yeah, well, I'm not giving up," Sam said.
"Nobody's giving up," Dean snapped, voice lowered so as to not carry. "Especially me."

Sam slumped some more, and Harry could physically see Dean winning.

"We're gonna find a way to beat the Devil, okay? Soon," Dean added with conviction. "I can feel it, and we will find Cas, we'll find Adam, but you are no good to me burnt out."

Dean and Sam stared each other down, Sam considering him. Finally, Sam deflated more and said, "Yeah. Yeah, okay."

"Really?" Harry leaned forward so quickly, he almost knocked over his drink. Hope sprang up in him, of a long, hot shower, a soft bed, and no apocalypse talk. He might even throw in some Dreamless Sleep. "Like, really, really? Because I swear to god, Sam, if you change your mind and try to drag me awake in the middle of the night, I will not be held responsible for hexing you."

Sam chuckled, and Dean barked a laugh.

"There's the spirit, Harry." Dean then grinned at Sam. "Come on. We've actually got the night off for once. Let's try to enjoy it."

"Merlin," Harry breathed. "I've been thinking I would never hear a Winchester say those words."

"Hey, we could even do an early birthday celebration," Dean added, waggling his eyebrows at Harry. "Just twelve days away. Not too early, huh?"

Harry rolled his eyes. Dean decided one day to crunch the numbers and pinpoint exactly when Harry's birthday would be. Even though he considered himself of age and didn't even put that much stock in it in the first place since turning of age to him was more about removing that bloody Trace than anything else, Dean seemed stuck on the whole turning eighteen thing. Why, Harry couldn't fathom since his IDs had him older anyway.

Sam sighed again and shook his head, picking up his fork instead of his phone. "No, I don't think so, Dean. But yeah, well, maybe one night off won't hurt."

Harry and Dean exchanged a look, then Harry said, "You're going to spend the night on your laptop anyway, aren't you?"

Sam looked a little sheepish, and Dean made a frustrated noise.

"Well, you do that," Harry pushed away from the table. "And you can celebrate my birthday," he said to Dean. "I'm going to start my super-secret alone time."

"It better be a bubble bath and candles, and not another tat," Dean called after him.

Harry ignored him.

He braved the storm to run out to the car and grab his bags, and this time he waited until he was on the lift, double checking his room number, to dry and warm himself. His room was on the third floor, about halfway down the hall, and Harry sighed with relief when he shut the door and felt himself relax. He tossed his bags on the bed, threw his jacket over a chair, and stretched, watching the gel pen he used for his journal fall out of the jacket's pocket and roll underneath the chair.

Shaking his head at the object and already planning out the rest of his evening, he squatted, reached under, and retrieved the escaping writing implement.
When he rose, Check-in Counter Chad was a mere foot from him, a wide, wicked smile plastered on his face, and before Harry could react, there was a hard knock on his head and everything went black.

Harry wasn't sure if it was the screaming and banging or the cold that woke him, but it was definitely the piercing sound of an infant crying that forced open his eyes and had him standing before he could properly say he was conscious.

"Help us! Get us out of here!"

"Help us! Help us!"

"They ate Jerry! They ate Jerry!"

"Open the door! Get us out!"

"Behind you! Behind you! Someone's behind you!"

"They ate Jerry! They ate Jerry!"

"Look out!"

"Help us! Help us!"

"They ate Jerry! They ate Jerry!"

"Blimey," Harry murmured, blinking through some dizziness to get a grasp on his surroundings.

He was in the back of a large, very cold, well stock, walk-in freezer along with, he quickly counted, nine muggles and a baby.

"They're taking them!"

"They're fighting them!"

"Help us! Help us!"

"They ate Jerry!"

"Bugger all in hell," Harry groaned, pushing through the group of screaming, frightened muggles to get to the front and the door. Once there, he had to push against a middle-aged man to get room enough to see out the square, thickly panelled window.

Dean and Sam were there, in a large kitchen, attempting to fight off two other men. Sam was being kicked, falling backward into some shelving rack, knocking it over and spilling its contents, as Dean was picking up a skillet and attempting to whack the Asian man in the head, who expertly dodged it and pounced. It looked like Dean and Sam were putting up a good fight - but they were losing and being manhandled out of the kitchen.

Which was wrong. The man with dark skin looked like maybe he could hold his own, but the Asian man didn't look anywhere near fit enough to be winning against Dean Winchester. Which meant they either weren't human or were using some kind of supernatural power.

Quickly, before Harry lost his chance, he subtly cast tracking spells on both brothers that would
allow him to find them more easily, and more importantly, alert him if either became seriously injured or killed. There were better and stronger spells he could have used, this one would only last maybe twenty minutes, but that was what came to mind first. He hadn't even remembered those kinds of spells until he began that journal.

As the men succeeded in manhandling the brothers out of the kitchen, Harry looked around at the mess they made and felt his blood run cold.

A big pot of what he thought looked like tomato sauce had been tipped over, and human eyeballs were splattered where they had hit the floor, some still rolling on the counter.

He took another sweep of the room. Half of a human arm was on the floor, looking like it had been grated like cheese. A stack of human ears was sitting beside chopped greens. And that was definitely a human foot dangling off of some knocked askew shelves.

Suddenly, out of all the screaming muggles, "They ate Jerry!" was hitting home.

Harry sighed and let his forehead fall forward to rest against the cool metal door and think.

He glanced down at his watch. By his count, he must have been unconscious for a couple of hours. Dean and Sam obviously knew something was going on, and Harry knew without a doubt that they knew he was gone. Missing. Possibly knew he was there, in the freezer. Check-in Counter Chad had been the one to knock Harry out, though Harry had no idea how the man got the jump on him, and clearly, the cooks were in on this gruesome turn of events.

Eating people. Monsters - whether they were human or not. They did sneak up on Harry, though, and were apparently stronger than Dean and Sam, so in all likelihood, not human.

Harry had the urge to Apparate out and save Dean and Sam, but they knew what they were doing at least. Harry had confidence they could hold out long enough. He also knew that if they suspected him to be in the freezer and could help, they would distract the monsters long enough for Harry to get the muggles away. They wouldn't want Harry helping them just yet. Harry, on the other hand, had nine muggles and a baby he needed to get to safety and away from blenders and seasoning before it was too late.

Problem was, it was obvious that probably the entire hotel staff were evil, so the chances of unlocking the freezer and just sneaking the muggles out without notice were basically nil. Especially with the screaming baby.

"Right," he said, turning to face the panicked group. "Excuse me! Excuse me, sorry, hello!" he yelled over them. "Excuse me - hey, hey, everyone, please, listen!"

It took a minute, but eventually, they calmed down enough to allow him to speak.

"Right then. Er... hello. My name is Harry, and as you can see, we're in a bit of a tight spot. But if you let me, I can get us out of this."

A man with dreadlocks huffed disbelievingly, managing it even through his obvious fear.

"I can," Harry said sternly. "Listen, those people out there... They aren't human."

"They're monsters," the woman clutching the baby said.

"Anyone who can do this to people can't be human," the middle-aged man agreed, but Harry could tell they weren't getting it.
"Yes," Harry nodded, "but I meant it literally. They aren't human. Look," he sighed and rubbed a hand through his unruly hair, "humans aren't actually at the top of the food chain, and in order to get you out of here, the safest thing is to do something my kind can do."

They were staring at him with wide eyes, both looking terrified of him and like he was insane.

"Alright," Harry pressed on, "look. I'm not bad - I'm not like them out there. I'm... Well, I'll just say it, I'm a wizard, alright? See," he took out his wand and waved it once, causing tiny little bluebirds to impressively burst from his wand and chirp happily at the people.

The muggles began screaming again, pressing as far away from Harry as possible.

"Please!" Harry yelled over them. "I'm not a danger to you! You're safe! Well," he conceded, "you aren't safe because you're in a locked freezer waiting to be eaten, but you're safe from me!"

The screaming baby suddenly stopped crying, hiccuped, then laughed, reaching for the birds who seem to enjoy the baby's attention and began chirping closer. The muggles watched this exchange, innocent baby laughter apparently enough to calm them again.

"You're a wizard?" Dreadlocks asked.

"Yes," Harry answered. "And I can... disappear and reappear - you know, instant travel. I don't know about your luggage, but I can take you straight to your cars without anyone noticing, so you can leave."

Dreadlocks immediately jumped forward, lifting his arms as though to offer all of himself to Harry. "Get me outta here, man! They ate Jerry!"

Harry nodded in what he hoped was a comforting way and held out his arm. "Here, grab my arm and hold on tight. This won't be a pleasant sensation, but it'll be over in a second."

Dreadlocks grabbed Harry's arm and squeezed hard enough that Harry was concerned there would be bruises. He took a deep breath then Harry focused on the parking lot and Apparated.

With a crack, their feet landed on wet asphalt around the corner of the hotel facing the parking lot. Harry immediately was grateful it had apparently stopped raining, not realising he was prepared for the storm. Dreadlocks took in a huge breath, and Harry expected to have to calm him, assure him the Apparation was over.

However, he barely opened his mouth to ask after the man before Dreadlocks was running, heading straight for a modern looking car, and hurled himself inside it, turning it on almost instantly and taking off.

Harry nodded to himself. He could respect that.

He took a moment to cast around the hotel, preventing anyone inside from hearing anything going on outside. When Harry cracked back inside the freezer, he was met with more shouts, this time sounding as though in surprise than fear though.

"He's safe," Harry assured. "He just ran to his car and took off. I suggest you all do the same."

Harry didn't know if it was him remaining calm and seemed to be trustworthy, or because the muggles were terrified out of their minds, but they agreed to trust Harry nonetheless. Much like Dreadlocks, they each hurried to their respective vehicles, those with passengers bending down low in the seats to hide and wait for their companions. The baby, in particular, loathed Apparation, and
Harry was very thankful to have silenced the hotel instead of just doing a Privacy Charm - a Privacy Charm allowed for some sound and natural background noises as opposed to absolute silence that could tip off any eavesdroppers. Harry was pretty sure the baby's cries would have penetrated.

As Harry watched the last of the cars disappear, leaving literally only Dean's car now, he thought about his next move. Harry didn't care about whether or not the muggles told anyone about him or their experience - nor was he worried about them going to the authorities. Any copper who heard they escaped because of a wizard wouldn't bother looking into the report too much.

He quickly cast a few detection spells at the hotel and surmised there were two muggles left in the building - which would have to be Dean and Sam.

The spell he put on Dean and Sam would be wearing off at any minute and wouldn't be able to give him a location now, but he at least knew they weren't seriously injured or dead.

Harry called both brothers, but neither answered their phones. He needed to send them a message somehow, to let them know he was okay, which also translated to letting them know he was coming for them. He could already hear Dean's voice ordering him to stay out of the way, leave it to them, but Harry figured eyeball-stew changed some things.

"Expecto Patronum," Harry cast.

His beautiful silvery stag burst from his wand and landed gracefully on the pavement. After a quick trot in a circle and seeing no danger, it turned to Harry dutifully.

"Hey, you," Harry said softly, reaching out and allowing the Patronus to nuzzle his hand. "Listen, can you find Dean and Sam? I've already tried calling, so if they're alone, tell them to call me so I can join them. If they aren't, then… I guess, just nod at them? Sam knows you; he'll know that means I'm okay."

His stag puffed out its chest in pride and honour and elegantly jumped through the brick wall to complete its mission.

"You're in the wrooong world, kiddo."

Harry spun around toward the voice, wand at his side, ready. Behind him was a man who was Harry's height with light brown hair, a sharp nose, and in what could have possibly been a recycled Members Only jacket.

He was smirking at Harry. "And you've come at a baaaaad time."

"Who are you?" Harry asked with narrowed eyes. He could practically taste the energy surrounding the man.

"Who I am isn't important," he replied, tone chipper. "It's who you are that's the million-dollar question."

Not muggle, Harry knew, since the odds were very low that Dean and Sam weren't there, and this man and another muggle were the ones he detected. Not human altogether was Harry's second guess, and possibly a monster staff member that had just caught Harry freeing dinner. He didn't look ready to attack Harry though, and he didn't seem all too upset with the break-out. So, the first question Harry had to answer wasn't if this man was friend or foe but rather if he was a part of the monster hotel and willing to turn friend.

Ignoring the man's implied question about who Harry was, Harry said, "Tell me, what goes better
with human flesh, salt or sugar? I would guess salt with meat, but are eyeballs really all that meaty?"

The man's smirk deepened. "My advice would be to stick with sauces - the low-fat kind. Eyeballs, y'know. Go straight to the waist."

Harry wrinkled his nose and raised his wand slightly. "You'll have to hurry to catch your supper then. My bet is that they're long gone now though."

"No shit, Sherlock," Members Only snorted. "Humans, I tell ya. They give new meaning to fast food. But see, now you have the slight problem with a completely empty freezer, and those guys in there," he jerked his thumb to the hotel, "won't be so happy with you, alien or not."

Harry clenched his jaw. "What are you warning me for? You're not going to capture me and hand me over?"

"Where would be the fun in that?" Members Only asked, a mischievous glint in his eye. "I wouldn't be able to play with you."

"You won't be playing with me now," Harry snarled, not liking the feeling that he was being strung along and, well, played with. He couldn't get a good reading on the guy.

"I don't know," Members Only sung, rocking on the balls of his feet. "I'm having fun."

Then his eyes narrowed, and Harry could feel the energy around the man sharpening. He had the distinct impression that if he cast Specilus Revealio around the guy, Harry would be blinded by it.

"Here's the thing, twisty. Those knuckleheads in there? Some of them aren't very smart and couldn't recognise your magic if it slapped them on the ass. They thought they could deep fry the Winchesters' lost puppy and have a nice dessert."

Harry frowned. Why was he telling him this? "But not you…" Harry said slowly, watchful.

"No, I thought so too. Until you woke up, that is. The real question is how big of a mistake did they make?"

He raised an eyebrow in challenge, giving Harry a quick vigilant yet somehow teasing once over. Almost like he wanted Harry to be intimidating if nothing else because it would be amusing to him.

Harry had enough of this. His patience was rapidly becoming nonexistent with the constant stress and work he was having to do. He could almost feel his hippos or whatever begin to teeter in their balance. Not to mention the spell Harry put on the brothers was officially worn off now. Annoyed, Harry raised his wand all the way, pointing it at Members Only's face.

The man, who was smug looking and smirking, looked at the wand, and the effect was instantaneous. He froze, and his eyes widened imperceptibly, the smirk not quite leaving his face but instead turning blank, a microscopic change that hid what Members Only was thinking.

"Biiiig mistake, huh?" His eyes trailed slowly up Harry's arm, pausing for a brief moment at Harry's forearm where his new tattoo sat underneath his sleeve until he once again met Harry's own eyes. "Do you have any idea what you're holding, twisty?"

…

The conference room in the Elysian Fields Hotel was as sleek and modern as the rest of the building. The long tables draped in rich, cream-coloured tablecloths were pushed together to form a sharp U,
and the gods that sat around it were leaning back in their chairs, looking both annoyed but relaxed. A food trolley containing a Mister Jerry Mathews' head on a platter was rolled off to a corner, and in front of the tables facing the gods were Dean and Sam Winchester, sitting tensely in chairs pulled out for them.

Baldur, the Norse god of light and summer, was standing at the head of the tables, tapping a fork against his champagne glass to call for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming. Well, in all my centuries, I never thought I'd see this… This many gods under one roof."

"Gods?" Sam hissed quietly to his brother, shoulders and jaw so tight he looked ready to snap. He and Dean shared a significant wide-eyed look before returning their attention to Baldur.

"Now," the god was saying, "before we get down to the brass tacks, some ground rules. No slaughtering each other. Curb your wrath. Oh, and keep your hands off the local virgins. We're trying to keep a low profile here."

A few gods exchanged glances, clearly disappointed.

"Oh, we are so, so screwed," Sam hissed again from the corner of his mouth. Dean was taking steady breaths, clearly worried, but his eyes were darting around, obviously thinking out several scenarios at once.

"Now, we all know why we're here," Baldur continued congenially. "The Judeo-Christian apocalypse looms over us. I know we've all had our little disagreements in the past, but the time has come to put those aside and look toward the future. Because if we don't, we won't have one.

"Now, we do have two very valuable bargaining chips," he pointed at Dean and Sam. "Michael and Lucifer's vessels. The question is… What do we do now? Anybody have any bright ideas, speak up. This is a safe room."

No sooner had those words left the god's mouth did an almost impossibly bright, silvery and elegant stag burst through the wall and landed gracefully in the middle of the room.

"Harry," Sam whispered hurriedly to his brother. "That's Harry's."

Dean spared Sam a glance then directed sharp, bright eyes at the beautiful creature, tensing even more.

The stag turned slowly on the spot, taking in every god in the room as though sizing them up before facing the Winchesters. It inclined its head in a nod, then disappeared.

There was a beat of silence, then the gods began whispering to each other.

"Gods, please," Baldur said, calming the room and exchanging a look with the Hindu goddess Kali who sat by his side. As he returned to speak to the gods, Kali stood and walked over to the warrior gods Apedemak and Kokou who were acting as security for the room.

"Find out what that was, where that came from, and squash it."

Apedemak and Kokou both gave small bows at the order and marched out.

Dean and Sam watched them go then looked at each other again, both obviously worried.
Harry's heart picked up in his chest, mind racing. There was no good answer he could give the bloke.

Members Only let out a low whistle. "Aren't you a wild card," he said gleefully and clapped his hands. "Excellent! This will be so much less work for me then."

Harry clenched his jaw. He wasn't too worried about Members Only stealing his wand with his tattoo now, but it was so not a good thing if he knew what Harry was holding. He didn't want to say anything outright, but he had to find out what he knew somehow.

Members Only opened his mouth to say something else, but Harry jabbed the wand closer to his face. The man immediately snapped his jaw shut, narrowing his eyes at Harry, careful.

There was absolutely no doubt this man was a lot more powerful than Harry and could annihilate Harry easily... so yeah, that meant he knew what Harry was pointing at him.

"You shouldn't have any idea what this is or what I am," Harry said bluntly.

Members Only snorted. "Oh please, I've met your kind before. I believe the name Merlin might ring a bell for you," he waggled his eyebrows.

Harry sputtered. "Merlin? You knew Merlin?"

"Knew him?" Members Only huffed. "Dude could strip dance, let me tell ya. But that's a story for another day, kiddo. Now, here's the plan -"

"What are you?" Harry snapped. "Who are you? What do you know about my wand?"

"Ooh, you wizards are so feisty," Members Only smirked.

Harry jutted the wand toward the man's face again.

"Alright, alright," he raised his hands. "Calm down, twisty. I've had a few run-ins with Death in my time. I know his work when I see it."

"... Death," Harry said slowly. "Death Death - like... Death?"

The man rolled his eyes. "Wow, he sure has a bright one this round," he said sarcastically. "Look, we don't have time for this. Do you want to save the Winchesters or not? Because as it stands, they're about as dead as doorknobs."

Panic spiked through Harry, but he didn't move.

Members Only sighed as though becoming annoyed and said seriously, "You can trust me."

It was Harry's turn to snort. "Says the scorpion to the frog."

Members Only narrowed his eyes again and studied Harry. Harry didn't much care who this guy was. Dean and Sam were obviously in danger, but Harry didn't need Members Only's help to save them. All Harry needed to do was find the brothers then Apparate them out. The Elder Wand made Harry their best shot. He just needed to get Members Only out of the way.

As though reading Harry's mind, Members Only laughed. "If you want to do it your way, go ahead and try. But you won't get the bros far. Plus, you just announced your presence to every god in the..."
joint, and you got two goons out lookin' for you right now."

Harry felt his jaw drop. Gods? The staff weren't monsters - they were gods? Harry had been reading up on them even though so far, he had only faced their following instead of one of them themselves, and though he felt competent enough to stand his own against one, maybe two, he didn't quite want to test that if he could help it. He definitely didn't want to see how he would fend against an entire hotel of gods. He wasn't worried about any monster seeing his Patronus, but if the gods did, they were in deep trouble. If two really were searching the hotel for him, he could pick those off, maybe, but after that?

"What do you mean I wouldn't be able to get them far?"

Members Only smiled - almost proudly, which made Harry frown. "The goddess Kali. Mm, dat ass." He shook his head, then looked back at Harry a little more seriously. "Blood spell."

"Fuck," Harry hissed, finally dropping his arm and shoving a hand through his hair. "Bloody fuck. What kind?"

"The kind - they're hers unless you can get their blood back."

Harry had no way of telling if Members Only was telling the truth or not, but with any chance of a goddess having used a blood spell on the brothers, he couldn't risk making any assumptions one way or another.

He ground his teeth a little, thinking hard, then pointed his wand at Members Only again, wagging it a little. "If you know what this is, then you know what I can do. Tell me who you are - right now."

Members Only seemed amused, but he nodded toward the wand with no small degree of respect. "The gang in there know me as Loki."

"I don't care who they think you are. I want to know who you really are."

Members Only considered Harry a moment, then took a dramatic bow. "Gabriel, at your service. Well," he straightened and cocked his head, "not really at your service. You're at my service, but I guess that's close enough."

Harry almost growled in frustration and gestured with his wand again. "Okay, fine," the man sighed loudly. "We can be a team, how 'bout that?"

"Gabriel? Gabriel who? What are you?"

Gabriel smirked, then a loud bang of thunder and lightning sounded, light striking through the air, illuminating Gabriel's eyes. They and his skin took on the now familiar white bright light - only much whiter and brighter, and humongous white bright light that was somehow silky smooth and a little ruffled unfolded from his back in the shape of giant and truly spectacular wings.

They were gone in an instant, darkness completely filling his vision in the sudden absence. Harry had to blink several times as he stumbled back, barely containing a yelp, until his vision corrected itself, and everything looked back to normal.

Harry gasped. "You're an angel."

"Eeeehhh," Gabriel flattened his palm out and slowly lifted it upward to indicate a higher ranking. The amount of power from him instantly made sense.
"You're an archangel," Harry breathed.

"Bingo. Archangel Gabriel, cocooned in my own personal witness protection. So, I'll make you a deal. I won't tell anyone about your Death Stick if you don't tell anyone who I am."

Harry gulped but nodded. "You're… the Gabriel? Book of Daniel-Horn of Truth-Mary's with child-Gabriel?"

"Ah, the top hits. Good times. Now," he clapped again. "I just sent fake me in there to distract the gods and sent the kiddies to their room. I'mma go let them know what's going on. Take the side entrance here," he snapped his fingers, and a door appeared on the wall next to them, "tackle Apedemak and Kokou, then take the elevator to the fifth floor, room 54, and wait for my signal."

Harry blinked. "Fake you?"

"Archangel," Gabriel gestured to himself as if in answer, then disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

*snickers* Yeah, I know.

What I would love to know this time around is: is Gabe in character? How's Harry/Dean? Have I successfully pulled off Harry totally checking Dean out and not realizing it?? What do you think of his tat? And most importantly, how is Harry fitting in now that he's adjusted being there?? It's def made it more fun to write.

Also, please tell me it makes sense why Gabe calls Harry 'twisty'? Everyone catch Dean saying 'twirl us away', right?

Please please please comment and review. I absolutely love it, and it's also very helpful. I'm going to go back and reply to everyone from last chap after I post this, don't worry.

And also please please please let me know if I made you laugh!!

To answer everyone's question: Harry will meet Death when Dean meets Death in canon. We have this and Crowley to get through first. That doesn't mean Harry won't be preparing for him XP
Chapter Summary

Harry sets out to prove himself, learns about all the variations of power, and calls Lucifer a right ugly twat... to his face.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I know, it's been a while. I had some major life things happen, then I had to run around for a while gathering back up my hippos, as it were. At any rate, I really hope you enjoy this. And I want to give an extra LOUD AND GRATEFUL shout out to all those people who have reached out to me about my concern straying too far from the show. I think I actually found a happy medium, maybe, and I want you to know that your support means EVERYTHING to me. Thank you so so much.

NOTE: THIS IS A DOUBLE CHAPTER UPDATE. POSTING CHAP 6 AND 7!!

woot

Some more art has been posted on chap 1 by the lovely myrkky! Go check it out if you want! (It's really amazing! You gotta look at the detail of the background)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Harry blinked again at the spot where Gabriel just disappeared, lips pursed, and he nodded slightly to himself, willing his brain to catch up. He barely had time to register the entire situation at hand and work out the instructions Gabriel had given him - and how he felt about them - before his phone began ringing.

He jumped a little, not expecting it, before quickly pulling the thing out of his pocket and looking at the caller ID.

It was Dean.

"-kay, yeah, next time," Dean was snapping, obviously frustrated.

"Dean?" Harry frowned.
"Uh, alright, so, what's our next move?" he could hear Sam saying in the background, sounding a little winded - or possibly frightened. Harry tried to push the correct side-button on his phone to turn the volume up, but he quickly gave up and just waved his wand toward the thing instead, so he could hear everything. Nothing else in the background gave any clues as to where the brothers were.

"Dean?" Harry asked again.

"Harry," Dean barked, "where the hell are you?"

"I -"

"What about the people in the freezer, Dean?" Sam's voice asked.

"I don't know, Sammy," Dean said tightly.

"Oh, I already -" Harry tried.

"Dean, what are we going to do?" Sam pressed, sounding alarmed.

"I don't know," Dean repeated. "Bust them out? Gank a few freaks along the way if we're lucky?"

"Dean -" Harry tried again, but a third voice through the phone joined the brothers, and Harry waved his wand again, turning up the volume even more.

"- are you ever lucky?"

It sounded like Gabriel, if Harry had to guess.

"Dean, is that -" Harry attempted.

"Oh, you know what? Bite me, Gabriel," Dean spat, but Harry felt a wave of relief at having a confirmation of whom he just met.

"Maybe later, big boy," the voice of Gabriel replied cheekily, and Harry scowled.

"I should have known," Dean growled. "I mean, this had your stink all over it from the jump."

"Dean!" Harry yelled, trying to get his attention as Gabriel answered him, though Harry missed whatever he said. "Is that really Gabriel? The archangel Gabriel?"

There was a beat of silence, then Dean's voice was finally directed into the phone again, "How the hell do you know Gabriel?"

"Harry knows Gabriel?" Sam's voice asked.

"Yeah, just now -" Harry started.

"Oh, me and twisty had a great talk, didn't we, twisty? We came to a good understanding, me thinks," Gabriel's voice floated through the line, sounding as though he was getting closer to the brothers.

"What?!" both brothers exclaimed, and Harry could just picture their twin gawks.

"Don't you have a job to be doing?" Gabriel then added, obviously directing his voice at the phone and Harry.
"Dean -" Harry attempted.

"How do you know Harry?" Dean asked, and Harry's eyebrows rose at the supremely threatening tone. He knew that tone. It was Dean's give-the-right-answer-or-I'll-shoot tone.

"What, you jelly?" he could practically hear Gabriel's smirk.

"Does he know what you are?" Sam asked, sounding confused and bit more alarmed.

"Yeah, he does," Dean answered. "That's what Harry just asked, if this dipshit's really the archangel Gabriel."

"I introduced myself," Gabriel grumbled, sounding a little annoyed, to Harry's growing surprise of the interaction he was overhearing. "I knew he wouldn't do what I said otherwise. You know that saying 'stubborn as a mule'? It's wrong. It's actually 'stubborn as a wizard'. Impossible, all of them. We didn't have time for it. Besides…" There was a significant pause. "I'm guessing I got one or two things to hold over him."

Harry winced, audibly sucking in a breath only to try to stifle it so Dean wouldn't hear. He doubted he succeeded though.

Gabriel's voice at the end there had become both wicked and extremely threatening, enough to not just rival but completely beat Dean's, making his last words all too clear to Harry that Gabriel's easy deal to not tell each other's secrets was, in fact, deadly serious.

"Now, he has work to be doing," Gabriel then practically yelled into the phone.

"Back off," Dean snapped. Dean's tone was dangerous still. Deep and inflecting something Harry couldn't make out. "He ain't got nothing to be doing for you. Harry, go back to Bobby's," he then ordered over the line. "We'll take care of things here."

"What? No way -"

"Think again, dumbo. Twisty there and I are the Costner to your Houston."

"What?" Dean asked after a quick beat.

"I'm here to save your ass, and your little friend is my Robin."

"I am not," Harry protested, though he thought maybe he was pointless to the conversation at that point.

"You want to pull us out of the fire?" Dean asked incredulously.

"Bingo. Those gods are either gonna dust you or use you as bait. Either way, you're uber boned without us."

"Wow," Dean said, stretching out the word. "'Cause a couple of months ago, you were telling us that we need to play our roles. You were uber boning us."

Harry frowned. The brothers wouldn't accuse something like that lightly, which zapped whatever trust Harry wanted to give the archangel, much to his own disappointment.

"Oooohh, the end is still nigh," Gabriel said. "Michael and Lucifer are gonna dance the Lambada. But not tonight. Not here."
"And why do you care?" Dean asked, and Harry recognised the careful tone, considering. He knew Dean's brain was working quickly.

And he briefly thought that if he could tell that over the phone, he was spending way too much time with the brothers.

Harry scrubbed a hand through his hair, nearing the end of his rope. "Dean."

"I… don't care," Gabriel said, sounding every bit like he did care. "But… me and Kali, we, uh… Had a thing. Chick was all hands."

"Dean," Harry tried once more to interrupt, filing that bit of information away. They really didn't have time for this.

"What can I say? I'm sentimental," Gabriel was saying defensively, probably to whatever looks the brothers were giving him. Harry could only imagine.

"Do they have a chance?" Sam suddenly asked. "Against Satan?"

"Really, Sam?" Dean barked, and Harry rolled his eyes and just hung up.

The brothers confirmed who Gabriel was, and Dean was making it crystal clear what he thought about him. That was really all Harry needed at the moment. Gabriel sounded sincere in wanting to help the brothers, but he certainly seemed to have every confidence the prophesied fight would happen. Perhaps even encouraging it, which would be on par with apparently every other angel in existence beside Castiel.

But, in this instance, that could be a good thing. That would be his motive, Harry calculated. Gabriel needed to save the brothers, so the apocalyptic fight could happen. That was enough for Harry to tentatively believe that Gabriel was on their side - for now. He would help keep the brothers safe from the gods at least.

Harry took a deep breath, ripped off his glasses to dangle in his hand, and rubbed his face, taking a much-needed moment to think.

Dean was right, Harry didn't work for Gabriel, but Harry wasn't going back to Bobby's either. As far as he was concerned at that moment, Dean and Gabriel could both shove it.

He knew he was pushing back, being impatient and a little hypersensitive, but he had had absolutely no alone time lately; they haven't taken - or gotten - a break, it was on him to get the brothers sodding blood back to get them out of this if what Gabriel said was real and having someone else tell Harry what to do and control the situation this time was just one stress factor too many for Harry's hippos.

He began formulating his own plan. His objective was to get Dean and Sam to safety, that was it. He needed to confirm if this Kali really did have their blood and what kind of spell she used so he could break it. He didn't necessarily have to steal the blood back, just break the curse.

He did really tip his hand with that Patronus, but they didn't know who or what he was. Hopefully. He still had a bit of an element of surprise.

He nodded to himself again as he put his glasses back on. Right, then. First things first, Harry quickly Apparated around the hotel, casting protective charms to ensure no more muggles came near there. That also included any authorities in case one of the muggles from the freezer did run to them.

Next, Harry ignored the door Gabriel had created out of thin air for the moment and Apparated back
into the freezer. He didn't need to be tipping his hand any more than he already had.

Harry studied the door for a moment, cast a few charms on the window to make it so no one could see in, then spelled the door locked. He didn't know what gods were there or how powerful they were, but they were going to have a hell of a time getting that door opened any time soon, he was sure of that.

Before he left, he cast a Disillusionment and Silencing Charm over himself in case he ran into anyone, then he Apparated to his room, grabbed his stuff that was thankfully still there, and went back to the parking lot to chuck it in the backseat of Dean's car.

He huffed, frustrated with himself that he didn't even ask what room the brothers were going to stay in. Dean hated that no matter what kind of locking he tried, just one wave of Harry's wand opened any of his car's doors and trunk. Usually it was humorous; at that moment, Harry was grateful. Crossing figurative fingers, he waved his wand over the trunk, opening it, and let out a breath at seeing their bags there. They either didn't have time to go to their room before tonight's events began, or they had enough time to retrieve their bags before events picked up. Either way, at least Harry knew the important things were now locked safely in the car where they belonged. One less sodding thing to worry about.

Apparating back to Gabriel's door, Harry very carefully opened it. He figured it was the safest bet at entering if there really were two gods looking for him, and considering Gabriel's instructions, would also bring him closest to the gods. The door opened to a hallway. Deciding against casting *Specialis Revelio*, out of what he considered a very legitimate fear of catching sight of Gabriel and having his eyes burned out of his skull, he only cast a Supersensory Charm and hoped that wouldn't be too overwhelming for whatever laid ahead. He immediately could hear voices, ones he didn't recognise, not too far away. He crept down the hall and flattened himself against the wall when he came to the end of it to peek around the corner.

"I'm telling you, that hall wasn't there before," God One was saying.

Just then, Harry phone began to ring again.

He swore under his breath, mentally kicking himself for not expecting Dean being stubborn enough to call back - because of course it was Dean and that damn ringtone Dean insisted be his, a guitar riff blaring out as the singer asked loudly if they were ready for a good time and to get ready for the night line. He should have silenced it like he did his person. He still wasn't used to random objects in his pockets being able to just make noise whenever someone else wanted. He quickly waved his wand to do just that, but it was too late. There was no way they didn't hear.

As he had cast, he ran, intending to go back the way he came. As quick as he was, he wasn't fast enough.

"Hey, you!" one of the gods shouted.

God Two appeared at the end of the hall with a small *blonk* sound, blocking his exit and giving Gabriel's door there a quick, confused glance. God One had paused down at the other end of the hall, effectively locking Harry in.

"Brilliant," Harry sighed, spinning in his spot to find a good angle to see both of them.
"What do you think?" God One asked the other one.

"Kali said to squash him," God Two answered.

Harry bit his tongue and wondered if it was the same Kali Gabriel had referenced twice now, who officially sounded like the ringleader. It had to be, honestly. If she really was, the archangel clearly had bad tastes in goddesses.

"What's wrong with him?" God Two squinted.

God One shrugged and waved a hand to Harry. Immediately, his Disillusionment, Silencing and Supersensory Charms dissipated. "Huh," God One cocked his head.

Harry clenched his jaw. It wasn't a good sign if God One could do that, but it did at least give Harry somewhat of a gauge into the god's power.

"What are you?" God One asked.

"Tired," Harry answered. "Stressed, but that's a general state these days, really. I'm a bit annoyed as well, and also in a hurry. So, if you wouldn't mind." He gestured with his hand for the god to step aside.

God One smirked. "Look, Apedemak. Isn't he cute?"

Turned facing God One slightly more but keeping God Two, Apedemak, in his peripheral, Harry slowly began to back up, hoping to lead God One further down the hall so Harry could Apparate to his other side and get them both together. Unfortunately, it was Apedemak he could see slightly behind him moving closer as God One stayed where he was. Harry knew that must have been deliberate, a move in response to Harry turning to God One. Clearly, these two weren't the lay-on-clouds-and-eat-grapes kind of gods.

Back to the defensive then. "Fine," Harry said, shifting on his feet to cover his moving back to where he was. "If you insist. I'm tired, stressed, annoyed, in a hurry, and cute. Better?"

"I think he's flirting with you, Kokou," Apedemak chuckled humourlessly, pausing in his slow advance.

Bloody hell, so he noticed Harry's retreat. Why couldn't he had gotten the gods of jam and toast or something? Ones that didn't have strategy like these ones clearly did. He obviously wasn't going to get away with positioning himself for any kind of strategy of his own. Dean and Sam had been teaching him a lot, and though he looked forward to utilising his newly forming skills, Harry thought this particular circumstance needed his original action plan he had had, used, and perfected since he was eleven.

Make it up as he went and roll with the chaos.

"Sorry," Harry smirked at Kokou. "You're not my type."

With that, he Apparated to the perpendicular hallway, jumping to one wall to see Kokou over the corner, pointed his wand and yelled, "Stupefy!"

Kokou was stunned, and Harry jumped back away from the wall for a bit of cover. Apedemak was there immediately with another blonk, a hand on his companion's shoulder, eyebrows furrowed, before he looked at Harry and pushed out a hand.
Harry was knocked off his feet, flying several feet back, but before he could hit the ground, he twisted into an Apparation and landed unsettlingly on his feet in the other hallway down from them by Gabriel's door.

Only giving himself time to take in one recovering breath, Harry pointed his wand at the two gods at the other end and this time yelled, "Incarcerous!"

The ropes were halfway to the gods before both Apedemak and a stunned-recovered Kokou held up one hand each and their respective ropes burned to ash. Before the flames were even burnt out, Kokou flicked his hand, and Harry was pushed off his feet again, coming to slam against Gabriel's door, being pinned to it with his feet dangling.

The wood of the door creaked under the pressure, but Harry quickly thought to himself that it was a door Gabriel had made out of thin air, with his own type of magic. Harry wouldn't be trapped against it if it didn't exist.

Taking a sucking breath through the pressure holding him there, Harry cast, "Magicus Extremos! Finite Incantatem!"

Abruptly the pressure holding him there dissipated, replaced by an equal amount of pressure and force as the door vanished and the hallway, like a stretched rubberband, snapped forward and fused with its two perpendicular ones. Harry assumed the now one hallway was how the floorplan was originally, and the hallway with the door that just disappeared was all Gabriel. It would have been a little impressive if the vanishing of them didn't put Harry quite literally with his back against a wall barely two feet from the gods.

So, Harry always tried his best not to give them the chance.

The gods were momentarily stunned by what they just witnessed, allowing Harry with just enough time to Apparate several feet down the hallway from them. Not enough time for Kokou, however, who had reached out to grab Harry, able to wrap the fingers of one hand around Harry's sleeve - fingers that Apparated with Harry and without Kokou.

Kokou howled and clutched his bleeding hand, and Harry jumped back a few more paces to get severed fingers out from underneath his feet.

Apedemak didn't spare a moment for his comrade in pain. He charged at Harry, who lifted his wand and yelled, "Immobulus!"

The spell rippled through Apedemak and didn't slow him down, forcing Harry to Apparate again to the other side of the hallway.

"Get back here!" Apedemak shouted, turning and charging back to him. Kokou seemed to have pushed through his pain first, though, and he faced Harry, slicing down his now fingerless hand through the air and sending a hot wave of energy toward Harry.

"PROTEGO MAXIUM!" Harry shouted just in time. Whatever Kokou did destroyed his Protego
shield, but it at least protected him.

Meanwhile, energy was rising around Kokou as though he was going to take his true form, which was clearly going to be big, so Harry pointed his wand as soon as his shield was shattered and yelled, "Magicus Extremos! Diminuendo!" shrinking Kokou, energy and all, to roughly the size of a beetle - just in time for a charging Apedemak to step on him.

That wasn't Harry's plan, but as Apedemak froze and lifted up his shoe to reveal blood and squished flesh, Harry reacted on instinct and cast, "Colloshoo!" adhering Apedemak shoes back to the floor.

If getting stepped on by another god didn't kill Kokou, that sure did. Harry's stomach rolled, and he gulped.

Apedemak slowly raised his head to give Harry a deadly look. Harry told himself he needed to put up another Protego, but instead he found himself bracing for what always happened now when Harry was around death. That sound.

That hoot.

And sure enough, as Apedemak waved a hand to cancel Harry's Colloshoo and stepped back to wipe his shoe on the carpet, Harry heard it. The soft, gentle hoot of an owl and a sliver of white in the corner of his eye.

He told himself firmly to ignore it, focus on the fight. He would think about it later. Always - he would think about it later.

He didn't focus in time though. With a blonk that somehow sounded angry, the god was behind Harry and grabbing him.

"Fuck!" Harry breathed as impossibly strong arms circled around his chest, squeezing all air out of him, and a roar sounded in his ear. Apedemak was bald, Harry knew, but still something close to long fur fell over Harry. Just as something sharp penetrated his shoulder, the Elder Wand turned in Harry's hand to point directly at the god behind Harry in a truly awkward twist of his arm. There was a feline-like yelp, and suddenly Harry was free, falling to the ground and gasping.

The tattoo on his arm started to become warm.

Shaking his head to get a grasp on reality again, and quite possibly knocking over a few hippos in the process, Harry scrambled to his feet and turned.

Apedemak glowered at him. The previous bald god now had a dark, thick, and full mane around his head, fur dipping into a tight v in the front of Apedemak's throat to travel underneath his suit. Apedemak's eyes were yellow now as well, his pupils cat-like. His nose, mouth, and chin were elongated a little, and he was bearing long, sharp teeth, the top two longest dripping with blood. Harry's blood.

Apedemak was a lion-god.

Too stunned to even cuss, Harry stumbled back, glancing down at his shoulder. It was bleeding and stung, but Harry didn't think it was life-threatening.

"Apedemak," he said in a tight voice. "Lion-god?"

Apedemak growled and lunged.
“Protego Maxium!” Harry yelled, pointing the Elder Wand. Apedemak charged through the shield, but he had to give it an extra push allowing Harry time to Apparate again. At lightning speed, the lion-god with his sharp reflexes of a feline turned, dropped to all fours, and came at Harry.


Panting, Harry Apparated again and again, genuinely afraid he was going to splinch himself, and threw what he could at the god while attempting to both shield himself and stay out of range of the agile, skilled lion. This needed to end soon, and the lion-god wasn't giving Harry any choices.

Cracking into another spot, Harry cast the Knee-Reversal Hex, hitting the god's right leg and causing Apedemak to roar in pain. Harry stumbled back while Apedemak whimpered and stopped in another advance. Harry hoped that would be enough. Surely, that would be enough, like shooting someone in the kneecap or something. But the lion-god was nothing if not adaptable, though, and apparently, had bollocks of steel. Harry watched, wide eyed, as Apedemak crouched down, applied his entire body weight to his reverse knee, and with a sickening sound, broke it.

"Bloody hell!" Harry cried.

Apedemak smirked at him, balanced himself on his unbroken and unreversed leg, and pounced.

Harry swore loudly and Apparated out of reach again. "Incendio! Defodio! Diffindo! Expulso!"

After Harry's yet another attempt at restraining the lion-god, Apedemak paused, panting as well. He scowled at Harry, whose arm was out straight, pointing his wand and careful not to miss a movement.

With a low growl, Apedemak prowled with a large limp, obviously trying to decide what to try next.

Harry, on the other hand, knew what he needed to try next. The walls were scorched with Harry's several attempts to use fire to stop the god. The ceiling was cracked with the failed attempts to use pressure against him, and the carpet was torn from all the places Apedemak had dug his claws into it to successfully get purchase against Harry's spells.

The only spell that worked well was Diffindo, the Severing Charm, having gone through Apedemak's mane and cutting the fur there. Apedemak could bleed, his skin wasn't as strong as the rest of him, and there wasn't any severing or otherwise cutting spells that restrained.

"Don't do it," Harry tried. Another sliver of white fluttered in the corner of his eye, and a mournful hoot sounded. He ignored it. "Don't do it, Apedemak. You don't have to do this."

Apedemak growled.

"Really, mate, don't do this. Don't make me. I didn't mean for Kokou to… You don't have to follow Kali's orders. You can walk away from this."

Apedemak snarled, his elongated nose wrinkling with the sound.

"Don't," Harry whispered. "Please."

With a roar, Apedemak pounced right at Harry.

"SECTUMSEMPRA!"
Like the bursting open of seams, slashes lacerated deeply across Apedemak's face and chest. Harry still had to Apparate out of the way, but he only went a few feet. Apedemak landed hard on the ground, crumbling in a heap, and slowly rolled onto his back, breathing heavily.

His yellow eyes blinked in obvious surprise up to the ceiling before swinging to Harry. "I can heal these," he spoke softly. "But you have to walk away."

A low rumble sounded from the lion-god, his face scrunched in disgust. "Never."

"Please," Harry said, watching as the pool of blood surrounding the god continue to grow and Apedemak's dark face paling. The spell was working very quickly on him. "You don't need to die, Apedemak. Not because of me."

"I had my orders," Apedemak grunted. "I die with dignity."

Harry frowned, pressing his lips together and trying to think of another angle to use. Before one came to him, Apedemak took an unsteady breath, blinked, and stilled. Harry watched as the life drained from the lion-god's cat-eyes. He surveyed Apedemak's dark face and darker mane. He was beautiful, in a feline way.

"Dignity," Harry sighed. "As you wish."

Gently, Harry reached over and closed the lion-god's eyes.

"Jesus-what-the- …Harry, what the hell!?"

He looked over his bleeding shoulder to find Dean, Sam, and Gabriel standing at the end of the hall. Dean and Sam were staring at him with wide eyes, but Gabriel had his arms crossed, a hip cocked out, and looked very annoyed.

"Shit," Dean breathed, recovering first. His surprised expression turned hard, and he marched directly to Harry. Harry stood, wondering why Dean looked so angry.

Sam and Gabriel followed behind Dean, and Gabriel, catching Harry's eye, pointed at Dean and said, "Stubborn as a wizard."

"Fuck off," Dean snarled back. When he reached Harry, he didn't say a word or even look at him, just gripped Harry's bicep and, contradicting with Dean's expression, gently pulled the collar of Harry's shirt to reveal Harry's shoulder. There were two puncture marks there, about five inches apart, bleeding openly, but Harry could tell they were clotting already. Dean frowned down at the dead lion-god whose mouth was parted and showing off the large, spectacular teeth.

"Ouch," Gabriel smirked.

"What did I just say?" Dean barked at him.

"Dean," Harry said softly, reaching up to ease his collar out of Dean's hand, "I'm fine."

"You're bleeding."
"I'm fine," he said sternly, bucking his arm to both show Dean he could and to knock Dean's remaining hand off of him. "What are you two doing down here?" He then threw Gabriel a glare. "We need to be getting them out of here."

"They just had to see you, apparently," Gabriel grumbled.

"Where's your phone?" Dean asked, voice still tight.

"Pocket," Harry said, growing weary. "And thank you for being a helicopter mum, Dean. You calling me led Apedemak and Kokou right to me."

"Who?" Dean asked, glancing down at Apedemak.

"Speaking of," Gabriel said, looking around, "where's Kokou? Aren't those his fingers?"

"Er..." Harry began, suddenly feeling very awkward as the memory of Kokou's death flooded his mind.

"Harry," Dean growled, a warning.

There was a beat of silence as Harry tried to think of how to answer, but then Sam asked, pointing to Apedemak, "Did you kill him?"

Harry nodded. Dean moved as though to step closer to Harry but stopped. Harry cast him a quick look, then refocused on Gabriel who was asking, sounding confused, "But where is Kokou?"

"Er..." Harry said again, wincing.

Gabriel's eyes suddenly sparkled. "What did you do?"

"I, er... might have shrunk him."

Gabriel threw his head back and laughed.

"You shrunk him?" Sam asked.

Harry nodded as Gabriel did a bounce then started looking around at the ground. "Where is the little guy? Kokou, oh, Kokou, where are you?"

"Er..." Harry said once more.

Gabriel looked back at him, the humour seemingly frozen like he was waiting for the next bit of news before he decided if it was funny or not.

Harry cleared his throat, wincing a little again, and reported, "Apedemak may have... stepped on him."

Gabriel blinked. "And?"

"And I may have..."

"You Colloshoo'd him, didn't you?" Dean asked.

Harry bit his lip and nodded.
"Wait, I know that one," Gabriel said, snapping his fingers. "Is that the one with the speedo?"

Harry did a double take. "Wh-what? No."

"There's a speedo spell?" Dean asked.

"No," Harry said at the same time Gabriel said, "Yep."

"It's the lube one, isn't it?" Gabriel continued.

"No!" Harry squawked.

"There's a lube spell?" Dean asked.

Harry chose not to answer, but it didn't matter because Gabriel was still trying to guess. "It's the one with the nipples, right?"

"No!" Harry practically yelled.

"Nipples?" Dean asked at the same time Sam said, frowning at Gabriel, "It adheres shoes to the ground."

"That's right," Gabriel snapped his fingers again. "Colloshoo, shoes."

"Please don't tell me you know those from Merlin?" Harry exclaimed.

"Ah, he was great," Gabriel sighed, almost dreamily.

"You are ruining Merlin for me!"

"Merlin?" Sam asked. "The Merlin?"

"Okay, everyone stop," Dean barked, slicing his hand through the air. "Harry, you killed A… Apex-guy and Coco, right?"

"Yes."

"Okay, fine, good," Dean sighed, and he ran a hand through his short hair. "Good. Thanks, that's helpful. Now, I want you to twirl on out of here. Go to Bobby's, and we'll call -"

"No," Harry interrupted.

"No?" Dean parroted, raising an eyebrow. "Harry, we got enough on our hands with a hotel full of gods and a freezer full of people - we don't need to be babysitting you too."

"Tell us what you really think," Gabriel snorted.

"I told you to fuck off," Dean snapped at him.

"I'm not going anywhere, Dean," Harry reverted flatly. "If you want to waste time and energy acting as though I need your protection, be my guest. But in case no one's informed you, the goddess Kali has yours and Sam's blood. She's done a blood spell on you. And like it or not, you're just a sodding muggle. You need me, and I for one am not in the habit of abandoning my friends."

Dean's eyes quickly scanned the three of them, then before Harry could stop it, Dean was gripping his upper arm again and dragging him away from Sam and Gabriel. Harry slipped on some of the
potent blood pooling the floor by the action. It wasn't particularly graceful.

Once they were a good distance down the hall where they weren't likely to be overheard (though Harry was pretty sure Gabriel would be able to hear them no matter where Dean dragged him off to), Dean stopped them and fixed Harry with a fierce look.

He seemed to study Harry for a moment while somewhere in the back of Harry's mind, Harry was realising that Dean's eyes really were pure green - there weren't any specs of any other colour in them, just like his own. Their eyes favoured different shades of green, yes, but they both had nothing but green eyes. He also distantly noticed that the shades of greens in Dean's irises twisted and swirled in such a way, Harry could imagine it being the aerial view of a plush, thick forest.

But any and all thoughts about Dean's eyes ceased when Dean snapped, "Do you have any idea what you're doing?"

Harry frowned and crossed his arms. "Actually, yes. Do you have any idea what you're doing?"

Dean let out a sharp, frustrated breath. "You can't trust Gabe, Harry. Dude would flip on us in a second if it benefited him. Hell, he still wants the apocalypse to run its course! And you're going to work with him?"

He knew where Dean was coming from, and though Harry wanted to believe the sincerity of Gabriel, the simple matter was that he was a powerful archangel who apparently had spent at least thousands of years in hiding, only to what, easily reveal himself to Harry? Harry honestly didn't have to look further than Dean's forest green eyes to know he thought the same thing Harry did: Gabriel did it for a reason.

Harry also knew those were Dean's thoughts anyway. Harry also knew of an added element that dramatically tipped the scales.

The Elder Wand.

If there was one thing Harry didn't doubt in his interaction with Gabriel earlier, it was Gabriel's respect for the Elder Wand. It was obvious he knew exactly what it was - and he knew exactly who had made it. That little detail Harry could feel hiding behind a few stray hippos in his head that he might need to knock over to get to.

Now wasn't the time for that.

Harry could understand exactly where Dean was coming from, and he could respect it. He, however, disagreed with it.

Harry braced himself for yet another standoff with Dean bloody Winchester.

Uncrossing his arms, Harry began ticking off his points with his fingers, wand still held loosely in his hand. "We are trapped in a hotel full of gods. One of them has yours and Sam's blood, so neither of you can leave. None of the gods know who or what I am. I have the ability to get your blood back, thus freeing us all. And I've already packed our bags in the car."

Dean seemed fleetingly surprised at the last part, but just as Harry could feel the spark of challenge
go up his spin, he could see it in Dean's eyes too.

Dean mockingly began ticking off his own points with his fingers. "They don't know who or what you are, but you basically blew a blowhorn to come and find you with that deer of yours. There's still a freezer full of people waiting to be burgers. Fuckin' Gabriel only wants to protect his brothers' vessels, and you're playing right into his hand."

Harry only just stopped himself from rolling his eyes. No longer using his other hand to tick off points, he began simply holding fingers up. "You, me, and Sam are the only humans left in the area - I already freed the muggles and set up charms to make sure no more can come here. I've just proven I can hold my own against gods, and my stag is already providing a nice distraction and has divided their focus, which is only helpful in a time like this. Gabriel's preferred ending of the apocalypse, one way or another, isn't up to him, it's up to you. If right now his motive is to protect his brothers' vessels, then aren't you lucky, you can use this to get out of here, can't you? No matter how you look at it, the absolute most powerful being here wants to help you."

"Jesus fucking Christ. He's right, 'stubborn as a mule' ain't the real phrase. Do you -"

"Have any idea what I'm doing?" Harry interrupted, cocking a brow. "Seriously, Dean? You and I both know that you and Sam are the gods main focus right now. There isn't really anything you can do. The only bloody question you have to ask yourself is who you trust least - me and Gabriel?"

It wasn't until the words were out of his mouth that Harry realised how much… emotion was apparently attached to them. He felt a desperate need curl in his gut to hear Dean say the words 'I trust you'. He also had immediate regret asking Dean who he trusted least, because with the realisation of how badly Harry wanted Dean's trust came a truly haunting awareness that it would feel like being stabbed if Dean said he trusted Gabriel more.

Oblivious to Harry's sudden inner turmoil, Dean snorted derisively. "Really, Harry?"

Swallowing, Harry tried to shrug casually. "It's the truth, isn't it?"

"It's stupid, that's what it is," Dean replied, and Harry's stomach twisted waiting for his next words. "Like hell I trust Gabriel at all."

Harry forced his stomach to uncoil. Bloody hell. At least he wasn't saying he didn't trust Harry too. "Then you're going to go do a little recon on the gods that I know you'll do regardless and stay hidden. I'm going to go unleash you from Kali, then I'll come get you. Okay?"

Dean looked ready to punch something. He eyed Harry before eyeing the dead lion-god on the floor. Finally, he let out a harsh rush of air through his nose, almost like a bull getting ready to charge, and said tightly, "Fine. But the fucking second you hit trouble -"

"I'll handle it," Harry interrupted again. "And if I can't handle it, I'll come to you."

Dean frowned at him disbelievingly.

Harry stepped closer as his hand came up to… to do what, he didn't know, so he just let it fall back down to his side but didn't step back, keeping eye contact with Dean. He noticed Dean didn't step away from him either which gave him enough courage to say, "I'll come to you if I need help."

Watching Dean's jaw twitch, Harry could tell Dean was trying to force himself to accept the situation, believing Harry or not.

"I promise," Harry assured, hearing his own voice go soft, and he almost stepped even closer but
stopped himself.

He didn't think his voice had been that soft in a long time, and he knew it must have something to do with the strange feeling spreading in his chest, almost kneading at his heart with this chance. This chance to prove to Dean he could do this. He could take care of them, he could help, he could be counted on. He could be trusted - just as much as the others.

Dean's eyes darted back and forth between Harry's, and Harry held his breath. Eventually, Dean gave a curt nod and walked away.

Harry exhaled slowly, silently praying to no one in particular that he wouldn't mess this up.

"Aw, ain't that cute," came a voice beside him.

Harry jumped, spinning around to find a smirking Gabriel had swaggered up to him. Dean and Sam were on the other end of the hallway, and by the looks of it, Dean was now trying to convince Sam to go along with Harry's plan.

That feeling in his chest kneaded harder at his heart at the image, seeing Dean trying to stand firmly on Harry's side as they quietly argued, and he prayed extra hard he wouldn't mess this up.

"Gees, Louise, you got it bad," Gabriel said, leaning back and waving a hand in front of his face as though to combat a bad smell.

"What?" Harry frowned.

"With the praying and the pining and the 'oh please don't let me mess this up'," Gabriel steepled his hands in a prayer motion and his voice got higher in mockery.

"Excuse me?" Harry snarled. "What are you talking about?"

"You, praying out in the open universe not to disappoint your boy-crush. It's cute and all but knock it back. We're running out of time."

Harry had to take a moment to comprehend Gabriel's words. "Praying… I was, wasn't I? You heard me?"

"Here's a hint, George Bailey, unless you address your soul pinging, it's an open switch board." He rolled his eyes. "Freak out later, will ya, when you're drawing little hearts around his name. We gotta focus."

"Drawing little… what?"

Gabriel sighed, heavy and entirely put-upon, and the dramatics of his faux-patience waning got Harry's hackles up.

"Piss off," Harry hissed. "I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't care. I have better uses of my time."

"Yes, dear," Gabriel patronised, "that's what I've been saying." He clapped once and continued, "Alright, twisty, new plan. Instead of room 54, go to room 52 beside it and go inside to the right wall by the bed. Right now, the gods are divided looking for both you and the bros. Kali is in 54, waiting for news and to resume their meeting. I'm going to go in there and distract her. You do your little," he wagged his fingers toward Harry's wand, "wood thing from the next room and get the blood."
Harry raised an eyebrow. "From the next room?"

"What?" Gabriel met his challenge. "Too hard for you?"

Harry opened his mouth to retort, because no, it wasn't too hard, but then he remembered why he didn't cast Specialis Reveilo before. "That depends. Are you going to burn out my eyes if I cast to see magic?"

"As tempting as that is, four-eyes, I'll keep the low-lighting. More romantic for my goddess anyway," he added, waggling his eyebrows again. "Alright, come on."

With one swat to Harry's shoulder, Harry felt that stomach-dropping wooshing sensation, and suddenly he and Gabriel were in a hallway. Gabriel pushed Harry toward one of the doors, which opened automatically, and before Harry could begin to protest, Gabriel pushed him through and the door was slamming behind him silently.

"Bloody arrogant piece of…" Harry muttered, turning to take in his surroundings.

It was a regular sized hotel room, just like the one he had. He walked in a little further, having just enough time to wonder if he wanted to stay and go along with the plan or not, when he got an overwhelming feeling of dread and déjà vu. Grimacing, he turned around.

Check-In Counter Chad was there along with a man with dark skin, a well-trimmed and slightly greyed goatee, and in a pressed and tailored suit. Both men were wearing nametags, though not the same kind Check-In Counter Chad had been wearing before that declared him Chad to begin with. These name tags were the red and white sticker kind that had HELLO, MY NAME IS printed above a white box.

Within those white boxes, Chad was sporting the name Mercury, and his companion was calling himself Baron Samedi.

Harry grimaced harder as he took several steps back. Mercury he didn't know anything about except he was perhaps a Roman god, but Baron Samedi, Harry knew, was one of the Ioas of Haitian Vodou.

From what Harry could remember, Baron Samedi controlled the life and death of the members of his following. It was said not even a nasty voodoo hex could kill someone bounded to Baron Samedi if Baron Samedi refused to dig their grave.

Bloody fucking voodoo.

"I'm terribly sorry," Mercury said with a scowl, "but guests are not allowed up on this level."

"Is that so?" Harry said, readjusting his grip on his wand. "Worried they'd defrost?"

"Among other things," Mercury sneered.

"Where's your glowing stag?" Baron Samedi asked in a hollow, deep voice.

"Where's your top hat?" Harry countered, silently casting a Protego around himself.

"I don't much wear it these days," Baron Samedi said, slowly stepping forward.

"Shame, that," Harry said, desperately trying to think of a plan of action with these two.

He didn't have time. Mercury suddenly disappeared in a small blur and was then behind him,
gripping him tight. Harry noted that his strength _Protego_ was clearly not enough as he tried to twist out of the man's arms. Baron Samedi was laughing, stepping forward slowly in front of Harry. He could feel his tattoo on his arm get warm again, but as neither god was yet actively attacking, heating up was apparently all his wand was going to do.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" Baron Samedi asked snidely.

"We've heard rumours," Mercury said, more to Baron Samedi than Harry. "That something new was around."

"Oh, you don't believe that crap, do you?" Baron Samedi then sneered at Mercury. "This boy's obviously human."

"You're not wrong," Harry said. While they were talking, Harry tried to review everything Sam had been teaching him about fighting. With his arms trapped to his side, he didn't really have too many options except _get loose_ and put some distance between him and them.

"Nice try," Mercury said in Harry's ear. "But you're more than just human, aren't you?"

Baron Samedi snorted.

"No, pretty much all human," Harry answered, then before he could lose his opportunity of Mercury turning his head slightly to address Harry, Harry dipped his own head down then threw it back with all his might, hitting Mercury square in the face.

Mercury yelped but didn't loosen his grip. Which was okay, Harry was hoping he would but prepared for if he didn't. Just as Sam had taught him, Harry took advantage of the brief moment Mercury had to use to absorb the blow to allow his body to dip down again naturally in the momentum, pulling himself further down, then he got purchase on the carpet and threw his body weight back against the god.

The god was sturdy, as Harry had been expecting, and immediately strengthened his stance by Mercury's move, which was what Harry wanted.

Harry dipped down a third time, quickly, then threw himself back again, using Mercury's own sturdiness to lean fully against him so Harry could throw both his legs up and kick Baron Samedi hard in the chest with both his feet.

The kick pushed Baron Samedi back and also gave Harry more momentum to fall heavily in Mercury's arms, allowing him to push against Mercury and twist. He jammed an elbow into the god's gut, who was struggling to keep his arms around Harry, and as the god bent down to adjust for a better hold, Harry pushed against him again to level his weight, lifting his right knee to his chest, then kicked it back as hard as he could.

The kick landed right to the god's groin, effectively causing Mercury to release him. Harry scrambled back, watching as Mercury fell to his knees and his hands coming to hold his crotch.

Dean had taught him that move. He had said it was very unsportsmanlike, and that he would murder Harry if Harry ever did it to him, but in a fight for his life, he wasn't above going straight for the jewels. "Don't matter what creature it is," Dean had said, "that place hurts."

Clearly, Dean was very right.

Leaving Mercury to groan, Harry continued to scramble back away from an advancing Baron Samedi. Lifting his wand, he cast, "_Protego Maxium_!"
Baron Samedi was pushed back. He scowled at Harry, then at the air around Harry.

"You shouldn't be able to do that," Baron Samedi said. "Who here is feeding you power?"

The question confused Harry momentarily. "Feeding me power?"

"Someone here is your source. I want to know who. Who is double crossing us?" he practically seethed, bearing yellowing teeth.

"Er…" was Harry automatic response. Baron Samedi kept trying to advance, and he punched twice at the shielded air.

Gabriel, Harry supposed, was the one double crossing them if there was anyone. Harry recalled Gabriel said the gods knew him as Loki. He needed to remember that if Baron Samedi was set on interrogating him. Harry didn't know if Baron Samedi thinking Harry's power had to be coming from something else could work to his advantage or not. He supposed he should be grateful gods apparently couldn't automatically see or sense Harry's magical core.

With a loud cry and ferocious punch, Baron Samedi broke through Harry's Protego.

"Stupefy!" Harry cried, but the spell merely bounced off Baron Samedi who was bearing down on him. Harry stumbled backward, trying to stay out of his range. He rounded around a desk chair, changing direction, and pulling the chair down to block Baron Samedi's path.

Harry glanced over his shoulder to see if Mercury was still recovering and making sure he wasn't Sneaking up behind him. Mercury, however, was gone. The few precious moments Harry took to do a spin and double check Mercury wasn't anywhere else, unfortunately, was all the opening Baron Samedi needed.

Harry lifted his wand, crying out Protegos and sending restraining spells, but no matter what he tried as he desperately kept backing away, Baron Samedi was staying close. The one time Harry tried to Apparate, Baron Samedi shot a hand out so quickly, it was just a blur, and hopped along for the ride.

All too quickly, Baron Samedi was able to win the upper hand, grabbing Harry around the throat and lifting him up off the ground in a motion so quick, the god was somehow able to catch Harry off guard, causing Harry to drop his wand. As soon as the wand was out of his grasp, his tattoo became hot. One glance down, and Harry could see the wand vibrating on the floor.

Harry pawed and scraped at the god's hand, trying and failing to take a breath.

"Who are you working for?" Baron Samedi asked.

Harry worked his jaw and was able to open his mouth enough to take in just a little bit of oxygen, but the god's hold was too tight for anything else. He knew he would get more air if he looked like he was going to talk.

He wasn't planning on it.

"Who's giving you power?"

The Elder Wand began rattling in earnest on the ground, and Harry's mind wildly tried to come up with a solution. He let go with his right hand, trying to aim his palm at the wand and maybe silently Accio it, but the moment he did, Baron Samedi was turning them around to slam Harry against a full-length mirror that hung on a wall, shattering the glass and blocking Harry from the wand.
"Answer me," Baron Samedi snarled.

Harry had to get back to his wand. His tattoo was heating up with every passing second, and the lack of oxygen wasn't giving Harry confidence in any silent spelling.

Sam had taught him something for situations like this, Harry knew he had. Harry was kicking his feet, breaking more of the glass behind him, but he couldn't get a foothold anywhere.

He closed his eyes when Baron Samedi began squeezing harder, snarling something in Harry's face, though Harry wasn't listening. It took him just a moment longer before he remembered what Sam taught him.

Harry curled the fingers of his right hand around the god's wrist, then he shot his left arm up in the air and yanked it back down, bent, slamming his elbow on the god's forearms, making his arms bend as well. The moment they did, Harry continued to push his elbow down, grabbing a hold of the god's wrist with his left hand to free his right and consequently, his throat. He sucked in a huge breath as he tried to swing a punch. He missed and got one in the gut himself for his trouble.

The god punched him twice more, but Harry still had a hand on his wrist. He pressed his fingers hard into the skin there. A punch to Harry's jaw was hard enough to turn Harry some - most likely would have had him on the floor if he wasn't holding onto the god as tightly as he was - but before Baron Samedi could get in another punch, Harry pushed his right forearm against the god's chest, using it and the god's wrist to get enough leverage to pull his lower body back and jerk his knee up, aiming for the groin again.

Something that Harry could only describe as precise, charged up wind circled around the thigh striking upward, wrenching Harry up in the air, and flinging him across the room where he slammed into the hotel room's coffee table, the thing breaking underneath him to dump him unceremoniously on the floor.

Harry groaned in pain and coughed once before forcing his eyes open.

Baron Samedi was standing over him, a foot on either side of Harry's hips and an evil, wicked smile across his face.

"I hate voodoo," Harry breathed, and if those were his last words, he would be okay with that.

He leaned even closer to Harry until his nose was pressed against Harry's cheek, and he took a slow, reverent sniff. Harry's arm where his tattoo was felt like it was on fire, and a small, muted siren-like sound started coming from across the room.

The siren sound shrieked, and before Harry could even blink, Baron Samedi's head exploded in a warm and wet blast of red, emitting out even as Harry slammed his eyes shut and a small, soft thump hit his forehead.

Harry pressed his lips together to keep from anything getting in his mouth, but he still took a breath through his nose… which brought with it stuff he never wanted to think about. It sucked down his throat causing Harry to cough violently. A heavy weight had fallen on him as well, and through his coughing, Harry had to try a few times to get it off.
He turned to his other side to spit as much as he could before he even dared opening his eyes. When he did, he couldn't see anything but liquid red. Harry took a couple of steadying breaths before pushing past his sore body to get on his knees, pull off his glasses, and use his shirt to try to clean them.

As he did so, he took stock of himself. He… was in pain, but it wasn't anything he couldn't push through. Baron Samedi could pack a punch, he could freely admit. As he cleaned his glasses the best he could, he noticed several glass pieces from the mirror slipping from his collar and down his back. He carefully removed his shirt, noting he had a few cuts and scrapes, leaving him in only his white undershirt that was mostly soaked in red now.

He shook the long-sleeve shirt out to try to dislodge anymore glass then scrubbed his face as clean as he could with it.

Once finished, he tossed the shirt, sighed, then secured his glasses in place before looking at the evidence of what he knew must had happened.

Sure enough, his arm felt fine, Baron Samedi's body laid there headless and bleeding, and the Elder Wand was not far from it, completely clean, and somehow seemed pleased.

A cold shiver completely shook Harry. At that moment, that wand terrified him.

A loud, low whistle sounded, and Harry spun around, still crouched, ready to fight whatever made the noise.

Gabriel stood there, looking just as he did before, and staring at Baron Samedi, shaking his head.

"Wild card," Gabriel said slowly as Harry stood. "At least I called it."

"Well?" Harry asked, voice sounding rough even to his own ears as he quickly snatched up the Elder Wand and shoved it in his pocket.

"You missed your cue," Gabriel said, and almost all of his playfulness and humour was gone. "So, new plan, twisty. You, uh," he gestured to the door that was adjoining the two rooms, 52 and 54, "go get our blood back, yeah?"

"Our?"

"The bros and, well… mine."

"You let Kali get your blood," he said flatly.

Gabriel shrugged as though it wasn't a big deal. "She was ready for me, what can I say?"

"Ready for you?" Harry asked, rotating the shoulder the lion-god had bitten earlier, making sure it was still okay enough to continue.

"She's figured out who I am. Wish I knew when. Damn apocalypse's really letting the skeletons out of the closet," Gabriel frowned to himself, sighed, then shrugged again. "Right now, she's dragging fake me and the Winchesters back down to the conference room, so now's your window."

"She got them? Dean and Sam?" Harry asked, mildly alarmed.

"They went to double check the freezers, and Bragi and Freyr were waiting for them."

"They went to…" He let out a frustrated groan, going to rub at his hair, only to stop and wipe Baron
Samedi's blood that transferred from his hair to his hand off on his trousers. "Why? I told them I got the muggles -"

He stopped himself, pushing down the sour emotions.

"Nevermind. Is your blood in there," he pointed toward the next room, "is the room empty?"

"Yep and yep, and so chop-chop, I'm ready to blow this joint."

Harry gave him a glare and stomped toward an adjoining door.

The room was indeed empty, and dark with the lights turned off. He could sense power in there, though compared next to the power he could sense off of Gabriel, it was nothing. Harry couldn't help but wonder how in the world Kali got Gabriel's real blood, which she seemed to have if Gabriel's face was anything to go by. He spared just a moment to muse how much of a soft spot the archangel had for something that ate people and told himself to keep that in mind.

A simple *Specialis Revelio* showed Harry where the blood would be most likely be. It was locked away in a large case on the floor next to an ancient looking vanity mirror that was obviously Kali's and not the hotel's. There were tons of enchantments around the case. Harry came closer and squatted to get a better look.

Parsing through the enchantments was easy, but it was difficult to get close enough to what they protected and confirm it was blood. By the time he weaved his magic through enough to see inside the case, he was unprepared.

He shouted and jumped back, shielding his eyes. He had to firmly tell himself he was okay, even if he tenderly touched his eyelids, making sure his eyes were still there. If he did have any doubts Kali got Gabriel's real blood, they were gone then. Though, it didn't look like regular blood.

Annoyed he had to start over, Harry squatted again and more carefully weaved his magic through the enchantments. He was ready that time but still had to squint to see better. There it was, a pure, pure white in a vial, bright and swirly. It looked incredibly similar to how memories looked in his world, like light made liquid, or wind made solid, only a several times whiter and brighter and thicker. There was some red swirling with it, that would be the blood, and he wondered if he could see the light without *Specialis Revelio*. There was only a small amount of it, but the pure power Harry could see made him have to remind himself to breathe.

He thought for a moment that maybe he should at least count his blessings that Voldemort had never known anything like this could exist.

The power was peaceful though. Calming. Pure. Unblended, unadulterated, uncontaminated, and undiluted. It was flawless, Harry thought, and beautiful. Something in him unclenched a little, and he took a moment to wish - not pray - that angels were real in his world too. To have something this Light watching over his loved one. His experience would suggest otherwise, but he still wished it so. Here, people were lucky, despite the conditions of the world. If there's something like this - such a bright, healthy Light, watching out for them, humans stood a chance.

Forcing himself to stop being distracted, Harry squinted around that vial to see others with dark, red crimson liquid in them. Next to Gabriel's, they looked dull and boring. Funny, really, he thought, since he never expected to live long enough for blood to become something boring.

Biting his lip, he sat cross legged on the floor and studied the vials before casting several spells to confirm that two of the vials held blood from muggles.
Gabriel was telling the truth, then. It was oddly reassuring.

He didn't know what the other creatures were that also had vials of their blood there, but they weren't human, that was for sure. He ran a test on Gabriel's blood, and though he had nothing to compare it to, to confirm it be an archangel's, he felt pretty confident in recognising Gabriel's magic there.

Problem was, he knew there was no way he could actually get to the blood, not physically. A lot of Kali's enchantments he couldn't even begin to name, and though they allowed his magic through for him to see, Harry was hesitant to even try to touch the case.

Which left breaking the spell. Wonderful, he thought, as he tried several different spells and failed.

Alright, so, blood spell. A spell for blood. A spell that needed blood. A spell that was performed on blood. A spell... that would be useless if it wasn't on blood. He smirked, turning the muggle blood in one vial into water and the other into coffee. He could sense and see the spell dissipating, no longer having anything to be attached to. He tried a few times transfiguring Gabriel's bright blood, but ultimately, he ended up freezing it before trying to turn it into a different substance. It hissed, changed, and began to bubble over like baking soda added to a wrong testing tube. Harry made a face. He cast a quick charm to confirm it, at least, wasn't anything like it was before, and the blood spell dissipated from that too. Whatever it had changed into was still bubbling over, though, spilling from its vial and began pooling at the bottom of the case.

Harry bit his lip again and carefully dislodged his magic from the enchantments and cancelled his *Specialis Revelio*. Something hissed inside the case. He stared at it a moment, wondering if there was something he could do to fix it, but then ultimately decided he didn't care and quickly left the room.

Not quite sure where a conference room would be in a hotel, Harry took the stairs two at a time to head to the ground floor. The stairway opened to a corner with vending machines and a water fountain. Harry barely made it a few feet out before Harry heard:

"Alright, twisty, new plan."

"Yeah. Run. Far and fast and don't look back." He held out his hand. "Give me my blood, kid."

"Run?" Harry asked, confused. "Why? What - no, we can't run."

"I don't care what you do," Gabriel said simply. "But I'm outta here. Give me my blood."

"I don't have it. What do you mean you're running?" Harry asked.

"Really?" Gabriel said flatly. "You don't have it? And you were just coming down here, for what? A soda?"

"Piss off," Harry griped, not liking the archangel's tone. "I don't have your blood, but I -"

"Isn't this just great," Gabriel threw up his hands. "If you want something done right…"

"Hey," Harry snapped, "I'm doing my part. What exactly are you doing? You're the one who said you wanted to help the Winchesters, but I don't see you doing anything except getting trapped yourself."

"Just… leave?" Harry asked incredulously. "Leave Dean and Sam, in a room full of gods who want to eat them?"

Gabriel rolled his eyes. "They aren't going to eat them, you idiot. They're going to trade them. Did you find where she put the blood at least? She's hid it from me."

"Trade them?" Harry ignored Gabriel's question. This was the same Gabriel he had been dealing with all night, yes, but after witnessing the purity of his blood, he was somehow flabbergasted that anyone who had that running in their veins could be someone who would just… leave. Then he remembered Dean's warning. "Was this your plan the whole time?"

"Of course not," Gabriel frowned, actually seeming a little offended. "I came here to keep the gods from being squashed like little flies by Lucifer and Michael. If they don't want to listen, fine. I'm done."

"Just like that," Harry raised a brow, tone turning cold.

"Yeah, just like that," Gabriel spat. "They just fuckin' killed me!"

"Fake you, you mean."

"They didn't know that," Gabriel reasoned. "They one-hundred percent think they just stabbed me, so screw them. Tell me where the blood is."

"No."

He stared the archangel down, who was becoming visibly angry. But Harry was becoming angry, too, and he couldn't help but feel a little betrayed. Harry saw what was surrounding the angel's blood. This was Gabriel. One of the four archangels who were supposed to watch over humanity. *Gabriel*, the one over 'Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim', he remembered reading. *Gabriel*, one of the trumpeters. Current predicament aside, Gabriel had been outed as the archangel, and he was still running?

"Just leave, huh? Just like that? You went through all this trouble for creatures who *eat people*, who just turned on you, and you're just going to, what, fuck all with *humanity*? What about *people*? *People* pray to you! *People believe* in you! People have festivals in your name, depend on just the *idea* and *hope* of you to help them get through the day, see them through grief, and pain, and all the worst things in life that happen naturally, let alone what your brothers are doing. How could you just *leave? How can you not help? How can you just not care?"

Everything around Gabriel, energy and all, softened, and Gabriel stepped up and put a hand on Harry's uninjured shoulder. "Of course, I love you."

"Then how can you support the apocalypse? How can you just stand by and watch us burn?"

Gabriel looked pained, and he opened his mouth to speak, but before he could say anything, he straightened. Harry did, too, them both having felt the addition of a tremendous power arrive in the
area - for Harry, specifically, feeling that power completely destroy his protective charms around the hotel.

"What is that?" Harry asked.

Gabriel swallowed. "Lucifer."

They gave each other a long look, then together they crept down the hallway that led to reception. When they peeked around the corner, Harry had to clench his jaw to keep from making a sound.

Mercury was there, behind the counter, addressing a man who frankly, looked like something from a bad horror film. He was in regular, plain clothing with his sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and he was leaning casually against the counter, but his skin looked almost like it was decaying. There were raw, red sore spots Harry could see on the man's face where the skin was peeling off.

"Oh, you did right calling me," the man was telling Mercury, and he sounded agreeable and almost kind.

"It's just…" Mercury began, sounding a little hesitant. "The way the talk is heading in there, it's… It's insane."

The man smiled softly at Mercury, considering him. "You know, I never understood you pagans." His tone remained agreeable and kind, and it took his next words for Harry to hear it was completely mocking. The slight difference caused a chill to run up his spine. "You're such… petty little things. Always fighting… Always happy to sell out your own kind."

Gabriel's hand came to rest on Harry's shoulder again, and Harry could feel the energy around them tighten, almost like a shield. Harry was pretty sure the man could sense Gabriel like Gabriel sensed him, but he had no idea about himself.

Finger still pointed at a now worriedly shifty Mercury, the man tilted his head as though studying something and his hand relaxed. He was obviously doing something with the energy-

Harry jumped when Mercury's neck twisted violently, breaking with a sickening snap before his body fell heavily on the floor, dead.

Lucifer snorted down at it then said sarcastically, "And they call me prideful." He shook his head down at Mercury as though disappointed, then pushed away from the counter and casually strode to a hallway on the other side of the room from where Harry and Gabriel were secreted.

The silence he left was heavy. Harry turned wide eyes to Gabriel, genuinely startled, but Gabriel was staring off after Lucifer, biting his lip. When he caught Harry staring, he squeezed Harry's shoulder, almost comfortably, then he considered him for a long moment before he smirked and said, "Alright, twisty, new plan."
Harry tried to ignore the sounds of the absolute brutal slaughter being conducted by the hands of the Devil against the gods, but it was hard. Gabriel had them literally inside the walls somehow, so they could sneak around to the conference room where Gabriel said Kali and the Winchesters were preparing to make a stand, though it was doubtful they knew Lucifer was there yet. Gabriel and Harry were easily going to beat Lucifer there what with Lucifer being slowed down by killing every god in the place who was out looking for Harry. Gabriel had physically winced when the god Odin died, grumbling under his breath about his family just giving him more messes to clean up and about dealing with something later.

"The biggest problem," Gabriel was telling him, "is that they think they have the right sword, so we need to get to them before they try to use it."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, trying to keep up with Gabriel as Gabriel led the way. The walls stretched to accommodate them, but Gabriel's magic wasn't doing anything about the cobwebs.

"They are very, very few things that can kill an archangel, twisty, and an archangel sword is one of them."

"That's what Kali thought she used to kill you?"

"Yep."

"But it was a fake?"

"Bingo."

"Do you have your real one on you?"

Gabriel threw a look over his shoulder at Harry as though Harry was insane. "Are you kidding? Hell no. That thing can kill me."

"Then what d'we do?"

"Death Stick," Gabriel declared.

Harry took a moment to realise he was talking about his wand and swallowed. "How d'you know that would work?"

"Please stop trying to be sly. It isn't working, and it's getting old. I know that wand can't lose."

"One, it doesn't have to win," Gabriel said. He snapped his finger, and a small alcove appeared in the wall, opening up on its other side to a bright room that, for some reason, was not illuminating it, keeping it being dark. From where they stood, Harry could only make out a corner of the room and some chairs pushed up against a clothed table. "And two, no, he's been in a cage for millennia, and he doesn't respect Death enough to recognise his work anyway. Okay, this is the conference room. Wait here for your cue."

"Okay. What's the cue?"

"Just…" Gabriel frowned then shrugged, "y'know. When it's time."
Harry said, "I'm not good at that. Why can't I have a verbal or body cue if I'm to wait?"

"Fine, I'll announce you," Gabriel rolled his eyes.

"Just announce me?" Harry asked. "Like, 'Hey, Lucifer, meet Harry Potter. He's going to distract you until I get the brothers to safety'?"

"Why not?" Gabriel shrugged again.

Just then, an explosion sound came from the other side of the hotel.

Gabriel squinted toward the ceiling, "That was Kali's room."

"Oh," Harry bit his lip a moment, remembering how he left Kali's case. Gabriel gave him a questioning look, and Harry knew he looked guilty when he said, "Don't worry about that."

"Uh-huh," Gabriel replied flatly. "You're sure the blood spells are gone?"

"Positive, especially after that. Are you sure the brothers are in there?" he pointed to the conference room.

"Positive," Gabriel parroted. "Just them, Kali, and Baldur. If you wait in this spot," he pointed to the new alcove, "no one will see you until you step out on the other side. If your wand works the way I think it does, this area's going to go up in smokes." He fixed Harry with the most serious expression Harry had seen yet from him. "It's going to take all of me to protect them. Kali will take off, I know her, and I don't give a shit about Baldur, but I won't be able to fly the bros anywhere until we get far enough away. Lucifer knows I'm here somewhere and is putting a block out. I won't be able to get through it with the brothers."

Harry nodded. "Okay. Once the three of you are gone, I can Apparate to safety."

Gabriel nodded slowly.

Harry swallowed thickly, understanding what Gabriel was not saying. He may not be able to match and draw with Lucifer and live. There may not be any safety for him to get to.

He smiled a little sadly at the archangel. "Just get them to safety. I'll take care of me."

Gabriel nodded once more, then said, "If you spell a tracking-spell-thingy, I'll fling it on their car. That way you'll know when it's time to run."

Harry did, picking a tracking spell Gabriel could use to inform him when they were safe, then he said, "We have to let them know Lucifer's here if they don't already, and that your sword isn't going to work. I can send another Patronus," he offered, not for the first time wondering how in the world the Winchesters always seemed to communicate in some way when they were separated.

"Just text them," Gabriel suggested.

And like a hex to the face, Harry got his answer. He blinked, then scoffed. "They text each other! That's how they do it!"

Gabriel frowned. "Do what?"

"All the time!" Harry complained. "I tell one brother one thing, the other one always knows! Just last week, Dean was out getting food, I told Sam about that time Ron and I got trapped on a set of stairs that stopped halfway in moving, and Dean comes back in, making fun of me for it! That's how. They
text each other."

Gabriel's expression was completely flat. "How cool for you to have solved a personal mystery for yourself at such a convenient time -"

"Yeah, yeah," Harry waved him off. "Go help the brothers. I'll wait here."

"Don't do anything rash," Gabriel told him sternly.

"Right back at you."

Gabriel smirked, winked, then jumped back into the wall. Harry hid himself in the alcove, pressed his back to it, and inched closer to the edge on the conference room's side to hear right as the lights started to flicker with the sere amount of energy engulfing the place. It made Harry's hair stand on end.

"What's happening?" an unfamiliar male voice from the room asked.

Pulling out his phone, Harry flipped it open and created a new message to Dean, ignoring the six he had from the man himself, the two he had from Sam, and the abundance of missed calls and voicemails. He tried to see where he could make the same message go to Sam, too, but quickly gave up.

He worried his lip, wondering how to phrase himself. It could very well be the last words he would ever say to Dean. And by extension, Sam, Bobby, and Castiel, if they ever found him.

Looking up to think, he jumped slightly at his reflection in a framed picture on the wall opposite, the light on his phone spotlighting him. He blinked at it, then took in the actual picture, huffing a little laugh at the 'Casa Erotica' poster which seemed to star a moustache Gabriel himself.

He shook his head, his reflection catching his eye again.

By this point, Harry was down to just his trousers and white undershirt. Well, used-to-be-white undershirt. Now, it was covered in blood, just like his arms and, bloody hell, face, having not been that successful at wiping it off earlier. His hair was coated with blood too. He pulled the hem of his shirt and wiped at his neck, but it only did some good.

Tilting his head, he considered himself. The short sleeves and thin material of the shirt showed the muscles he was gaining - nowhere close to the brothers, but there was still some gain, he thought. Though he was tired, sore, and had been through the mill that night, he looked sturdy and strong. He was a far cry from the fragile thing that came to this universe, sure, but what stood out the most to Harry in his reflection was that it was obvious to him where he was headed. He could see in his appearance the man he was becoming, who would undoubtedly still be on the shorter side and slender, but also strapping in his own way.

Right at that moment, moreover, with the blood and the scowl he had when he looked up, he might could even call himself a bit intimidating. Maybe.

He grinned at himself.

Looking back down at his phone, he thought for only a moment longer before typing out his message and sending it.

| Lucifer's here. Gabriel's alive. Sword's a fake. We have a plan. Go with G please. I got L. If I survive, I'll go to Bobby's |
Shoving his phone back in his pocket, Harry pushed down his annoyance at how long it took him to type out the text and decided, if he did survive, he was getting a phone with one of those little keyboards.

There was screaming as the slaughter was coming closer to the conference room, and a woman’s voice demanded to know what was going on as the lights flickered more. It took only a few moments before he heard Dean's voice.

"Goddamnit, Harry!"

"What?" Sam's voice asked.

"Show's over," Dean announced. "Sword's a fake, and Gabriel? He's still kicking. I hate to break it to you, sister, but you've been tricked. And we're screwed."

A loud, pained shout sounded from somewhere outside the room.

"That's Lucifer," Dean reported.

"Lucifer?" Sam sputtered.

"He's here."

"How?" the woman's voice asked. Kali's voice, Harry told himself.

"Does it matter?" Dean snapped. "Shazam us out of here, would you?"

"We can't," the first male voice, Baldur, answered.

There was an audible, tense pause, then an almost kind, sympathetic voice said, "Of course you can't… You didn't say, 'Mother, may I?'"

Lucifer. Harry pulled out his wand and held a tight grip.

"Sam, Dean, good to see you again," Lucifer addressed them over the sound of a door closing.

"Baldur," Kali said. "Don't."

"You think you own the planet?" Baldur sneered, sounding outraged. "What gives you the right -"

He was cut off as a pained sound in his voice filled the room, the wet sound of being killed by Lucifer's own hand drowning everything else out. It took Harry only hearing that sound once at the beginning of the slaughter to now recognise it anywhere, the sound of Lucifer punching his fist right through someone's chest.

"No one gives us the right," Lucifer's soft voice answered. "We take it."

Suddenly, there was a sound of flames, and Harry had to resist the urge to peek his head over to see what was going on. A blast sounded next, along with the shout from Dean to "get down!" When the blast-sounds quieted, there was the unmistakable sound of someone being hit and a feminine voice crying out in pain. There was some rustling, then it sounded like someone was thrown, something crashing in the process, and a pained sound came from, apparently, Lucifer.

"Lucy," Gabriel's light, not-quite-reaching-amused voice rang out loud and clear. "I'm home." There was a beat, another scuffle sound, then, "Not this time… Kali, nice flames, babe, but you need to get yourself far away from here and don't come back. Leave. Now. Guys! Get over here, behind me."
"Over a girl," Lucifer's now sharp voice said over the noise of movement. "Gabriel, really? I mean, I knew you were slumming, but… I hope you didn't catch anything."

"Lucifer," Gabriel practically sighed. "You're my brother, and I love you. But you are a great big bag of dicks."

"What did you just say to me?" Lucifer was quick to warn.

"Look at yourself. Boo-hoo," Gabriel mocked. "Daddy was mean to me, so I'm gonna smash up all his toys."

"Watch your tone," Lucifer warned again.

"Play the victim all you want," Gabriel went on heedlessly. "But you and me? We know the truth. Dad loved you best. More than Michael. More than me. Then he brought the new baby home, and you couldn't handle it."

Harry frowned, filing away what he was overhearing.

"So, all this is just a great big temper tantrum," Gabriel declared. "Time to grow up."

"Dean," he then heard Sam hiss, "where's Harry? We gotta go."

"Gabriel, if you're doing this for Michael -" Lucifer began, sounding reasonably placating.

Gabriel interrupted harshly, "Screw him. If he were here, I'd stand against him too."

Lucifer scoffed. "You disloyal -"

"Oh, I'm loyal," Gabriel interrupted him again, firm. "To them."

"Who? These… so-called gods," Lucifer asked.

Gabriel surprised Harry even more by answering, "To people, Lucifer." Lucifer made a noise like that answer amused him. "People," Gabriel pressed.

"So, you're willing to die for a pile of cockroaches?" Lucifer asked, as though trying to reason with an idiot, even if his tone was clearly becoming angry. "Why?"

"Because Dad was right," Gabriel said with conviction. "They are better than us."

"They are broken, flawed abortions!" Lucifer argued with feeling.

"Damn right they're flawed," he heard Gabriel take a deep breath, "but a lot of them try… to do better. To forgive." If Harry felt touched by the declaration, Gabriel ruined it by adding, "And you should see the spearmint rhino."

Harry shook his head and began tapping his feet. He was ready to go out there, and he was worried he really was missing his cue. Planning stuff like this was much easier with the Winchesters - easier still when he did so with Castiel.

"I've been riding the pine a long time," Gabriel said when Lucifer didn't respond, "but I'm in the game now. And I'm not on your side or Michael's. I'm on theirs."

There was a heavy silence, then Lucifer spoke softly, sounding genuinely regretful and pleading. "Brother, don't make me do this."
"Oh, don't worry, I'm not. I made a new friend, though, thought I'd introduce you." He whistled a sharp, universal 'come here' sound normally used for dogs.

Harry rolled his eyes, but finally stepped out into the conference room.

The official looking tables, chairs and dishware were all askew around the room from the fighting. The room's main double doors on the other side from his entrance were broken, he thought maybe that having been what Lucifer was thrown through. Gabriel was there, an angel sword in hand, looking smug with his back to the door. Dean and Sam were at its threshold, looking as tense as Harry had ever seen them and like they were torn between wanting to run and wanting to help. At Harry's appearance, they both stiffened more.

Lucifer had his back to him though, so Harry said, proud at just how casual he sounded, "Lucifer, right? I'd say it's nice to meet you, but I'm pretty sure this is going to suck."

Lucifer turned slowly to see him, and when he did, he frowned, cocked his head, and slowly looked him over. "You…" he said, pointing a finger, "shouldn't be here."

"Neither should you," Harry shrugged, walking just as slowly, sizing Lucifer up, and aiming to come stand across the room from him with the others out of the line of fire. Lucifer began walking, too, a counter move. It felt as though they both were prowling each other.

Though his defences were clearly up, Lucifer still scoffed to Gabriel, who was backing himself and Winchesters up carefully. "A kid? An alien, sure, but a human kid? You're putting a human kid in my way instead of dealing with me yourself? And here I thought you were saying you were on their side." He looked back at Harry, chuckling incredulously. "What world are you from, anyway? The lollipop guild?"

"I think a better question is, how do you even know what that is? You were caged for millennia, and one of the first things you do when you're out is watch *The Wizard of Oz*?" Harry questioned Lucifer's reference, raising an unimpressed eyebrow. "Got a thing for the wicked witch?"

Lucifer sneered, clearly deciding he disliked Harry, but eyeing him still, trying to figure out where the threat was. "Not really my type."

"Is it because of her complexion," Harry couldn't help but gibe, coming to a full stop on one side of the room, Lucifer on the other, the tables between them and the Winchesters and Gabriel to Harry's left. "Little hypocritical, don't you think?" he added, gesturing toward his own skin and making a face.

"Excuse me?" Lucifer asked coldly, a clear warning.

"Y'know, I've wondered, is it like an initiation thing for you doofers? To truly be considered evil, you have to become a right ugly twat?"

The energy around the room whipped out, making the lights flicker, and Lucifer's eyes turned red. Honestly, it was intimidating, but not willing to give Lucifer the satisfaction, Harry just shrugged.

"Sorry. My last one had red eyes too. I'll give you points for having a nose, though, if it makes you feel any better."

What happened next happened in a span of just a blink. Lucifer raised his hand and snapped his fingers. What it was supposed to do, Harry didn't know, probably disintegrate him, but what happened was the Elder Wand tightly grabbed the energy Lucifer just attempted to manipulate and flung it sharply right over Harry's shoulder. The energy slammed through the wall, disintegrating it
instead, and just kept going, leaving echoes of loud, giant booms like thunder as it pummelled a path of probably more than 100 yards, leaving absolute destruction in its wake.

Lucifer cocked a brow in the few seconds everyone just stood there, the others probably frozen in shock, the echoes of the destruction as it travelled further away being the only sound.

"Huh," Lucifer said and snapped his fingers again.

The exact same thing happened, only this time, the Elder Wand flung it to Harry's right.

"Cool," Lucifer snorted, snapping his fingers once more, the Elder Wand flinging it over Harry's other shoulder.

"Go-go-go-go-go-go-go," Gabriel urged, pushing the brothers out of the room.

Lucifer snapped his fingers again, only this time, the wand pushed it right back at Lucifer, hitting him square in the chest and sending him through the wall. There was a beat where Harry wondered seriously if he just killed the bloody Devil, but then the absolute chilling sound of Lucifer's soft voice came from behind him.

"My turn."

The Elder Wand twirled him around, Harry barely holding on, the wand grabbing the energy and flinging it away in the process, destroying half the building with thunderous booms. Harry's tattoo on his arm heated up painfully, as though actually burning him, and he could feel the Elder Wand using his magic and body almost like a conductor, gripping onto Lucifer's energy to channel it. And clearly, before, Lucifer was barely trying.

Lucifer lifted both his arms and pushed the seemingly thin air. The Elder Wand swiped upward, Harry holding on for dear life, sending the energy up and over Harry, through whatever ceiling was left, but Lucifer was ready, squeezing his hands into fist and ripping the energy back down in a tidal wave.

"PROTEGO MAXIMUM!" Harry screamed with all his might, his little bit of magic enough to power the Elder Wand more, creating the barrier around Harry, deflected the destructive energy to all around him. Lucifer though, was sending another wave, and Harry could feel the wand actually activate the runes tattooed on his skin. A battle of power crashed down around him, thunder booming and lightning quite literally striking the ground. An almost unbearable pain seared through Harry's right arm that was still straight up, wand pointed to the sky, and for a few moments, the only thing Harry could do was throw his head back and scream.

Then with a physical pulse, everything seemed to be pushed outward with the loudest boom yet.

Harry fell to all fours, wand still in hand, breathing hard.

He looked up as quickly as he could, and Lucifer was about a yard away, also on his knees. The only sound was a slight sizzle, their breathing, the settling of the area that used to be The Elysian Fields Hotel but was now nothing more but burnt earth, and the magnified echoes of Harry's screams. No doubt magnified by the sheer power that just exploded around them. Slowly, Harry realised his arm was on fire, a white, bright fire, in perfect traces of his tattoo. It looked like the white bright of angels, and it didn't hurt any longer.

As his ears allowed for more sound, he distantly heard the rumbling of an engine.

He pushed himself up, making himself stand, and only then noticed Dean's car, about fifteen yards
away to his right, its headlights the only light flooding the area now that everything else had been destroyed. Harry knew now what Gabriel meant. The only possible reason the car and those inside still existed was the archangel, and he didn't doubt Gabriel didn't have anything to spare for Harry. Harry was alone in this. The car was just sitting there, though, and Harry could practically feel Dean, Sam, and probably also Gabriel, gaping at them. He wished they would get out of there.

Harry was able to get to his feet before Lucifer, but the Devil wasn't far behind. Once they were faced off again, Lucifer's eyes still red, Lucifer quickly gained the upper hand as the sky above them began to rumble. A storm was forming as Lucifer held out his hands and began to build up energy.

The runes on Harry's wand started to glow like the white bright fire on his arm as it latched onto the power. Harry gulped, a little shaken, but his arms were still out, ready. He realised then that he didn't just give his allegiance to the Elder Wand. He made himself an extension of it. Made his magic and his body real conductors. The wand may be able to channel the kind of power Lucifer possessed, but Harry… Harry really was just human.

Not only was this going to hurt, this very well may kill him indeed, allowing the **wand** to become victorious.

Lucifer made a battle cry as he held out his arms wide, then pushed. Harry screamed the shield charm again as he and his wand worked together to lash it out and meet the destructive energy head on. Now with nothing around to destroy except for the car, which was protected, the energies crashed with a ground trembling boom and began to visibly send out pulses as it tangled together. Lightning shot down around them, and the collision of energy was so strong, both Harry and Lucifer were pushed backward (Harry much further), them needing to bear their weight and bend their knees. He cried out as the white, bright fire on his arm grew.

Harry wasn't going to be able to hold on.


Almost immediately, the car's tires began to squeal as whoever was driving, probably Dean, desperately tried to get the car's tires enough purchase on the ground through the pulse-waves of energy. Gabriel must have helped because quickly, the car was able to turn around and began speeding away.

Harry gritted his teeth, falling to his knees and holding onto the wand with both hands, and he prayed, prayed, prayed - to Cas, to Gabriel, to God, to Death - that he would be able to hold on just long enough.

It felt like forever, but it could have only been fifteen seconds, before Harry's wand sent out a signal. Dean, Sam, and Gabriel were free.

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath as Lucifer tried to send *more* power his way. He just needed to get Lucifer to pause long enough to Apparate.

With what little strength he had left, he cried, "**MAGICUS EXTREMOS! EVERTE STATUM!**"

It worked.

It was just enough to slice through to Lucifer's side and knock the energy back some, which would have caused Lucifer to need only a beat before sending it back. In that beat, Harry pictured Bobby's study and Apparated.

With a *crack*, he landed hard and fell forward.
"What the hell!" he heard Bobby cry.

He looked up from where he was on all fours again. Bobby was in the middle of the kitchen, having dropped a glass probably from Harry appearance, and was staring at him wide-eyed.

Harry pushed himself up a little, looked around and waited to make sure he wasn't followed somehow.

Nothing. Silence.

He looked back at Bobby, smiling a little.

"I did it," he wheezed. "It worked."

Then he promptly collapsed, unconscious.

When consciousness first beckoned Harry, he realised, with no small amount of effort, that he was being carried, possibly up some stairs. He also thought he could hear grumbling about someone not doing something before they put their weight on and thought he could smell a familiar scent that seemed to instantly comfort him - which instantly sharpened his consciousness a little more, wary of the thought.

His head didn't seem to be ready for that, though, because the next thing he knew, he was waking up once more, having apparently passed out again.

This time he woke up fully and could tell his surroundings. He was lying on a comfortable bed, and someone was sitting close beside him, gently holding his wrist, and was rubbing something cool and what felt so good onto his pained, achy hand. He just laid there a while, enjoying it as the person very carefully wrapped his hand and some fingers and began moving up with the cool cream to where the worst of his pain was.

After a while, he cracked open his eyes and looked to see Dean was the one doctoring his injuries. Harry was so tired and drowsy, finally noting the pain he was in and how weak he was, and when Dean's hands rubbed in whatever cool cream he was using onto a particularly painful spot, Harry had no power to stifle the relieved groan that escaped him.

"Feels good," Harry attempted to say, although his voice was so weak, he was surprised it worked at all.

"Good," Dean smiled. "Enjoy it while it lasts because I owe you an ass-kicking."

Harry frowned.

Dean gently lifted up Harry's forearm, so Harry could better see it where he lay. He winced. His tattoo was no longer ink - it was an impossibly black burn, and Harry knew by how it felt during the fight, it was probably burnt down into the bone. Magical burns usually did that, and this was clearly a bad one.

What really caught his attention, though, was there were also burns that followed his vein lines, looking like a lightning storm on his skin, stretching out from the tattoo on either side to travel up to
his elbow and down to his fingers.

Dean hummed as if agreeing with Harry's reaction and gently laid his arm on his lap again, putting on more of that cool cream over the burns. "I told you if this thing got us blown up, I was going to kick your ass."

Harry huffed this time. "That wasn't me."

Dean smiled cheekily, though his eyes were warm. "Sure, blame the Devil…"

Harry just made another huff sound, then another relieved groan, and let his eyes fall close. "Hurts."

"Yeah, well, you were a lot worse. Gabe did what he could."

Harry nodded, not opening his eyes. He reminded himself that he was safe, that he was alive, that his people were alive, and that he would heal. He could rest, and it would be okay.

After several long moments during which he noticed he was in Bobby's guest room and how quiet the house was, Harry eventually asked, "What happened?"

Dean paused. "You mean you don't remember?"

"No, I meant…" he tried clearing his throat and looking back at Dean. "The house is quiet."

"Bobby's gone to bed. Sam's driving my car back. As soon as Bobby called, which took a while because he had to put you out first, I had Gabe zap me here."

"Okay," Harry accepted, then asked again, "So, what happened?"

Dean looked up at him and raised an eyebrow.

"Bobby's gone to bed. There's no clinging of glasses or thumps of books, so he must have found something."

Dean smirked and moved to grab some gauze.

"More," Harry said quickly to stop him. That cold cream felt really good.

Dean snorted but obeyed. His hand moved up from just holding his wrist to holding his palm, resting their joined hands to his own chest as he began rubbing the burns again, careful to reach all of them. "Gabe told us something that should work against his brothers," he then finally answered Harry.

Harry waited, but when Dean didn't continue, he made an annoyed sound. "And you're going to wait to thoroughly discuss it with Sam first before thoroughly discussing it with Bobby before just telling me what the plan is. Wonderful. Good to have a routine, I guess," he mumbled, knowing he was sounding bitter but not caring. He was weak and tired and in pain, so he just closed his eyes again.

Dean had frozen though, and Harry could feel his eyes on him. Eventually, Harry peeked one eye open and raised an eyebrow. Dean's expression was unreadable. Slowly, Dean's eyes travelled back down to his work.

"You remember the horsemen we told you about?"

Harry went to sit up, surprised, but found he was too weak for even that. He wiggled some and said, "Yeah."
"Well, there's four of them, right? And we told you that we were able to stop two by getting their rings?"

Harry hummed an affirmative.

"Well, Gabriel says that the four rings together are the key to Lucifer's cage. You were right, there is something powerful enough out there to do it without breaking more seals. How we're going to get Michael and Lucifer in, now that I have no idea."

"We would need to focus on the rings first," Harry suggested, unable to stop a twitch of his lips, the best he could managed at the moment. Dean's eyes flicked up to his and gave a returned smile for a moment. "We already have two, so we're halfway there. We get the rings, figure out how they work, then go from there."

Dean nodded, agreeing, then lifted Harry's arm slightly again in silent question if he wanted more of that cream. Harry did. Whatever balm it was, it was quickly becoming Harry's new favourite thing.

"So, we've ganked War and Famine so far," Dean opened.

"Who does that leave?" Harry asked, glad to hear his voice getting stronger now.

"Uh, let's see, that just leaves… Pestilence and Death."

Harry's whole body locked up so quickly, his muscles jumped, and he involuntarily squeezed his hands - which meant he just borderline violently squeezed Dean's hand.

Dean immediately squeezed back, alert, and asked, "What?"

"Nothing," Harry said quickly before Dean could even finish speaking. He tried clearing his throat and tried sitting up again, "Sorry, nothing, just… sorry."

"Take it easy, tiger," Dean said softly, leaning over Harry to hold his head up and stuff an extra pillow behind it. He sat back down beside Harry on the bed, taking his arm again. "Where did it hurt?"

Harry blinked, then realised Dean thought his reaction was from the burn. "Oh. Oh, no - it's fine. The cream feels really good."

Dean raised another eyebrow, clearly not believing him. He watched him for a moment, then apparently decided to let it go and grab the medical gauze and tape. Harry chewed on his lip as he watched Dean carefully take care of his arm, wrapping every burn.

Death. Gabriel had said he had enough run-ins with Death to know his work when he saw it - that Lucifer didn't respect Death enough to do the same. Implied that Death really made Harry's wand, twice. Death was a *horseman*, a physical, alive, right-there in-person - with fingers that could wear rings - an actual real thing. Working *for* the Devil.

Harry fought the Devil with a wand made by one of his horsemen - one of his followers. If Harry didn't feel exactly safe with the Elder Wand before, now he could almost admit he felt bloody terrified of it.

A warm hand was suddenly by his face, fingers brushing his cheek. He met Dean's eyes as Dean pressed his thumb gently down on his chin, making Harry's teeth free his lip.

"What is it?" Dean asked.
Harry gulped. He was just too, too weak - and now nervous and overloaded with mere ideas and concepts of a Death that was real, that he still needed to process fully - to even begin to hide his thoughts or school his expression. As he stared into Dean's eyes and Dean began frowning, he knew he was conveying his thoughts loud and clear: *I can't tell you. It's too dangerous. It's too big.*

"What is it, Harry?"

Harry didn't answer him, just bit his lip again and minutely shook his head. He couldn't do this, not now.

Dean watched him, nodding slowly, and they stared at each other for the longest moment with Harry wondering what Dean was thinking, if Dean would let it go. They both knew Harry was in no condition for an argument. Then Dean sighed and shifted some on the bed, facing Harry more fully with a thigh pressed against Harry's hip.

"Okay," Dean said, seeming to accept Harry's silence. "How are you feeling?"

Harry shrugged, relieved Dean wasn't pressing. He could evade Dean later once he had time to think. "Fine."

Dean shrugged again. "It's fine."

"It's fine." Dean said flatly. "Harry, you went full Skywalker against Satan, but yeah, okay. You're fine. No pain. Awesome."

Harry smiled a little. "Survive a few rounds of Crucio, and your pain tolerance goes up."

Dean pursed his lips. "*Crucio.* That's the…"

"Cruciatus Curse. The torture one."

Dean nodded. He seemed relaxed and casual, despite sounding a little frustrated a moment ago. Which was good, Harry supposed. Harry liked Dean like this, enjoyed it more than the tensed, bossy Dean. "An Unforgivable, right? How many of those are there again?"

"Three." Harry answered, feeling a little at ease now himself. He could chat with Dean, sleep some more, think about Death later when he wasn't being watched and wasn't so vulnerable. His voice was still rough and hoarse, but at least getting stronger. "The Killing Curse, the Cruciatius Curse, and the Imperius Curse."

"Which one's Imperius?"

"*Imperio.*"

"No - I," Dean hung his head a moment. "I meant, what does it do?"

Harry grinned slightly, but he still felt too weak to laugh properly. "Mind-control. You can make your victims do whatever you want."

Dean made a face.

"Yeah," Harry agreed with the look. "You can throw it off, though. You just need strong will-power."
Dean narrowed his eyes, a little playful. "Yeah, and I bet being a stubborn son of a bitch helps, right?"

Harry nodded, grinning again. "I could throw off Imperius at fourteen. Gave Voldemort a right shock. I wonder if he ever found out that it was his own implanted professor-imposture Death Eater who taught me how."

"I would think that'd be something dude would warn him about."

"Maybe," Harry conceded. "But either he didn't, or Voldemort didn't believe I could throw off his. His pride cost him a lot of mistakes in the end."

"Voldemoron," Dean rolled his eyes. "Even after that, he still thought he could possess you, too, right? That happened… what did you say? When you were fifteen? At the what's-it place?"

"Ministry," Harry answered, filing away 'Voldemoron' to the growing list of Dean's insulting nicknames for Voldemort. "The Minister of Magic and several reporters caught him, too, out there in the open, in the lobby."

Dean huffed a quiet laugh, nodding just a little… but Harry noticed how sharp his eyes were then. How he was watching Harry.

He frowned, fully taking Dean in. He recognised that pose. That casual, open, relaxed, down-to-earth pose. Like nothing could shock him or get him stirred. He began realising the navigation of their conversation, too, the easiness of it but not actually an exchange back and forth. How Dean was listening and asking follow-ups - that it was a slow steer. If it wasn't for Dean practically holding his hand and being so close, Harry would have seen it a mile away-

Dean bloody Winchester was fucking interrogating him.

Harry suddenly scowled, and Dean smirked.

"So, tell me Harry," Dean said, letting some of the facade go and asking the question he undoubtedly had been steering Harry to since he asked how Harry was feeling. "How is that someone stubborn enough to beat an Unforgivable Curse that's right up there with murder and torture - who has enough balls to look Lucifer right in the face and called him an ugly twat without flinching - can hear the word 'death' and jump?"

Harry clenched his jaw.

"Not the first time either," Dean added.

"And probably won't be last. You not might remember, but I kind of have a history of dying."

Dean shook his head. "I'm not talking about that, and you know it."

Harry did know it. The only other time he reacted like he just did at the mention of Death was when some psychic they were checking out kept talking about Death as a real person. Dean obviously picked up on the connection there. Sometimes Dean really impressed him with how observant he could be. In this case, he was annoyed by it too.

Harry had to be careful.

"Death is real," he answered. "Doesn't that scare you?"
Dean pursed his lips again, studying him. He was obviously trying to figure something out. He seemed to be thinking he had.

He moved his hand until their palms were pressed together, fully holding Harry's hand, and he began stroking Harry's arm softly and lazily with his other. "Tell me the truth, Harry," he said quietly. "That day you and Cas went out to take care of the angel patrol, when we tried to save Adam - before Cas came and got us… What happened?"

Harry swallowed hard.

He thought back to that moment, that moment the brothers were there, asking how things went, and he and Cas shared a look. How the brothers noticed - how he thought the brothers had let it go. And how in the world Dean was connecting that day to Death, hell, Harry couldn't even guess.

He needed to be very careful still though. This could work for him. If he focused on that day, on the PTSD thing, maybe Dean could to make up his own conclusions about the Death-thing, steer Dean away from the Elder Wand.

He bit his lip again, trying to sit up a little more. It was an obvious move to give himself time to think. Dean didn't help, just let him fight the slow battle, but he didn't let go of Harry's hand either. By the time he had adjusted himself more comfortably and felt readier to have a serious discussion, Harry had decided that between his PTSD secret and Elder Wand secret, the Elder Wand one needed the most protection. If Dean was somehow attributing one with the other, that really could be good for Harry's Elder Wand secret. He just needed to find out what Dean was thinking.

Problem was that he didn't feel like he had enough energy to truly pull off a coy play. So, he didn't just need to find out what Dean was thinking - he needed to find out what Dean wanted to think.

Knowing his wariness showed, Harry asked, "Why?"

Dean gave him a look like he was an idiot. "You left two degrees away from a haunted shell, and then we see you next, you…” he looked Harry up and down. "I don't know. Had life back in you."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, genuinely confused if not also a little extra worried for the full-blown-PTSD part of himself.

"When you crashed to earth, man," Dean said, soft and gentle, but still very serious, "Harry, you didn't see you. I don't know if you could have even if you wanted. Fuck, sometimes I would look into your eyes and wonder if your soul wasn't dead in there or something."

Harry found his heart rate picking up and his hand was squeezing Dean's again. What Dean was saying truly terrified him.

"You did?" he whispered.

Dean began stroking his arm again. "Then Cas wings us to the factory, and you were alive. You had fire in you. It was night and day, man."

Harry sighed, looking down. "I didn't realise."

"I just need to know one thing, just one thing, before we go on…”

Harry eyed him, not knowing what his expression was, so he knew that had to be mixed in. He waited for Dean to continue, but he didn't until Harry nodded, silently agreeing to answer.
"Whatever happened… did you make a deal with the other angels for it?"

Harry sputtered, feeling a little like he was just slapped across the face. "What?!" he tried to yell, but really it came out more of a wheeze. "Make a deal -… Dean, what the fuck?"

Dean grinned.

"I should hex you - have you thought I've been betraying you this whole time?" Even if he did have any strength to hide anything, at that moment, he doubted he could have kept the hurt from his voice.

"No," Dean's grin turned into an honest smile. "But I had to check. You still haven't said no."

"No," Harry said sternly. "Fuck no. It was bloody Cas!"

Dean nodded. "Figured he was involved."

Harry relaxed back, body having made a feeble and unsuccessful attempt at shooting up at Dean's inquiry. And damn Dean, getting him to outright confess something did, in fact, happen. "Make a deal…" he muttered a little petulantly.

Dean squeezed Harry's hand in a placating gesture, careful to avoid the burns. Harry wondered why or how they were holding hands in the first place, but Dean's other hand had been stroking and rubbing at tender places on his arm while also avoiding the burns, so he wasn't going to stop him.

Dean was watching him, waiting.

Harry sighed. After this last hotel from hell, Harry knew he was going to have to tell the brothers. He knew it the moment he stepped into that conference room and looked into the Devil's eyes. He had to be the frontline then, so the others could get away, but what if Lucifer had knocked down all his hippos? If that damn owl thing - that Harry was pretty sure was either a hippo thing or some poor unlucky owl at Hogwarts got caught in Voldemort's *Avada Kedavra* and was trapped between dimensions - was enough to cause Apedemak to get the upper hand during that fight, he couldn't imagine what he could have unintentionally let happen with Lucifer.

He looked over at Dean feeling almost sheepish and a little like a child caught with their hand in the cookie jar. "Was I really that bad?"

Dean pressed his lips together and nodded slowly.

Harry looked down at their joined hands, feeling fidgety. Dean let him start to play with his fingers a little.

"Hippos. I-it's my hippos," Harry said after a long minute.

"Okay," Dean accepted, open and ready to deal with whatever that meant, just like that time in the woods after killing the Whore. It was a quality Harry admired.

"Cas…" Harry rasped, voice tight with the confession. He was surprised how hard this was to admit when he could so easily decide to tell this secret instead of the other one. "He… said I have PTSD."

Dean, whose fingers started playing back with his, paused for a moment. "How did this come about?"

"There was a bad enough imbalance in my h-head, and I didn't understand all of what Cas said, but I looked it up later, and basically my brain responded with my am-… er, amydala? Or something.
Emotion memory. My hippocampus memory didn't respond or something. My hippos… I… I lost my hippos."

He felt even more like a child with that explanation, but the only way he could explain it was with the only analogy he had in his own head to explain it to himself.

"Harry, what happened?" Dean asked, a bit more serious.

Harry worried his lip, not daring to look Dean in the eye. "I… I killed an angel, and… Cas called it a flashback… I… It was like I wasn't there anymore," He curled his fingers past Dean's and pressed their palms together in as hard of a grip as he could, needing to hold onto something real and solid. "I wasn't there anymore, Dean. I… I was back in the cave - his cave, with the Horcrux - and I just made Dumbledore drink all the potion - he made me promise, Dean, he made me promise to do whatever he told me - and he told me to make sure he drank it all - and it was horrible - and he was thirsty - and I had to get him some water, Dean, I had to do something, and they -"

He distantly noticed he had started shaking, of Dean coming closer, of a strong hand tight on his shoulder, of a voice telling him to breathe. Damn Dean for making him talk about it while he was so injured, vulnerable and weak. He doubted he would be acting this way if he was at full strength.

He took in a deep breath, then another, his eyes closed.

"They were everywhere," he whispered.

"Who was?" Dean asked, tone soft but strong.

"The Inferi." He opened his eyes and looked at Dean, seeing the recognition of the name on his face. When Harry first told the brothers about them, they were comparing them to zombies. Harry made lots of jokes, tried to make it sound like he hadn't even met one, but even so, he knew the brothers respected what they were. How terrible and tragic they were. What they could do. "The cave. The Horcrux was hidden in this bowl of poison, on this rock in the middle of a lake full of dormant Inferi, inside the cave. Dean... there were hundreds."

Dean nodded, looking a little sad. "And?"

"I disturbed the water," Harry whispered.

Dean's jaw clenched, and Harry saw understanding strike through his dark green eyes - that slight, split-second panic and fear. Knew Dean realised he woke all the Inferni up.

Harry sucked in a breath, slamming his eyes closed, and felt a tear escape and roll down his cheek as hideous guilt burned in the back of his throat and made his voice thick. "I was back there and attacking them, but in reality, I was attacking Cas. He stopped me from hurting him and balanced my head, but he said he couldn't heal me."

After a moment of just breathing, Harry felt a warm hand on his cheek, a thumb brushing away the tear's wet path. "Kerplunk," Dean said.

Harry opened his eyes once more at the strange word, searching out and finding Dean a lot closer to him than he was a moment ago.

Dean ran his hand through Harry's hair then rested it on his cheek again. At Harry's questioning look, he said, "One hippo down."

Harry huffed, lips twitching despite himself.
"Are they ticklish hippos?" Dean asked almost playfully.

"What?"

"Ticklish hippos," Dean said before he started to try to tickle the side of Harry's head.

"Stop," Harry complained, trying to bat Dean's hand away. Dean didn't stop, though, until Harry produced a proper laugh, then he patted the top of Harry's head and stood, grabbing a blanket off the end of the bed and throwing it at Harry.

"Alright, alright, enough hippo talk. We can discuss it later. Get some rest, Harry. You've earned it."

"Piss off," Harry sighed, but he wiggled down into the blanket nonetheless, a smile still trying to tug at his lips. He noticed they didn't circle back around to talk about Death, but he wasn't about to be the one to point that out.

Chapter End Notes

REMINDER, THIS IS A DOUBLE CHAPTER UPDATE. If there is no "next chapter" button, refresh the page. :D

So?? How'd this go?? I love to hear what you guys thought of Harry's fights with the gods, his fight with Lucifer, and of course this ending here. I had some requests of wanting to see Harry and Dean getting comfortable being more intimate, so I hope it works!!

For the Harry/Dean fans: chapter 7 is your chapter!!
For readers who prefer more action: bare with me in the next chapter. Harry needs to recover. Hopefully there's some humour in it for you.

Thank you so so much for reading!! I'm always open to ideas, just please be kind. :D
As per usual, let me go ahead and post these, then I'll circle back and reply to everyone!
Christmas at Bobby's

Chapter Summary

While recovering from the events at the hotel, Harry, Bobby, and the Winchesters celebrate Christmas and Harry’s birthday. Meanwhile, Harry tries to come up with a kind of compromise for his wand problem.

Chapter Notes

Part two of the double chapter update!! I'm going to post this then begin replying to everyone as soon as possible.
Thank you so much reading and sticking with me this far!

Ps, heads-up for those who hate Harry's temper - his temper show up around in here, but he does have a reflective moment later that might show some growth? I hope it's alright.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
"Nope," Sam chuckled. "I still felt you take it."

Harry swore under his breath and tossed Sam's wallet back to him as they both faced each other again. "If I could just use my wand -"

"Nope," Sam said again, smirking. "You have to learn to do these things without magic first."

"So says you guys," Harry griped.

"Look," Sam placated, "you don't have to become some Chris Angel in slight-of-hand, but if you can learn to pickpocket, that skill can go a long way."

Harry bit back any other comments he might have had and nodded for them to go again.

Harry's recovery was slow.
It had taken him almost a week to get enough strength just to come down the stairs, a fact that Bobby found hilarious since he, in his wheelchair, couldn't come upstairs. Harry didn't know why Bobby thought their predicament was as funny as he did, but he went along with it, replying to every message-in-a-bottle Bobby would toss up and smile when he heard Bobby's cackles to his replies. And no matter what Bobby tried to say, too, Harry's aim tossing it down was way better than Bobby's aim tossing it up.

It had taken days to get enough strength to walk as well. Harry was conscious, though, so he tried not to get too embarrassed at needing the brothers to help carry him into the loo. He had been in worse shapes, after all, and though Harry knew what muggle catheters were, he sincerely thought that Madam Pomfrey's magical equivalent was worse. Either way, he preferred being carried over either one.

Currently, it was Christmas Day, and coincidently, Harry's eighteenth birthday. Harry couldn't say he was back to full strength, but the more he moved around and ate (Bobby generally had him on a five-meal a day regimen), the faster his strength was returning.

The others were, frankly, just baffled that Harry survived at all, but for the first real time, Harry wished he could talk to one of them about the Elder Wand. He was concerned about the effects were of going up against something as powerful as Lucifer. The wand had tapped into every ounce of magic and strength Harry possessed, as well as throwing Lucifer's own energy back at him, and Harry genuinely didn't know what would have happened if he had gone on any longer. If Harry had to rank cosmic beings, he would have originally positioned a personified Death higher than an archangel, but apparently, Death was a horseman - at Lucifer's command, so maybe not. Against Death's wand, could Lucifer had really beaten it?

Harry's arm was a sure sight to see too.

After a couple of days from the events at the hotel, Dean had disappeared only to come back with Leonard Quinhagak in tow to take a look at Harry's arm. Leonard was the one who had told Harry that as long as the tattoo was ink, not a burn or scar, the runes could always be broken with more ink. And just as Harry had suspected, any ink from the tattoo had been burned away. Leonard even confirmed that the burn went as far down to Harry's bone. It would take something extremely drastic and painful to break the lines now. Leonard didn't seem too concerned, but Harry didn't think there was much that could get the man concerned, in all honesty. Leonard told them the lightning/vein burns would heal and leave scars that could one day fade, but the rune's burns would stay and most likely remain as black as night.

At any rate, during the days he could barely walk, he had a lot of time to think about the Elder Wand and Death.

He told himself that the first thing he must always keep in mind was that if Death was real, it was quite possible that this world and his world had different Deaths. Even though Gabriel himself said that he had had a few run-ins with Death to know his work when he saw it, Gabriel had also mentioned knowing Merlin and having met Harry's kind before. There was no telling everywhere Gabriel had been hiding during his own 'witness protection', so it was still possible, Harry thought, that the horseman Death and the Death that created the Elder Wand were two different Deaths.

However comforting repeating that to himself was, the second thing he kept reminding himself was that if he had learned anything from his old life, it was to err on the side of caution.

If this horseman was the same Death that made the Deathly Hollows, he probably wouldn't appreciate someone coming after him for his horseman's ring with his very own wand. No matter which way Harry looked at it, regardless of his burn, there was a chance of Harry coming out of the
confrontation sans any wand.

The moment he realised that, he decided to see if the Elder Wand could fix his phoenix wand, the pieces of which were still safely stowed away in Hagrid's pouch. He had no idea if it would work or what spells he would need, so he knew he needed time and opportunity to even try.

Problem was, if Harry was out of sight for longer than five minutes, Dean, Sam, or Bobby would come looking for him.

Harry thought some of it was general concern for his well-being after such an ordeal at the hotel. He also thought some of it was unconscious protection of him - as something that turned out far more valuable than they had realised, kind of like the way they always double checked where the demon-killing knife was or made sure John Winchester's journal was put away safely, or the way Bobby coveted his brew.

He did know, however, that most of it was precautionary on the brothers' part. Harry was an associate and an asset that happened to have a bit of a temper, as well as a usually quiet temperament and disposition of wanting to be alone, neither of which he was afforded most of the time. He was, as Gabriel had put it, a wild card. Sometimes Harry felt like the Winchesters had him hog-tied to their apocalypse, and he knew they knew it. He also knew they knew he could decide he was done with all of it and leave, and they would be powerless to do anything about it. In fact, it was that little small freedom that kept Harry from going insane sometimes when he was running low on energy and patience.

So, yes, it seemed habitual at this point for Dean, Sam, and Bobby to look in on him, and it was making it impossible to find the time and space to pull out the pieces of his old phoenix wand and see if he could fix it. Several times he thought about trying when the house was asleep, but the four of them had overlapping and sporadic sleeping schedules as it were. He couldn't chance it.

The best he could do was keep an eye out for an opening. Meanwhile, he focused on getting better, learning what he could, and trying to be helpful in research.

Though Bobby had his feelers out for any signs of Death, Pestilence was a bit easier to track. Originally when Harry was at his worst, both Dean and Sam seemed to put things on hold to care for him. As he got better, they stayed to help, but once Harry was more mobile, they began going back to mostly normal - as in full-steam ahead with the apocalypse. Dean had left a couple of days ago to follow up on a lead, leaving Sam there to help Bobby and Harry if needed. Dean would be returning later that day, and Bobby had apparently decided that one day of good cheer would do them some good. To Harry's surprise, he had put away his books and pulled out some Christmas lights that he had Harry and Sam string along around the study and kitchen almost as soon as they had gotten up.

Bobby was in the newly decorated kitchen, humming along with the Christmas music playing from Sam's internet radio. Sam and Harry, after being shooed from the kitchen when they were both caught sneaking bites of the meal Bobby was preparing, decided to continue what Harry was privately calling his 'criminal lessons'.

"Keep in mind," Sam was telling him, "that right now, it's more about how you actually get my wallet out. With enough practise, you'll be able to tell just by looking at the other person's clothes which way to go about it. Once you have that down, it's all about creating the least suspicious distraction."

"Right," Harry nodded. "Plausible explanation why I'm suddenly in their personal space."

"Exactly. For now, try just bumping into me again."
Harry agreed, and both Sam and Harry walked toward each other. Harry stepped slightly to the side to effectively knock into Sam, and as Sam's body turned to accommodate the collision, Harry darted his hand out quickly, two fingers dipping into Sam's pocket to clasp the wallet and pulling it out. The whole manoeuvre wasn't even two seconds.

"Better," Sam praised, taking his wallet back. "I still felt it leave my pocket, but I didn't feel you at all."

"Thanks. It'd definitely be easier with a lighter object. I see why you wanted to start with something heavier."

Sam nodded. "Want to try again?"

Harry looked out the window to the bright December sky. It was still morning. "Maybe later."

"Okay," Sam agreed. "What else is on our list to teach you?"

"Other than everything?" Harry raised an eyebrow. Sam chuckled, and Harry walked a few steps to let himself fall into the chair leaned up against Bobby's desk, facing the room. "I finally got lockpicking down. Dean said he would teach me how to throw that one dagger, the, er… Gerber?"

"Gerber Mark II?"

"Yeah, that. He said he'd teach me how to throw that one once I'm strong enough to hold a dictionary above my head for a full minute."

Sam grinned, leaning against the wall and crossing his arms. "The Mark II is a good fighting knife. The U.S. Armed Forces use them."

Harry nodded. "Yeah, Dean said. And he said it was also in some movie about an alien?"

Sam snorted. "The movie Aliens. Yeah, the mess hall scene. And Mel Gibson used it, too, in the movie, um…"

"Yeah, he said, it was, er…"

"The Road Warrior," they said at the same time and chuckled.

"Dean still gets frustrated with how I hold the knives in close-range fighting though," Harry admitted. "I just can't flip it around in my hand like you guys can. Not even with a switchblade."

"You will," Sam reassured. "This all just takes practise. Where were we in hand-to-hand, anyway?"

"Clothesline," Harry answered. "Which I still maintain I will not be able to do, even if my opponent is my size."

"It just takes momentum," Sam said, uncrossing his arms and visibly slipping into 'teacher-mode'. "Once you're able to hold your arm straight out," Sam demonstrated, stretching his right arm out at the side, "and keep it out as someone runs into it, then all you need is enough momentum. Usually, you slam your arm against their chest to knock them down, right? But if you can, aim for the neck." He then gestured slamming his forearm against his own neck. "They'll most likely lose footing just trying to protect it. And if you can keep your arm out and steady," he stretched his arm out again, "they should go down."

Harry nodded; he had heard all this before, but he still tossed Sam a glare. "Yeah, but when I tried
that on you, you flipped me."

Sam smirked. "You're the one who always says not to go easy on you."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Still. But hey, I've been thinking…" he sat up a little straighter. "I know you said my upper body strength will increase, but I think… I think I am better at kicks. I'd like to learn more kickboxing."

He had been thinking about it since his fight with Baron Samedi, how it was a kick (albeit aimed at the crotch) and not his punches that got the god to use magic to stop him. He didn't think Dean or Sam would object, but usually they responded with a 'sure, but…' As in, sure, they would humour him but only after they got their way first.

Sam, though, surprised him with taking a moment longer than usual to consider it. Slowly, he nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I can see that. I actually took kickboxing classes in college. We can start with knee and elbow strikes first while we try to get the clothesline down, then we can switch to sweeping."

"Sweeping?"

"Using your legs to knock your opponent down. In sport, sweeping isn't always allowed, but it's effective. You have two basic forms," Sam straightened again and adjusted his stance. "Outside and inside foot sweeps. A good outside foot sweep will make your opponent lose balance. Follow it with a quick inside sweep and a good punch to the jaw," he demonstrated kicking out his left foot and throwing a punch in the air, "will get them knocked down. And there's the -" Sam bounced once, then threw his leg up and spun, doing a full 360 with his long leg slicing expertly through the air. "That's a spinning back sweep. With enough practise, you can get your leg high enough to hit your opponent's head."

Harry eyed Sam sceptically, noting his height.

Sam seemed to notice and barked a laugh. "Yeah, even someone as tall as me. If you're serious about kickboxing, better start stretching your hamstrings."

"I'll say…" Harry commented, still eyeing Sam's height.

Sam began eyeing Harry, too, frowning. "Actually, you really should. You should try to do some lunges and squats every day, especially to build up the muscles around your knee caps - your knees will be your most vulnerable and can work against you. Do a kick wrong, or someone grabs your ankle as you twist, your knee cap can pop right out." Harry winced. "Building those muscles can prevent it. But on top of that, you might want to consider some yoga. I know Dean makes fun of it, but if you can get your leg and back muscles as flexible as possible, then I can see you doing some serious damage to someone. You're already agile and fast, and I've seen you be light on your feet. If you train right, I don't see why you couldn't excel in it."

"Really?" Harry blinked. Harry wouldn't call either brother particularly complimentary, but Sam was always supportive and encouraging when he wasn't moody and self-righteous. This assessment, however, was downright approving. Sam really did believe kickboxing could be Harry's thing.

"Yes," Sam said seriously. "You need your full strength back before we begin anything, and I'd save any lunges for when you're better too, but you could probably already start with stretches."

Sam then ran Harry through some basic and simple stretches to loosen muscle, then a couple to help Harry grow in flexibility. Harry was already flexible, he knew that, but Sam knew what moves and
positions would be required in kickboxing and was quick to point out muscles Harry never
considered before. Some he didn't even know he had.

Sam had Harry's legs spread as wide apart as possible and was showing him how to apply pressure
to eventually teach Harry's muscles how to do the splits, though they couldn't try anything too
strenuous as Harry had already dressed in his trousers for the day. This was the moment when Dean
came walking in.

"Yo, I'm back!" Dean hollered as he pushed in through the front door. He had several bags and a
couple of boxes, and he froze in the doorway to the study.

Sam and Harry froze, too, and only then did Harry realise exactly what kind of position he and Sam
were in. Sam was pressed against his back, one hand on Harry's stretched out thigh and another on
his shoulder as Sam had been gently pushing Harry down. Sam was practically sprawled over Harry.

The three of them blinked at each other, then Bobby was laughing at them from the kitchen's
doorway.

"Let me guess," Dean slowly smirked, "it's not what it looks like."

Harry jumped from Sam, feeling his face go red, but Sam was laughing, completely unperturbed.
"Harry's interested in kickboxing," Sam said as way of explanation.

"Well, I don't know much about kickboxing," Dean said, coming fully into the room and dumping
his haul on Bobby's desk, "but I'm pretty sure Harry's legs should be going up, not down."

"They've been at it for almost an hour," Bobby informed, shaking his head. "I thought these idjits
would race into yoga pants before they were done."

"Y'know," Sam said, looking back at Harry, "you should get some of those."

"Oh, what?" Dean asked, looking appalled. "Harry ain't getting any yoga pants."

"You should get something," Sam pressed, still addressing Harry with only a glance at Dean. "We've
been training in just sweats and t's, but some workout clothes would be good."

"Workout clothes and yoga pants are two different things, Sammy," Dean said.

"What did you get?" Harry asked Dean, nodding toward the bags and wanting to end all
conversation about pants in general.

"Just the usual supplies," Dean shrugged and began pulling out several different ingredients they
usually kept in storage, as well as a few for Harry's Skele-Gro, he noticed. Of course, the boxes
Dean had with him held pie.

"Stay out of the kitchen," Bobby ordered, taking the pies from Dean.

"What's cooking? It smells great," Dean commented, knocking Harry's hand away when he tried to
help unload the bags and pointing to the cot, silently telling Harry to sit.

"He won't tell us," Harry sighed, complying and sitting. He was rapidly becoming tired, and he
knew it probably showed.

"We know there's a turkey," Sam informed, helping Dean put away ingredients. "And there will be
potatoes."
Dean seemed content with letting Sam finish unloading the bags, and he looked around as he peeled off his jacket. "Well, ain't this just Hallmark perfect."

"It won't kill us to celebrate one holiday," Bobby barked from the kitchen.

"Two holidays," Dean grinned then waggled his eyebrows at Harry. "Happy Eighteen, Harry."

Harry shook his head good-naturedly. "You realise I'm still the same person I was yesterday, don't you?"

"Yes," Dean said mischievously, "but now you're not jailbait."

Harry frowned. "What? What's jailbait?"

"Dean," Sam said in a warning tone. "It's nothing Harry. Just ignore him."

"But what is it?" Harry pressed.

"Jailbait means we could kick his ass if he tried anything," Bobby answered still deep in the other room. "Which is still the case, boy, so put it away."

Harry's frown deepened. "I'm confused."

"How much longer until the food's ready, Bobby?" Sam asked loudly, effectively ending the conversation. Harry huffed and crossed his arms, frustrated no one was explaining what the hell they were talking about.

"See," Dean said, perking up a little and pointing at Harry while catching Sam's eye. "Adorable."

"It'll be a few hours yet," Bobby said to Sam's question.

The answer had the three of them whipping their heads around to gape into the kitchen.

"Hours?" Harry asked.

"But you've already been at it for hours," Sam said.

"It's called a goddamn Christmas dinner, and if we're going to have a goddamn Christmas dinner, then we're gonna have a goddamn Christmas dinner the right way. Capisce?"

"Yes, sir," Dean, Sam, and Harry replied automatically.

There was some clanking in the kitchen, then Dean whispered, "What the hell are we supposed to do for food in the meantime? I skipped breakfast this morning to get these fuckin' errands out of the way," he gestured to the bags that had been tossed into an office bin by Bobby's desk.

"I don't know," Sam said, rubbing his chin and brows furrowed in thought.

"I can try levitating some food out," Harry suggested, whispering as well.
"If you want to die before you can enjoy being eighteen," Dean snorted mutely.

"I suppose we can make a run?" Sam asked.

"It's Christmas," Dean said, shaking his head. "What would even be open?"

"Not Omar's," Harry sighed. Omar's Steakhouse and Barbecue was the closest restaurant to Bobby's, and their turkey loaded baked potatoes were completely worth the overpricing, Harry thought.

"No, no restaurants," Sam agreed, then he moved to his laptop with purpose, snatching it up from where he left it on the armchair and sitting down. "Fast food chains might be though."

"There ya go," Dean nodded, coming to peer over Sam's shoulder. Harry jumped up and went over, too, to look over Sam's other shoulder. "McD's is always open."

Harry made a face. "They've changed their chips lately, have you noticed? They're all tiny now."

"Fries, Harry. They're called fries," Dean corrected him in the mock-stern kind of way he did sometimes. The three of them were still keeping their voices low, though, so it really didn't have any effect. "And you can get that M&Ms milkshake."

"They put sugar in their salads, Dean," Sam shook his head, as though that tidbit was the ultimate deciding factor. He clicked over to the maps section on the google while his internet radio continued to play, and immediately a list of open places loaded.

The three of them saw and said at the same time, "Taco Bell."

"They got that steak thing back, did you see?" Dean whispered.

"And they're doing Dorito taco shells now," Sam agreed.

"Taco Bell it is then," Harry smiled.

"Get me a chicken quesadilla," Bobby called from the kitchen, and Dean, Sam, and Harry exchanged a slightly exasperated look at having been overheard despite their efforts.

Sam volunteered to go get the food, taking one of the cars from Bobby's lot rather than Dean's car. Harry went back to the cot, and he was tempted to lay down.

As though reading his mind, Dean said, "Get some rest, Harry. I can help you up the stairs after you eat."

"That's alright," Harry said. He pushed back far enough on the cot to lean against the bay window and let his feet dangle. "I'm tired, but fine."

"I'd feel better if you'd take a nap," Dean said, leaning against Bobby's desk and crossing his arms.

"I might later," Harry shrugged.

They stared at each other a moment, then Harry took a chance he had been working up to for days now. While Harry was recovering and trying to gain strength, he largely left matters alone. He knew it was a gesture of good faith, or good will, or whatever, on Dean's part when they discussed the horsemen and plans of action without Sam or Bobby there. Dean actually listening and giving Harry's opinion thought and weight. Half of Harry didn't want to push, didn't want to try, just in case that really was a one-off thing. That it was just Dean, feeling sorry for Harry. The other half of him desperately wanted confirmation that things have changed. That Dean was trusting him more. That
Harry proved himself that night at the hotel.

Clearing his throat, Harry asked, "How did things go in Utah?"

"Just a shit ton of sick people. It looks like swine flu is a party favourite. Every outbreak there, though, is accompanied with omens, too, but never the same one. If it's not Pestilence, then it's gotta be something close to him."

"Swine flu?" Harry hummed, letting his curious mind take over and push down any drumming of his heart. "Isn't that rather mild for a supposed horseman meant to bring about disease and death? There are tons of vaccines and antibiotics for that."

Dean raised his eyebrows. "Someone's done some research."

Harry nodded and made a face. "I never really had any desire to be a Healer, but if I did, I wouldn't now."

"What about the hardcore stuff, though," Harry went on. "I mean, I know there are vaccines for a lot of the bad diseases, like smallpox, but he could bring back the black plague if he wanted."

"True," Dean agreed. "But honestly? Why go black plague if he's got Croatoan."

Harry bit his lip. "Yeah. Which makes swine flu all the more… bizarrely mild."

"Unless he's bidding his time. Building to something else."

"It's possible," Harry allowed, pulling his legs up to his chest and wrapping his arms around them. "From that angle, there's loads of places to go. Create a disease that will only to react to those who have swine flu antibodies, force people to use as many vaccines as possible so they aren't available when the worst comes, using swine flu as a basis or foundational illness to mix with others later…"

"It seems like a pretty random and lowkey thing to be a part of that kind of elaborate plan," Dean replied. "Unless we're missing something."

"Oh, I'm positive we are missing something," Harry said, and Dean looked surprised for a moment, probably at how confident Harry sounded. "We're probably missing a bunch of somethings. Pestilence and… and Death, I mean, they were released at the same time as the others. By what you've told me, War and Famine didn't hold back, and I don't think it's likely Pestilence has been just sitting on his thumbs. I'm more than willing to bet that whatever Pestilence has been doing this whole time, he's been keeping a low profile for a reason."

Dean nodded, clearly thinking. "You could be right. Or, he could be part of Lucifer's plans, obeying orders to keep his head down."

"Allowing omens around his work wouldn't be keeping his head down, even if it is just swine flu."

Dean shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. If dude's got Croatoan in his bag, weird but small omens could be just as mild as swine flu and nothing to worry about to them."

Harry conceded to that point with a quick tilt of his head.

"You guys get anything on Death?" Dean then asked.
Harry had to physically stop himself from wincing. He knew if they knew about the Elder Wand, they would consider it a lead in and of itself. Harry supposed it technically was, but as the only thing the wand could give them would be its runes, and Harry had already exhausted that angle, he didn't believe it could provide anything else.

"Not really," Harry answered instead. "Sam did a cross search with the google -"

"It's - Harry, it's just google. Stop calling it 'the' google."

Harry shrugged, indifferent. "Whichever, he used that, doing a cross search between obits and unidentified bodies in the cities with the most reported deaths each year. There's been a major increase over the last few months, but that's consistent with the average mayhem of Armageddon."

"Obits, consistent with the average mayhem - and you call it the google."

Ignoring Dean's quip, Harry continued, "I've helped Bobby look into any particular weird deaths to see if something's jumps out, but so far all we've found are cases, and Bobby's been passing them on to other hunters. I tried looking into disastrous events that have had the highest number of deaths, but other than increasingly wild political conspiracy theories, nothing."

Dean nodded. "Good work. We'll keep at it. A doc down in the Utah clinic said she had a buddy in Wichita, Kansas reporting another outbreak. It's not that far, a day trip to check out. Sam or I will go tomorrow."

"I can help," Harry tried.

Dean shook his head. "You are helping. But until you can do jumping jacks for five minutes straight and be fine, you're benched, pal."

"You have odd parameters for health and recovery."

"Sorry, I think you pronounced 'effective' wrong."

"Heads up," Bobby warned a moment before a beer can came flying into the room. Dean caught it easily, and Harry caught his as well when it was thrown at him. Bobby wheeled into the study with his own beer rested between his thighs. "I never asked," he said, coming to a stop and popping open his can. "You ain't allergic to anything, are ya, Harry?"

Harry shook his head as both he and Dean opened their cans. "Not that I know of."

"Cheers," Bobby raised his can. Dean and Harry followed suit, raising their cans and taking a swig as Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree began to play quietly in the background.

"What's with the lights?" Dean asked, gesturing around.

"What's wrong with them?" Bobby countered.

"You haven't pulled these out in years."

"Exactly. Thought it was 'bout time to put them to use again."

Dean narrowed his eyes at Bobby. Though Harry could tell Dean tried to sound light, it fell flat. "Got that little faith in us, Bobby? Pullin' out the big guns for a last Christmas on earth?"

Harry's chest felt tight at his words. It was obvious Bobby and the Winchesters weren't in the habit of celebrating holidays, and he had figured why this year was so different. Hearing it confirmed
saddened him.

Bobby shrugged casually, taking a long pull of beer. When he lowered the can and saw Dean still staring at him, he said, "I ain't no Grinch, boy."

"Right, because Tiny Tim is more your style."

"I think it's nice," Harry cut in. "I didn't have Christmas this last time."

"Yeah?" Dean asked, crossing his ankles to get more comfortable there against the desk. "Why not?"

"We didn't know it was Christmas," Harry answered honestly. "We, uh… at that time, it was just me and Hermione, and I had wanted to go to the village my parents used to live in. She thought we might could find something there, a lead as it were. Which," Harry chuckled softly to himself, "I guess, technically, we did."

"What happened?" Bobby asked.

Harry looked down at his beer can, picking at the dulled metal edges. "Well, when we got there, there was a church loaded with people, and we realised it was Christmas Eve. We went to my parents' graves, and we did find - " Careful, he told himself; he needed to stay away from mentions of the Deathly Hollows, "er, clues, I guess, there. Then we saw Bathilda Bagshot."

"Bathilda… Bagshot," Dean interrupted, a glint in his eyes.

Harry snorted. He knew what was about to come, having been teased by them before.

"Bathilda Bagshot," Bobby repeated.

"So, wait, okay," Dean said, obviously repressing a laugh. He started counting with his fingers, "Okay-okay, we got, Minerva McGonagall, Luna Lovegood, Severus Snape -"

"Poppy Pomfrey," Bobby picked up, "Padma and the other-one-that-starts-with-a-p Patil, Gellert Grindewald, Filius Flitwick -"

"Florean Fortecue," Dean continued, and by this time, Harry was laughing, "Pansy Parkinson. And let's not forget the Rowena Ravenclaw -"

"Helga Hufflepuff."

"Godric Gryffidnor."

"And Salazar Slytherin," Bobby finished.

"No shortage in alliteration in wizard land, is there?" Dean asked.

"Piss off," Harry laughed. "You two always remember the names and never the stories."

"I remember the stories," Bobby gruffed. "That Salazar guy was your teacher."

Harry shook his head. "That was Severus."

"Well, Flitwick was a teacher."

"Yeah, and that Grindlewald dude was… or, wait," Dean frowned, "was it Gaunt who was Hitler?"
"No, that was Grindlewald," Bobby said, "Gaunt was…"

"Gaunt had something to do with being evil, right?"

"Well, I know you learned Herbology from some perfectly named chick named Sprout," Bobby said with finality, toasting Harry as Harry laughed again.

"And I know for sure that the Fortecue dude had the ice cream," Dean finished.

Harry shook his head. "Yes, Dean, he was the one with the ice cream parlour."

"Well, what's up with this B chick?" Dean asked.

"Bathilda Bagshot," Harry offered as he let his legs fall to be sitting crossed legged now. As he did so, though, images at the Christmas Eve night flashed before his eyes, and he felt his smile slip off his face. "Right. Well, she was author of our history of magic texts. She lived in the village."

There was a heavy silence as the other two registered Harry's change of mood. Harry swallowed and tried to get back some of the lightness. It was, however, impossible considering the story.

"Voldemort knew I'd come to the village eventually. He had Bagshot killed months beforehand and his snake disguised as her to lure me. I don't know if he knew I had questions about Dumbledore, that I would look to Bagshot for some answers since she knew him when he was young, or if he just knew my parents are buried there or something." Harry shrugged. "Whichever, Nagini, his snake, lured me and Hermione inside Bagshot's house. She got me cornered up the stairs before she revealed herself and attacked."

The memory of the dead body smell and the sharp fangs faded as the memory of Harry's wand breaking took precedence in his mind's eye. So much so, Harry jumped when Dean spoke.

"How'd you get away?"

Harry sighed, rolling his shoulders in a physical attempt to brush away the memories. "Hermione. She was able to get to me, and we Apparated away."

"Lucky," Bobby said, then, lighting the mood in a way it seemed only Bobby could, he said, "Well, I don't know if I can top that. I reckon I could go out in the yard and try to find you a snake, but some dead old lady is up to you."

Harry laughed.

It wasn't long after they finished their beers that Sam returned. In the shuffling to accommodate the food while still not being allowed in the kitchen, Bobby wheeled behind his desk, Sam sat in front of it, and Dean nudged Harry over and joined him on the cot.

Sam passed out their respective orders, and Harry frowned down at the large drink handed to him.

"Oh, this isn't mine," he said, trying to hand it back to Sam.

Harry's frown deepened. "But what about Baja Blast?"

"You know what it does to your stomach," Sam answered.

Harry blinked, then looked over at Dean who had paused to watch them, mirroring Harry's frown.
They both looked down to the Baja Blast in Dean's hand, shared a look, then both looked back at Sam. Dean said, "But it's worth it," at the same time Harry said, "I don't care about that."

Bobby laughed; Sam grumbled and tried to suggest Dean share. Dean refused, but as they ate, Harry still got to steal a few sips. Overall, it was a good meal.

Harry argued with the others about his need for a nap, and by the time he was letting Dean help him up the stairs for one, Harry had the suspicion the others kept him arguing about it with the sole purpose of wearing him out and requiring one.

After his nap, Harry made his way back down and took the hallway to the other entrance to the kitchen, and he found himself glad he took that nap. Glad he had the strength to enjoy what he saw.

The sun had fallen, and other than a few lamps and the overhead of the stove, the only lights were the Christmas ones. Bobby apparently extended the table with the table leaf, and currently, Dean and Sam were setting it. Bobby was arranging a small pile of gifts at the end of the table closest to his wall of phones, and Sam's internet radio was still playing, a song about silver bells.

Harry couldn't help but lean against the doorframe, a warm smile taking over his face.

"You need to separate the birthday and Christmas presents," Sam said as he carefully sat a huge turkey in the middle of the table.

"There's only one birthday present," Bobby grunted, tossing a small thing wrapped in brown paper on top of the pile of other items wrapped in brown paper or plastic grocery bags.

"There isn't room for the whiskey," Dean said, frowning at the table and the abundance there.

"It's called dinner glasses, ya idjit," Bobby answered him, rolling over to a low cabinet and pulling out regular dinner glasses.

"No, it's called a thirty-dollar bottle," Dean griped, pulling over a chair specifically to hold the large bottle of whiskey.

"Hey, Harry," Sam greeted, adjusting some dishes to sit on potholders on the table.

Dean turned to see Harry, face breaking out in a big grin as Harry pushed from the doorframe to join them. Dean threw up his hands, "Birthday boy!"

"How much has he already had?" Harry laughed, gesturing to the whiskey.

Bobby hiccupped loudly, and that was answer enough. Over some light, non-heated bickering, he helped finish the table and laughed when Sam offered to do a Christmas toast, to which Bobby told him to shut up and eat.

Harry couldn't call their Christmas dinner anywhere close to traditional, and he loved it.

Bobby had cooked a feast: a large turkey filled with dressing, cheese grits, corn pudding, a roasted sweet potato casserole, a red pepper and avocado salad, green bean casserole with bacon, Hawaiian rolls, crispy garlic smashed baby potatoes, fried shallots, and rosemary-port cranberry sauce. All of it were in different, mismatched dishes, the smashed potatoes even still in a mixing bowl and the Hawaiian rolls were still in their aluminium packaging. Sam and Harry drank red wine with dinner while Bobby and Dean split the whiskey. Sam and Dean argued some, good-naturedly, and Harry
mostly watched as the other three traded old stories they remembered from the Winchesters' childhood. Harry thought it should have been sad to hear about a Christmas Dean once stole already wrapped presents from some suburban house, just so Sam would have gifts to wake up to (only for Sam to open them and find girl-gifts, such as a barbie). It wasn't though. Harry laughed along with the others at Sam's impression of their father when he found the barbie and laughed harder still when Sam announced Dean laughed just as evilly back then as he was now.

A few of times, however, he found himself looking over, expecting to see Ron laughing, or looking over to see Hermione's reaction to something. It was a twist to the gut each time to remember they weren't there. After the last time, he pulled a new glass out of the cabinets and began requesting whiskey.

"Present time!" Dean announced after it became clear no one was eating anymore, though Harry still picked at a roll.

He and Dean sat together on one side of the table with Sam and Bobby on the other, their backs to the study. Dean was all smiles as he passed out the presents wrapped in Dollar General plastic grocery bags.

"I don't have anything for anyone," Harry realised, accepting the gift.

"So?" Dean shrugged easily.

"We don't care, Harry," Sam assured.

"Open, open," Dean demanded the table.

Harry snorted but obey, untying the bag and dumping what was inside on his lap. It was a black t-shirt, and Harry lifted it to read the white words printed on it.

SORRY I'M LATE
I DIDN'T WANT TO COME

Harry laughed.

"Right," Dean said, nudging his side and winking.

Sam and Bobby were chuckling at their own t-shirts, and the three of them turned their shirts around to present to everyone else. Bobby's was grey with black lettering saying, 'THE COPS NEVER THINK IT'S AS FUNNY AS YOU DO' underneath a simple drawing of a police vehicle, and Sam's was a dark yellow one with dark green lettering saying 'I WENT TO ST. HILAIRE AND I DIDN'T EVEN GET A T-SHIRT. I HAD TO BORROW THIS ONE.'

"Brilliant," Harry chuckled.

"Thanks, Dean," Sam smiled, shaking his head as he folded his shirt.

"Idjit," Bobby grumbled, though there was a smile playing on his lips, and he threw his shirt across the back of his wheelchair. Harry gently laid his down in his lap.

"My turn," Sam said, and he handed out three gifts wrapped in brown paper.

Sam had given Bobby rose cross compass on a metal chain, Dean a stack of 'Busty Asian Beauties', and Harry a Rubik's cube that Harry found genuinely interesting. Then Bobby passed a present to
each brother and wheeled his chair to the stove. The brothers waited until he returned, and Harry
gasped, surprised, at what he brought back to the table with him.

"Merry Christmas," Bobby told him as he dumped a pumpkin treacle tart in front of Harry.

Sam chuckled. "It's just pie."

"It's not pie," Dean and Harry said at the same time, with feeling, making Sam shake his head and
Bobby to snort.

"Thank you, Bobby," Harry said sincerely. "I've been dying for treacle tart."

Bobby rolled his eyes. "Make it last, will ya? I'm sick of you bitchin' 'bout crust every time Dean has
pie."

Harry gave him a shy smile and tucked in.

The Winchesters finally opened their presents from Bobby, also wrapped in brown paper. They each
got handsomely engraved pocket knives.

"Awesome," Dean praised, flipping his open and shut. Then he turned, holding it for Harry to see
with a stern look. "Dean Winchester," he pointed as his engraved name. "You ain't stealing this
one."

Harry didn't answer, as his mouth was full of tart, but he still gave Dean a cheeky grin.

The three examined the knives as Harry ate his slice. It was delicious. Harry didn't know if Bobby
made it himself or if he bought it and kept it warm, but it bloody wonderful. He was reminded all
over again why it was his favourite dessert.

"Okay, birthday time," Dean said, throwing the last present at Harry.

Harry sighed, breaking open the tape there. "You didn't have to do anything."

"I doubt it is much of anything," Sam teased, finishing off the wine bottle.

Harry opened the brown paper, then frowned.

"A mistletoe?" Harry asked Dean, confused.

Sam groaned, "Dean, you didn't."

Dean winked at his brother then crossed his arms on the table, leaning closer to Harry. "See, Harry, I
don't know if this is a thing in your world, but see, here, we have a tradition for when two people
stand under a mistletoe."


Bobby and Sam were huffing out laughs, but Dean looked briefly surprised before smirking at Sam.
"See? It's the perfect gift. What better way than for him to get his first kiss in this world?"

"Huh?"

Dean snatched the mistletoe from Harry's hand and held it up between them. "Wanna test this baby
out?" he asked, waggling his eyebrows.
Harry knew his eyes went huge, and he could feel his cheeks heat up. Sam and Bobby threw back their heads laughing.

"I don't understand," Harry breathed, genuinely confused and very embarrassed.

"Don't break the kid, idjit," Bobby laughed.

Sam made a noise of agreement and said, "Just ignore him, Harry."

Dean, still smirking, tossed the mistletoe on the table. "You two ruin all the fun," he mockingly grumbled as though dejected. "Who's going to be his first kiss here if not one of us? He's too scared to approach strangers."

"I am not," Harry argued.

"Please," Dean waved a hand as the other two laughed again. "You should have seen your face," he gestured to the mistletoe. "You looked like a virgin locked inside a room with a hooker."

"He's not a coward for not wanting to kiss you," Sam laughed.

The word coward bristled Harry, as was Dean's all too smug assumptions that Harry would be too scared to approach someone. He was not. Just because he didn't hit on everything that moved like Dean did, didn't mean he was scared.

Dean was laughing and was forming his lips around on a word when Harry snatched up the mistletoe, lifting it above them, and swiftly leaning over and firmly kissing Dean.

Dean gasped a surprised breath, and the entire kitchen fell silent. It was a moment before Dean's lips puckered back, and they moved their lips together for about two second before Harry drew back, leaning back in his chair and tossing the mistletoe back on the table.

He smirked at Dean, whose eyes were huge. He obviously never expected Harry to ever kiss him. Feeling smug himself, Harry said, "Who's the coward now," before lifting his whiskey glass and taking a sip.

The comment knocked Sam and Bobby out of their stunned, frozen expressions, and they howled with laughter.

"Dean, the look on your face!" Sam cried, holding his stomach.

Dean blinked over at him then flushed, making Bobby and Sam laugh harder and Harry to chuckle. "He just caught me off guard!"

"I can't believe that just happened!" Sam continued.

Bobby, big grin and all, cleared his throat and held out his hand to Sam. Sam blinked at it, then started laughing again as he pulled out his wallet and handed over a twenty.

"What the hell?" Dean asked them incredulously. "Did you bet on me hitting on Harry?" Harry's surprise at his words must have been clear on his face because then Dean rushed, "Not that - I mean, I wouldn't actually... It was a joke! I-I wouldn't - shut up, Sammy!"

"I bet Sam you wouldn't actually make the move," Bobby grinned at him unapologetically, dramatically putting the twenty in his shirt pocket. "You only think you're big, bad, and slick."

"Well!" Dean threw out his hands just as dramatic as Bobby was before snatching up the mistletoe
and shoving it in his pocket.

"Hey, that's mine," Harry protested.

"Nope. I'm ungifting it."

"You can't do that."

"Watch me."

"Give it back."

"Bite me."

More of Harry's protest was drowned out by Sam laughing again, Bobby whispering something to him. Harry decided to just toss the whole thing and drained his whiskey glass.

... 

Hours later, Harry bid them a goodnight, and Dean volunteered to help him up the stairs. He wrapped an arm around Harry's waist, and though Harry didn't really need it health-wise, he allowed it because he had a glass of Bobby's brew along with the wine and whiskey that night, and it would have been just too embarrassing to trip and fall on drink.

"Gettin' better every day," Dean commented.

"It's nice to have rest, honestly. But I'm anxious to get back. Especially looking for Cas."

"We got our feelers out," Dean said, his general answer any time any of them brought up Castiel. Harry still prayed to him every day, but he was losing hope. Apparently, though, Dean was also not in the mood to get morose because he said next, "I still can't believe you insulted the Devil to his face."

"Well, he is ugly," Harry said. "And seriously, how did he know about the lollipop guild? Do you think Lucifer actually sat down and watched Wizard of Oz?"

Dean chuckled as they reached the upstairs landing. "He was probably lookin' for inspiration."

"Bloody hell, watch out for flying monkeys."

"What, scared of a few hybrid primates?" Dean teased.

Harry snorted, leaving Dean's side to go to the guest room's door. Dean followed, however, to his slight surprise, as Harry said, "Hardly, but they are bloody creepy."

"Right, I forgot," Dean said, tone for all in the world sounding flirtatious. He stepped up to Harry's person, leaving hardly any space between them. Harry raised a brow as Dean pulled the mistletoe out of his pocket, lifting it over their heads. "You're the brave one."

Harry swallowed, finding himself unable to not rise to the silent challenge. "Am I?"

Dean smirked, then his free hand was in Harry's hair, yanking his head back, and warm, slightly dry lips were on Harry's, pressing firm. Harry took in a breath through his nose, welcoming the kiss and figuring it was just Dean getting him back.

But as the seconds ticked on and their rather mild, chaste kiss wettened both their lips deliciously,
Dean wasn't pulling away. Instead, his mouth opened more, Harry's bottom lip slipping between his, and Dean nipped at it with his teeth, opening both their mouths even more. Then Harry's entire world narrowed down to the absolutely mouth-watering taste of Dean's tongue. There was some tobacco taste from the pipe Dean smoked earlier, the sharp, almost stingy aftertaste of Dean's special holiday whiskey, a hint of something sweet, probably from Dean's pies, but mostly was just the hot, wet taste of tongue.

Before Harry could even think, he was pushing himself up on his toes, climbing those broad shoulders to get closer, to get more, and relishing the way both of Dean's arms circled around his waist, keeping him up and close. Then the large body was pressed fully against him, his back banging slightly awkwardly against the wall.

Dean grunted against him, and Harry did his best to chase the tongue, twirl his around it, making his own noises when Dean sucked on his. Though he had imagined many, many times of what it would be like pressed against another man, nothing in his wildest daydreams held a candle to Dean's strong arms, his flat, hard chest, the ripple of hard muscles pressed against Harry's belly as Dean took in deep breaths before diving back into Harry's mouth. And not to mention all the things Harry hadn't ever thought to imagine, such as the rub of Dean's stubble, the rough callouses when Dean's hand went under his shirt, the distinct smell of just male, or the small but deep, masculine sounds. Even the smacking sound of their lips sounded masculine somehow.

Harry's body had just decided it would have been an excellent idea to spread his legs for the man when Dean sucked his lip, gave another smacking open mouth kiss, then stepped back, Harry stumbling and catching himself on the wall from being released.

Dean winked at him, and he tossed the mistletoe at Harry, it hitting his chest and falling pathetically on the floor since Harry didn't even attempt to catch it. Dean said, fully collected, "Call me a coward again, I dare you."

Giving Harry a satisfied once over, Dean smirked and walked away, leaving a truly dumbfounded Harry in his wake.

Harry blinked at nothing a few times before licking his lips, finding Dean's taste there and confirming that he didn't just have a stroke. He gently rubbed his chin where he could still feel Dean's stubble.

That did just happen.

Harry jumped, at nothing more but his brain coming back online, only to jump again as he hissed, looking down at his crotch, shocked. A very telling bulge was there, as though staring up at Harry, proud of itself. Harry jumped a third time to get himself to get into action, took a few steps toward the stairs to go after Dean, thought better of it, rushed over to the guest room door, remembered the mistletoe, hurriedly snatched it from the floor, and almost dropped it twice in his haste to get into his room with the door firmly shut and locked behind him.

Once he did, he just stood there for probably a full minute before slowly coming to sit on the edge of the bed in the dark room.

He palmed his crotch, unable to help himself and sending it a glare as though it betrayed him. He continued gently palming nonetheless as he returned to stare at nothing, rolling the mistletoe in his other hand.

Eventually, he let out a long breath. "Fuck."
Dean Winchester was the most infuriating, aggravating, maddening, confusing, stupid, arrogant, teasing, competitive, absolutely exasperating big giant git Harry had ever met, and he was glad Sam was going to teach him kickboxing because someday, definitely someday soon, Harry was going to dropkick him.

Harry honestly couldn't remember the last time he got off, what with working himself dead over the apocalypse, grieving over his own real death, then the whole almost dying again by going head-to-head against the Devil. Not that he didn't have a healthy libido for someone his age; he just did the standard shower routine, over and done with. There were times in his life when he didn't have a healthy libido, and he knew because he had lived with four other boys his age. There was just too much trauma going on in his life sometimes. He was pretty ignorant, he knew, and he passed up a lot of chances to experiment with Ginny because… well, he wasn't all that into it, if he was honest. It was always one thing or another. He would suddenly remember she was Ron's sister, or he would get a pang of guilt from remembering one passing look from Dean Thomas, or he would think 'What if Mrs. and Mr. Weasley could see us right now', and no matter what, he would effectively ruin whatever Ginny had attempted to start.

Ginny was - most likely still was, back in their world - a vivacious girl. A beautiful girl. She could be maddening at times, confusing as well, teasing, sure, and hands down competitive with the rest of them. But she was always a lay-all-her-cards-down-on-the-table kind of person when it counted. With Ginny, she either liked someone, or she didn't, there wasn't much of an in-between, and if she didn't like someone, that didn't mean she had anything against them. Their personality or whatever just wasn't her cuppa. She was never infuriating, or aggravating, or stupid, and the furthest thing from arrogant.

Harry had imagined time and time again since his 'coming out', as it were, about the conversation he would have had with Ginny. How he cared deeply for her. How he loved her, in his own way. But how there was an itchy need he had for… something different. Something masculine. He could only ever imagine what her response would have been, or Ron's for that matter, or any of them, but he knew despite whatever immediate givings, the entire Weasley clan would have been supportive.

So, it was both enthralling and heartbreaking when Harry realised that Ginny was the one person Harry wanted to talk to the most, would have given anything to tell her all about his hallway experience with Dean, how erotic it was, how eye-opening, how… satisfying. He could imagine so easily them sharing a deep interest in the angles and hardness of a man, Ginny telling him the differences between different men from her small pool of experience. He could imagine them discussing it with Ron there, Ron being a little freaked out but trying to be supportive, and Hermione laughing at him. He could hear so easily Ron asking, "Wait, which Dean is the tongue story about, now? Thomas or the prick?"

It broke his heart.

Which completely bent him around the twist because his body, uncaring of his heart or his mind, was very interested in what Dean started, and was enthusiastic in letting Harry know, like his bloody cock was a dog who just learned a new trick and was excited to show its master.

Harry had no idea about other people, but for him, there was the bodily function of masturbation, then there was getting off.

Harry found himself furious, and he had no idea why. Or rather, couldn't settle on just one reason why. He was furious he would have been the butt of Dean's mistletoe joke if he didn't strike back at dinner and frustrated that he continued that rebuttal in the hallway. Because he had. He tried every which way to place the blame completely on Dean - how Dean was in the wrong for taking Harry's
kiss in the kitchen as permission for anything more - but Dean had asked him. It was unspoken, and teasing, and arrogant, but he had. Harry met Dean's challenge straight on, opened up to him, would have gladly continued.

Which was the teasing part of Dean that made him furious just as much. There was only one reason Dean did it, and it was simply to get back at Harry. Harry had the upper hand, so Dean took it back. He disarmed Harry the way Harry disarmed him. He pushed it just enough that Harry was absolute putty - which was infuriating - before stopping it, letting Harry know it wasn't real or whatever. Merlin, a part of Harry was thankful Dean stopped when he did because Harry was very much about to just spread his legs, which was a thought that was both embarrassing and very, very appealing.

Very, very appealing.

Which brought Harry to the competitive part of Dean that was making him furious. All the ways to get Harry back, and that was how he did it? It couldn't have been something to make him blush in front of Sam and Bobby, no, not for Dean. He had to bump it up to NC-17, show Harry that he could make Harry completely dazed - and god, how embarrassing was it that Harry was pretty sure there was no way Dean didn't feel his hard on, that he didn't know the effect the encounter had. And what the bloody hell was Harry supposed to do now? Ignore it? He doubted Dean was going to. Try to get him back? How far would he have to go? Of course, there was the other choice, which was to admit Dean won whatever twisted competition or whatever. The Mistletoe Game, he was calling it in his head. Which he was sorely tempted to do because, though throughout the night during more… physical ponderings and the idea of getting him back seemed like a wonderful one indeed, in reality, Harry didn't know what that would lead to, what that would require or entail, and he had next to no experience. Also, though he was hardly anywhere near a place where he was looking for something solid and romantic, sex wasn't a game. He didn't want to gain step-by-step experience in a push-and-pull with Dean bloody Winchester. He had been entertaining the idea over the last few weeks of just letting go and experiencing, like going back to the Male Box or something. But that still wasn't a game.

Harry was teetering on the fence between telling Dean off and ignoring him altogether when he decided to finally leave his room the next morning, only having gotten a few hours' sleep, resolved to let the moment decide how he felt about the whole thing. That was how he found himself slapped with the exasperating part of Harry's feelings toward the man because Dean was already gone! He had left early that morning to go check out the lead in Wichita, Kansas.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Harry blurted when he was told. "How bloody early did he leave? It's only seven a.m.!!"

"Uh..." Sam responded, frowning. Bobby was in the kitchen, warming up leftovers for breakfast, and undoubtedly was hearing them. Harry took a deep breath to calm down as Sam said, "Yeah, he left pretty early. Why? Did you need him?"

"No," Harry said sharply. "I most definitely do not need bloody Dean Winchester."

He tried to spin on his heels and leave, cool off a little before he completely embarrassed himself, when Bobby called, "Get your ass in here and eat!"

Harry obeyed, only because he didn't want to deal with an annoyed Bobby, and Sam laughed after him, apparently assuming Harry's inquiry was about going with, and reassured Harry that in probably another week, he would be strong enough to join.
Dean didn't return for another two days, Wichita having led him to Chicago then to some town in Arkansas before he could make his way back. Harry could honestly say Dean wasn't staying away on purpose, both leads being too good to pass up. It was good having Sam stick around as well, because Harry still got really tired in the afternoon and every now and then pushed himself too hard. Bobby could take care of himself, but he couldn't take care of Harry as well.

By the time the elder Winchester had returned, the Christmas lights had long since been put away, the majority of the leftovers from Christmas dinner finished or thrown out, and the apocalypse was back in full-swing.

The memory of their shared kiss seemed far away, yet, Harry sometimes could still feel it - feel it right down to his toes. He ignored it for the most part, but still felt hopelessly awkward when Dean returned. Dean greeted them in his usual fashion, as though nothing was different or awkward at all, and Harry, who was in the kitchen to make lunch for everyone, reminded himself that he wasn't in school anymore. This was adulthood. That kind of thing happened all the time without having to attach anything to it. Dean bought the mistletoe as a joke, pure and simple. A joke Harry turned around him, that was all. And Dean retaliated, because he was an infuriating git. Also, everything was with alcohol, and wasn't there some kind of unspoken adult rule about alcohol and things like that? Take it with a grain of salt or something? Or was salt a tequila thing?

Harry was making a dish his aunt had him make on too many occasions to count. The recipe was so engrained in him, he didn't even have to think about it. He volunteered to make lunch this time, both he and Sam attempting to give Bobby a break after that giant Christmas feast and neither really in the mood for fast food. He was chopping carrots as he listened to the other three in the study discuss what possible leads and busts they had.

By the time the main dish was in the oven and Harry had begun on the two side dishes he decided to pair with it (Harry always seemed to make their meals more wholesome - though not necessarily healthy - due to habit while cooking), Dean had come into the kitchen and jumped to sit up on the counter next to where Harry was peeling potatoes.

"How's the Skele-thingy potion?" Dean asked, stifling a yawn.

Harry winced at the reminder of his potion-making skills. "I need to start over on that, actually. I added the African Red Pepper before the African Sea Salt. Speaking of, the sink basin Bobby has in the basement? Yeah, don't use that until I fix it."

Dean chuckled. He opened his mouth to say something, but Harry quickly interrupted, knowing what he was going to say.

"And no, Bobby doesn't know yet. Sam does, he was there when it happened, but I asked him to let me tell him, yeah?"

Dean chuckled again, shaking his head. "Sure. So, are you going to try again or move on to that other one?"

"Move on," Harry answered, wandlessly levitating the kitchen's bin to brush the potato peels inside while also wandlessly levitating the potatoes into a strainer to wash again. "I'm going to try Dittany before anything else. We could use that."

"Need anything special for it?"
"A copper cauldron, other than a few extra ingredients."

Dean nodded, not even reacting as Harry continued to use his magic to prepare the meal. He wasn't in the habit of it, but he found it easier when trying to multitask. That was all.

"So, uh…" Dean opened after several moments of silence between them, the only sound over Harry's work being Bobby and Sam discussing one thing or another in the study.

Harry clenched his jaw. So, this was it. They were going to talk about the kiss. Which was good. Harry had cooled off some, could see the humour in it now, though he still wasn't in a position where he wanted to treat things like that like a game. He wasn't so much angry anymore as he was… nervous, he supposed. He didn't want to continue anything, thought that was best, and really, a holiday was nice, but they needed to be focusing on other things-

"So, about Death…" Dean continued.

Harry felt himself freeze while his stomach dropped.

"What about him?" he asked tightly, waving a hand to turn the dial down for the oven.

Dean sighed, dropping his voice. "Listen, I haven't told Sam and Bobby about your PTSD thing. Cas fixed you up pretty damn good, from what I can tell, and though it's something to watch, it's… Look, I know how it is. It isn't something I would want broadcasted either."

Harry blinked at him. He was surprised, to say the least, and he found himself disappointed this was what Dean wanted to talk about. He guessed, yeah, they really were back to the apocalypse.

Dean seemed to be expecting him to respond, so Harry shook himself out of it, stopped using his magic altogether, and started mashing the potatoes by hand with the potato masher. "Thanks," he said, still tightly. "I appreciate that. I really do."

"Sure," Dean said slowly. He waited a beat, then jumped down and came to stand close to Harry's side. "Harry… I know how much you must miss home, but I don't think Death can take you back there."

Harry froze again. That was the absolute last thing he was expecting, and it made his throat even tighter. He didn't move, didn't look up.

"Who knows, maybe he can, but… we'll see about it, okay? Look," Dean sighed again, lowering his voice even more. "I stopped by this church what-cha-ma-call-it in Arkansas, asked some of the higher up's in the clergy, but there's nothing in the Christian lore about Death taking any more of an active hand other than during the apocalypse. That doesn't mean there isn't hope, but…"

At his hesitance, Harry finally did look up, taking extra care to make sure his face was completely blank and unreadable.

"I don't want to see you get your hopes up, only to fall back down, man."

Harry bit his lip, looking away. He gave a sharp nod and hoped that would be the end of it.

Dean hovered, as though he wanted to say more, but then he clapped Harry on the shoulder and left, joining the others in the study.

So, that was the connection Dean had settled on between his suspicion of Harry and Death and what happened at the factory. Harry had wondered, almost asked a couple of times, but he was glad he left
it alone and let Dean come to his own conclusion. How he got there, Harry couldn't begin to fathom. And honestly, he was really surprised Dean didn't tell the others about his PTSD. He was a lot better though, and according to Dean, better as in Harry was night and day. Something to watch, yes, Harry agreed, but night and day nonetheless. And, Harry reasoned, Dean had no reason to think anything else in connection to Death and Harry. Yes, he picked up Harry having an unexpected reaction to Death, probably every time, but he had no reason to suspect it could be anything else. After all, Harry had obviously been hiding something, then revealed something he had been hiding, it would make sense for Dean to do his best to put those two together.

It was actually touching, in a weird, morbid way, that Dean assumed Harry's anxiety about Death was about getting back home. He even made a special trip for Harry to see about the possibility. It also planted that very idea in his head, sparking a hope in him, and holy hell…

Dean Winchester was the most infuriating, aggravating, maddening, confusing, stupid, arrogant, teasing, competitive, absolutely exasperating, sweetest git Harry had ever met, and he was glad they still had some leftover chocolate pie because in twenty minutes, maybe twenty-five, Harry would be serving it to him.

Finally, they got two solid leads on the West coast that yielded something. Sam went to check out one, and Dean went to check out the other. The omens left no question that Pestilence or something high-up and close to Pestilence had been there. It gave them a bit more confidence in what to look for as well.

When the brothers returned, though, Harry could have kicked himself. He was so caught up in the leads, he didn't even realise that those couple of days they were gone, he could have had hours seeing about repairing his phoenix wand. He knew he was avoiding it a little, but to waste all that time.

He was frustrated, too, because unless Harry was sleeping and resting to heal, he couldn't get any alone time in general, let alone to experiment with his wands. Even if he spent too long in the loo, someone would be knocking on the door asking if he was alright. Harry tried to squeeze out as much alone time as he could in the mornings after he woke up, taking his time to actually get out of bed. But if he pushed it too long, there would be another knock on his door.

It wasn't like Dean, Sam, and Bobby didn't understand the need to recharge, of course. At least once a day, Sam would request no one bother him for a little bit, and sometimes Bobby would just give them this look if disturbed. They would be left alone, the house blanketed in precious silence, and Harry appreciated those moments and tried to hold onto them, squeeze as much out of those as well.

But that wasn't enough for Harry, and Harry found himself generally less patient by the end of the day. And it bothered him especially because, though he knew some of it was care for his well-being, it felt like they didn't trust him to be alone for too long. (Though, considering if he was, one of the first things he would do would be to sneakily fix his other wand that they didn't know about behind their back, so he did have a fair amount of conflicting emotions about the whole thing.)

So, when Dean left to go pick up some things they ordered at the post office, and Sam wanted Bobby to show him how the new hand-controls for Bobby's truck was going to go, Harry knew it was pointless to ask to stay behind and followed them to the garage.

It was a good thing, of course, overall, that Bobby was finally getting hand-controls to be able to drive, and when Dean returned, he also had some new books that might be helpful to their cause. It
was all good news, so Harry tried not to begrudge the company.

Dean announced he was going to shower and left them to it. As Harry, Sam, and Bobby made their way back to the house not long after, it took a long moment for Harry to realise that this, though, could actually be an opportune moment for his wands if not his stress. Bobby and Sam were completely engrossed in the new books, and Dean had just gone for his shower. He had maybe ten minutes before anyone started to look for him.

He slowed down to stay behind Bobby and Sam and was pleased to see them pushing on into the house without noticing if he was following. He quietly shut the screen door, then equally quietly but hastily made his way back to the garage. He went into one of the side workrooms where there was only one door and the windows were either blocked by shelves and clutter or by grime and dust.

Harry stepped over a few things to get to the back table, double checked he was alone, then carefully pulled the pieces of his phoenix wand out of Hagrid’ pouch he kept around his neck. It was still held together by the thin phoenix hair.

"Hey," he couldn't help but greet it. He took a moment to rub his thumb over one of the pieces, sensing the broken magic there.

Biting his lip, he gently laid it on the worktable and pulled the Elder Wand from his pocket.

He stared at the phoenix wand. Outside of the somehow painful looking break, it was the same as always. Not polished but dulled with use with some scratches and smudges. There was a time in his life when he was embarrassed by it - that time during the weighing of wands for the Triwizard Tournament. Which, that seemed like a lifetime ago - was a lifetime ago, technically. No, he wasn't embarrassed anymore. He was proud. This wand, his wand, was a friend, had been through everything with him, and was just as battered and affected as he was.

He smiled at it.

Taking a breath, he quickly tried to calculate how much power this was going to take. He knew nothing about wandmaking, but in this world, Harry was more powerful, and the Elder Wand was very powerful in and of itself, so surely, it wouldn't take much, right?

Deciding to start simply and cut his losses to try again later if it didn't work, Harry pointed the Elder Wand and spelled, "Reparo."

The pieces of the wand rattled, vibrated, then snapped together, a golden glow producing from the crack until it slithered down and disappeared as the crack sealed itself.

That was it? That was all it took?

Harry huffed a small laugh. It wasn't that easy, was it?

Tenderly, he picked up the phoenix wand, and oh, it was alive. It was back. He could feel it. A wide grin on his face, Harry flicked it once and cast a wordless Lumos. He Nox it just as quickly, amazed at feeling the familiar and greatly missed connection between him and it. It wasn't until that moment he realised how afraid he was that the runes from the Elder Wand burned into his skin would have ruined the connection, but Harry could feel as strong of a bond with it as before. Perhaps because it was the Elder Wand that fixed it?

It filled him with incredible happiness and giddiness. He didn't care how unreasonable it might have sounded - he felt like he wasn't alone anymore. A grief he had been feeling since that Christmas Eve when it was broken was eliminated by the simple touch of his wand, repaired and fully functional.
He would have to run many more tests on it, of course, but the hope swelling in him felt too good to try to dissuade with realities.

A noise behind him made him jump and spin around, hiding both wands behind his back.

"You alright?" Sam asked from the doorway.

Harry swallowed, letting his left hand holding the Elder Wand drop. "Yeah. What's up?" he asked, slowly and carefully tucking the phoenix wand under his shirt and into the waistband of his trousers.

Sam raised an eyebrow, looking Harry over, obvious suspicion coming over him. "I could ask you the same."

"Just looking at things," Harry said simply, gesturing around him at the clutter and mess.

"With your wand?" Sam questioned.

Harry shrugged, letting his now wandless right hand drop as well. "You startled me."

"Right," Sam said, simple and disbelieving.

Harry shrugged again, pocketing his wand as he picked his way through to the door and coming to step around Sam. For the life of him, he couldn't think of a single lie or half-truth to help him out here. "Is there something you wanted?"

"No," Sam said slowly. "Were you looking for something specific?"

Harry shook his head, now outside the workroom, and turned to unhurriedly make his way to the house, berating himself because, yeah, that was subtle and not obvious at all. But he wasn't about to just stand there and lie, he decided. There was some guilt there over the Elder Wand, but the phoenix wand was his. That wand, ultimately, wasn't any of their business.

He pushed his way in through the back door, Sam having not followed. He looked around, pulling out the phoenix wand, and upon not seeing anyone, peeked through the curtains on the window on the door to make double sure Sam wasn't there and shoved the wand in Hagrid's pouch. He was facing the corner as he did so and jumped a mile high when he turned to find Dean, hair wet from his shower, walking down the hallway to him.

Dean had his phone in his hand and flipped it shut, eyes hard. The brothers and their texting, Harry swore.

"What'cha got there?" he asked bluntly.

Harry shrugged once again, showing the closed pouch, and made to move around Dean into the kitchen.

Dean's hand shot out, wrapping around the pouch to examine.


As Harry pushed past him, Dean said, "Okay. What is it?"

"It's just a pouch," Harry answered, annoyed. He ripped open the fridge door and got himself a water bottle to have something to do with his hands. He saw Bobby in the study, reading and not paying them any attention.
"A pouch holding what?" Dean continued to question.

"My things," Harry snapped. Merlin, beside the fact that Harry actually did have something to hide, Harry was very quickly resenting that, apparently, he had to share everything about him. "It's private. Leave it alone."

"So private you had to go outside and hide?"

"Piss off," Harry snapped loudly, making Bobby look up. He gave Bobby an apologetic look then turned to Dean fully. "Please do let me know where and where not I'm allowed to be, won't you? Because apparently I missed the last memo."

"What's in the pouch, Harry?"

"My prick," Harry spat, then he stomped into the study, roughly throwing himself on the cot and pulling a book to him, effectively ending the conversation. He didn't miss the exchange glance between Dean and Bobby, though, nor the one among the three of them when Sam returned, no doubt having searched the workroom Harry was in. It took a while for the air to change back into an easiness there was before.

The relaxed air between him and the brothers didn't come back though.

... 

They pretty much left Harry alone for the rest of the day, and Harry made sure to keep in their line of sight as a kind of olive branch. Still, he couldn't help but feel disappointed when the next morning, the brothers announced they were going to Oregon to check out another lead, and they would be back in a few days.

"That's one hell of a pout," Bobby chuckled when he found Harry at the kitchen table, looking at the Marauder's Map.

"I'm not pouting," Harry sighed.

Bobby pulled out a couple of beers despite it only being the morning and handed one to Harry. It wasn't Harry's taste, but he was getting used to it.

"Want to tell me what's on your mind?" Bobby asked.

Harry sent him a sharp look. "If this is a ploy from the brothers -"

Bobby raised a hand to stop him. "It's not, son. Just little ol' me, checking in."

Harry took off his glasses to play with them but didn't say anything.

"What's buggin' ya?" Bobby pressed.

"I'm fine," Harry answered automatically.

"Mhm. What's buggin' ya?"

The repeat of the question made Harry huff a laugh, and he put his glasses back on. He wandlessly waved his hand over the map as he mumbled, "Mischief managed," before he put it away.

Then he blurted, "Why do they have to be like that? It took fighting the Devil to feel like they really trusted me, and one tiny, little thing, and it's over."
"Eh," Bobby sighed, "it's how they've always been. John taught them boys to trust only family."

Harry nodded slowly. "I forget about him," he said honestly. "I keep forgetting you didn't raise

them."

Bobby seemed to preen a little at that, as though proud. "I've always been there for 'em. It wasn't

until John died, though, that they started to really let me in."

Harry cocked his head. "Really? The way you three are, I thought you've always been this close."

"Nah," Bobby answered, taking a swig of his beer. "If it wasn't them keepin' me at arm's length, it

was their daddy."

"Why?"

Harry nodded, understanding and appreciating the little insight into the brothers.

"I reckon you didn't get much of a childhood either."

Bobby shrugged. "I thought they should be kids, y'know, play ball, make friends. He thought they

needed to learn to protect themselves. That it was more important for them to grow up sooner rather

than later."

"Why?"

Harry made a noncommittal noise and began sliding his beer bottle gently between his hands.

"However they were raised, they seemed to have grown up to be good men."

Bobby hummed, "That they have. And you seem to be fairing pretty good yourself."

"Thanks."

Harry let his mind wander, Bobby not interrupting him, and Harry thought over how it would have

been liked to be raised as a solider. Whatever Dumbledore's intentions or actions, he did at least

attempt to give Harry a childhood. It brought the question how much Dumbledore knew about the

Dursleys, but besides that, there was Hogwarts, at least. Harry had that. The Winchesters always had

Bobby though. And maybe Bobby's was kind of like the Winchesters' Hogwarts. A home they could

return to, a sanctuary of types, something they could count on.

That was when it occurred to Harry for the first time: "I'm homeless."

"Huh?" Bobby asked. He had finished his beer and taken Harry's, which was fine by Harry, and was

looking through some notes he had by his line of phones, most likely checking up on where other

hunters were and whatnot.

"I'm homeless," Harry repeated, feeling oddly removed from the revelation. "I mean, I guess

technically, I have been, but also technically, while we were on the run, Grimmauld's Place was still

my home. It was my house, at any rate, just taken over by Death Eaters. But still. I just realised.

Without you guys, where would I even go?"

He trailed off, letting his thoughts ponder places he could go, where he could stay, what he would

do. He didn't think he actually had it in him to walk away from an apocalypse, but even so, would he

be able to get a regular job, live among muggles, and not do anything about the monsters he knew to

be out there? He doubted it. It was something he needed to think about, though. After the

apocalypse, however that was going to end, if Harry survived, then his main focus would be on

getting home, right? His actual home, with the people he loved. In the meantime, he could use the

skills the brothers were teaching him to stay afloat, though he would have to eventually deal with the
morality of basically stealing and be a criminal for a living.

He shook himself out of it, sighed, and rubbed his eye. "May I use your computer? I should go back to the CDC website and double check their alerts."

When he looked up, Bobby was giving him an odd look, but seemed to shake himself out of it too. "Actually," Bobby said, stretching his arms, "I had a different idea."

"Yeah?"

"I thought today you could drive us into town, and we can use this new fancy-dancy credit card I've made to get you your own computer."

"Really?" Harry said, immediately perking up. "Can I get a new phone too? One with a keyboard?"

Bobby chuckled. "Knew you'd ask for that. Sure thing. Come on, let's go before all the 9-to-5's take lunch."

Five hours later, Harry was pretty sure Bobby regretted his generosity, but Harry hadn't felt this excited since maybe getting new things for his firebolt.

Harry got a Macbook Pro, used and refurbished but in excellent condition, and sat with one of the store clerks for a good couple of hours learning the ins and outs of it. The clerk almost had Harry buying a cordless mouse and other accessories like that, but thankfully, Bobby was there to knock sense back into him. Quite literally by smacking him upside the head, though it didn't hurt at all. Harry did, however, get screen protectors and small portable case for it. Next, they moved on to phones, and Harry was very impressed when the clerk showed him what was called the iPhone 4. Now, these phones made sense to him. If muggles had this technology, why were they still creating bloody flip phones? Bobby was not impressed whatsoever, but Harry used three of his own cards along with Bobby's and bought an iPhone nonetheless, sitting with the clerk again to program and personalise it. He bought a case for it, screen protectors, and was sorely tempted to get a wireless Bluetooth headset.

Ultimately, they spent a lot of money that day, but Harry felt better.

Over the next few days, Harry was relieved to see the rest of his strength returning. His magic wasn't fully recovered but was replenishing quickly. His appetite increased as well, making Bobby complain about him eating Bobby out of house and home, but Harry knew he didn't really mean it since he was the one encouraging Harry to eat all the time.

On New Year's, Bobby had Harry drive his truck, a manual that Harry was getting used to but not very good at driving, into town where they parked in an abandon parking lot and watched fireworks from a neighbourhood close by. They toasted each other at the count down, Bobby with beer and Harry with Pepsi, and then drove back to have a quiet night.

Other than that, and a few meals (and the few times Harry successfully snuck off to test his phoenix wand which was operating just the same as before it broke), Bobby and Harry worked. Harry knew he was overcompensating a bit because of the guilt about his Elder Wand secret, but he also genuinely wanted to help. There was a small part of him that realised he was working so hard to win back some of the trust he might have lost with the brothers, but when he thought about that, it made him want to rebel and prove he didn't care what they thought. So, that went into the nice little avoidance bin inside his head.
Harry was one hundred percent the apocalypse, but Bobby a few times had to pause in what he was doing to help out another hunter. Some law enforcement in Pulaski, Tennessee called three times waiting to confirm the 'agent' looking into their cases, and at another point, Bobby had to do some research into whatever monster another hunter was after. Harry didn't know what kind of monster, but he saw a picture in one of Bobby's books, and he was very okay with not knowing.

At another point, Harry was sitting at the kitchen table with his Macbook eating a bowl of cereal when an older bloke with dark skin came stomping into the kitchen from the back door. He froze when he saw Harry, frowned, and barked, "Who the hell are you?"

Harry opened his mouth to throw the question back at the man, but then the man shook his head sharply.

"Wait, I forgot; I don't care. Where's Bobby?"

Harry pointed toward the living room, and the man gave Harry a quick nod and walked away. Whatever he needed, his visit only lasted a few minutes, and Harry smirked to himself when he heard the man complaining to Bobby that he must have been getting old because it took forever for him to find Bobby's house. Harry had to take down some enchantments for the brothers to find their way back, but obviously, a few he left up were working well.

Then, the morning the brothers were due to return, a knock came to Bobby's door.

"Want me to?" Harry asked. He was sitting in the armchair in the study, once again reviewing the CDC website. Bobby was in the kitchen and grunted as an answer. Knowing that meant Bobby didn't care one way or another, Harry got up and went to the door.

He froze immediately.

Harry didn't know the official ladders of whatever of American Law Enforcement, but there was no mistaking the brown uniform, the starred badge pinned to it, and the word SHERIFF.

"Er…"

"Hello," the woman said, looking surprised to see him. "Bobby around?"

Harry nodded and stepped to the side a little, calling out for Bobby but making it clear he wasn't inviting the woman in. He opened the door a little wider when Bobby came down the hall, so he could see who it was, and once he did, Harry was expecting a frown and harsh words. Not the smile he graced her and them to embrace.

"You have a butler now?" the sheriff asked, nodding to Harry.

"Yep, and he only accepts cash tips," Bobby grinned. "Harry, this is Jody Mills, the sheriff. Jody, this is Harry Potter, he's been helpin' us out."

Harry shook the sheriff's hand when she offered it, and soon the door was shutting behind her. They didn't go deeper into the house, though. Clearly, this was a quick visit.

"Listen," Sheriff Mills opened, "there's been reports a few towns over. Lot of weird stuff happening."

"Where at?"

"Cherry Creek and West Fork."
"I can get someone on it."

"That's what I thought you'd say," she frowned at him, crossing her arms. "You did that the last two times too. What, are you retired from hunting now?"

Harry felt himself relax, reassured this woman was in-the-know and not there for police business. Bobby, however, tensed a little.

"Not retired, just busy. Besides," he gestured to his wheelchair, "you think I can go chasing after some monsters?"

"There's still a lot you could do," Sheriff Mills answered. "But I'm not talking about that. There's been a lot of weird lately, Bobby."

Bobby shared a look with Harry, and Harry got the message loud and clear to leave. He excused himself, told the woman it was nice to meet her, collected his things and went upstairs. The whole exchange did make him wonder, though, on exactly how many people were in the hunter community, and who knew about the apocalypse?

The two men who killed Dean and Sam on the day they met were hunters who killed them because they found out the Winchesters' connection to the apocalypse, so he guessed, perhaps the fewer who knew, the better.

... 

"It's been five minutes," Harry complained, still doing jumping jacks.

"It'll be five minutes when I say it's been five minutes," Dean answered, staring down at the kitchen timer in his hands. "Or, well, when this thingy does."

"I think you're moving the dial back," Harry replied.

Dean just smirked.

Harry didn't slow down in his research when the brothers returned but was careful to get enough rest. Now the lead they were about to go look into was one Harry himself found, and Harry wanted to go with. Not that Bobby's house wasn't great and all, but Harry was ready to get out and do something. He was getting cabin fever which was frustrating and odd since he was also not getting any breaks or alone time. Really, he just wanted to go somewhere different and be by himself a while.

When the timer finally went off, Harry stopped doing jumping jacks and offer his wrist for Dean to check his pulse. Dean did, looked surprised, then shrugged. "Yeah, alright. You're good. Go pack."

Harry grinned widely and rushed up the stairs. He already packed, so he was back in no time. Bobby chuckled at him and shook his head.

"You boys be careful," he said.

"We will, Bobby. See you soon," Sam returned, and the three of them bid goodbyes and left.

It was a long drive, going southwest, during which Dean went on a Zeppelin binge and Harry got to put his music and radio apps to the test with borrowed headphones as he added to his journal. It was late when they arrived at their destination, and they picked a cheap motel near some train tracks for the night.
Harry was the first to shower, which he couldn't put off because being back on the road with Dean was turning out to be... eye opening, at the very least. Dean had changed into night clothes there right open in the room, and Harry couldn't take his eyes off of the man. In the shower, it was all he could do to not make loud noises as he remembered what that body felt like pressed against him. He could handle the joke of the kiss, the one-off of it, but he was beginning to prove himself very, very attracted to the man. He had no idea what to do with that, so for the time, he was going to put that also in that avoidance bin of his mind until times like then when he could pull it out and relieve some stress. He was pretty sure it wasn't healthy, but it worked.

Absolutely none of it mattered when he came out of the loo in soft trousers and loose t-shirt to find Dean leaning against the kichenette counter, ankles crossed, with Hagrid's pouch on the counter beside him. It was a blow to see, considering he left it by his duffle. Dean had a beer in his hand, taking a sip, and was absolutely unapologetic.

"Sam went out to get some breakfast things for in the morning," Dean announced.

Harry clenched his fists. "I hate to break it to you, mate, but Sam getting breakfast things does not give you permission to go through my things."

Dean shrugged. "I think you and I both know I couldn't open it. Which, why is that? Y'know, at first I wasn't gonna really look, but when something's as locked down as Fort Knox, I start to ask some questions."

"That's not the point," Harry scoffed. Somewhere in him, he felt that Elder Wand Guilt simmer again, but mostly he was overwhelmed with something close to... hurt. "I thought we were over this."

"You never gave us the chance to be under this," Dean countered, tossing back the rest of his beer and throwing the bottle in the sink.

"Because there shouldn't even be a this," Harry argued, becoming genuinely angry. "It's my things, I can do with them what I like, and you have no say because it's none of your bloody business."

"There's a difference between hiding and privacy, Harry."

"Yeah, and there's a difference between being curious and crossing a line."

"There's something in there that you don't want us to know about," Dean challenged, crossing his arms. "That spells out trouble for me right there."

"Because I don't want to share something?" Harry asked incredulously. "There are a lot of things in there that I don't want you to know about. There's a lot of things in general that I don't want you to know about, and there are even more things that I don't ever want to even talk about, let alone play some bloody show-and-tell with you. They're my things, leave them alone."

"This thing is around your neck pretty much twenty-four-seven," Dean continued, holding up the pouch by its strings. "And you're pretty much around us twenty-four-seven, so if you're hiding something dangerous, I think we very damn well have a right -"

Harry growled, "You hold the key to the most dangerous stock pile we have in that trunk of yours, don't you? Most of which I'm around a lot, and I don't go poking around, do I? I respect that it's your shit, and trust that you would tell me if I need to know something."

"That's what you want, for us to just trust that you'll tell us if we need to know?"
"That's exactly what you expect from me, isn't it?"

"Oh, stop doing that British crap!"

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"Where you turn everything into a goddamn question that I have to agree to!" Dean yelled, clearly exasperated. "Give me a straight answer, is there something dangerous in here or not?" he lifted the pouch again.

"No, I will not answer you," Harry said, standing his ground. "That pouch is mine, holds my private things, and you don't get to know about them. That's final."

"That is not how this works," Dean barked.

"Yes. It is." Harry held out his hand and wordlessly Accio the pouch, which flew from Dean's hand to his. Harry didn't break eye contact as he dropped it around his neck. "This is personal and private, and I cannot believe you tried to open it."

Dean's jaw muscle twitched. "I never would have if you would just be honest."

"I am honest!" Harry shouted. "I haven't lied to you, Dean! I told you I'm not telling you, and that's me, one-hundred-percent honest. I also told you it's private, and you've completely ignored that boundary. I left my pouch out here because I trusted you, so thanks for spitting that in my face."

"Nah-uh," Dean said sharply, slicing his hand through the air. "You don't get to pull that -"

"Yes, I do!" Harry snapped, and something that had been building inside him for a while now suddenly spilt over. "I have done everything you've asked! I have been giving you and Sam my all. I am doing everything I can to help. I am working every minute of every day, learning how to fight, how to steal, learning how to shoot a bloody fucking gun, doing everything I can, giving everything I can, using everything I can. Am I really not allowed to have something that's just mine, just me, private, that I don't have to share with the both of you? I literally cannot be alone unless it's to 'get rest', heal and sleep or whatever the bloody fuck Dr. Dean bloody Winchester demands of me, without one of you checking in on me. I need alone time, Dean! I need to be able to breathe! I need to be able to just fucking sit, in silence, be in my head, think. Do you have any idea how hard it is to give that up? How hard it is to just fucking function without it?! I need space, I need privacy. After everything I've done so far, after everything I've given, is that really too bloody much to ask?!"

Dean's face was completely blank, which pushed Harry over the edge even more.

Not wanting to deal with any of it anymore, Harry spat, "Fuck you," and Apparated to Leonard's where he knew Leonard would let him pout and wallow out on his porch and not bother him once.

By the time the sun was coming up and Leonard brought him a cup of his herbal mix, Harry had decided that he was a well and true arse. He shouldn't have blown up on Dean, but he had no idea so much of that had been bottled up in him. Where the sudden need for Dean to understand that Harry needed space and privacy - really, truly needed it - came from, he had no idea. But it was strong and overwhelmed him. There was a difference he wanted Dean to see between being alone while he was too weak to even get himself to the loo and being alone, like he had been since he left the motel, physically fine and able to think. To sit in silence, let his mind wander, even let his body to wander some, taking in the
moment and do absolutely nothing. Just those few hours already did Harry a lot of good and recharged him. It would have recharged him more if he wasn't also spending a lot of energy swinging back and forth from being angry with Dean to being angry with himself.

One of the main issues his brain seemed to be having was, of bloody course, the whole secrecy with the Elder Wand thing. Part of why he felt so guilty about the night before was because Harry didn't just throw at Dean how he felt, he also hit where it would hurt and make Dean feel guilty. He didn't know why; whether it was because a lot of what was in his pouch really was personal like that (as was the pouch itself), that he needed Dean to see why he wanted it to be genuinely left alone, or if it was the more cunning, snakey side of him trying to effectively hide his secret in a pile of trauma where he knew the brothers wouldn't approach.

Either way, he needed to apologise. He was better than that. He knew he was.

Then there was this horrible ugly spot in him about the secret itself. He could try coming up with excuse after excuse, and they seemed valid and reasonable, but when it came down to it, he had questions on whether or not he deserved to be trusted. He wanted Dean's, the brothers', trust a lot more than he realised, but was he earning it keeping something like Death's wand a secret?

He didn't know, but it was his phoenix wand in his pouch, and that was very personal to Harry. He had a long history with his wand. He could have easily told them it was an old wand broken, and he realised that here, on this planet, he could fix it. It would solve everything. But that was the thing: he didn't want to lie, and if he had to tell himself it was technically not a lie to convince himself to do it, then that should tell him right there where his morals landed with it.

Harry had to Apparate inside the motel room since he didn't have a keycard when he left. Or shoes, for that matter. The brothers were up and dressed in suits, obviously getting ready to go out. Harry wrung his hands, refusing to meet either of their eyes.

"Er…"

"Here," Dean said, and a clothes bag was tossed at him. "Copy that suit and get dressed."

"What?" Harry said, surprised.

Dean looked back to his usual self, and so did Sam surprisingly, and they were smiling at him.
"You're coming with us, help us question the hospital."

Harry blinked. Just like this? Like the night before didn't happen? Merlin, Harry sometimes really couldn't keep up with the Winchesters. He spent all night worrying himself, for what? Nothing? "Are you serious? You aren't having me stay behind and do more research?"

"If that's what you want…” Dean smirked.

"No!" Harry said quickly, jumping at this chance. "No, I want to come."

"We all do," Dean grinned, winking at him.

"Gross, Dean," Sam said flatly, but Harry snorted.

So, Harry supposed this was Dean's way of saying fight over? Or maybe even apologise. Or, bringing Harry along was just a way to keep an eye on him? Really, with Dean, it could go either way. He would take the opportunity, though, and he quickly copied the suit and magically trimmed it to size.
When he stepped out of the loo fully dressed, Dean whistled. "Definitely picked the right suit."

"Looks good, Harry," Sam smiled. "You ready?"

"Sure," Harry nodded, but then he hesitated. "Er… Dean, about last night -"

"Save it," Dean said, shaking his head. "I was out of line, you were dramatic, it's our usual dance. Don't worry about it."

Harry huffed. "Dramatic?"

"Dude, you did everything but drop the mic and exit stage left," Dean chuckled, opening the motel door for them.

They bickered to the car about Harry's dramatics, in a way that somehow made Harry feel comforted, until Sam got them back to why they were there. Harry swore, nothing and no one in this world or his could give him whiplash like a Winchester.

The lead was just more swine flu, but this outbreak happened a lot more quickly than the others. The town also had several more omens than usual, too, once Harry was able to confirm they weren't pranks. That was something that took him a little bit to learn - a lot of things that looked weird and supernatural were actually rebellious kids having a laugh. He thought, though, that he was getting the hang of telling them apart.

The hospital was an average one for an average sized town. They entered through some lobby that then sent them to the surgical unit with Sam muttering, "Here we go again." So, instead of FBI, they switched their IDs to CDC ones. Harry was becoming increasingly familiar with its logo. It only took flashing them once to have a nurse lead them to a doctor. Despite joining them, the brothers did make a point to tell Harry to let them do the talking.

The doctor was young and pretty, and very busy, and merely looked at their badges before she was throwing medical face masks at them, so they could follow her to ask their questions while she worked.

"Check it out," Dean whispered to him and Sam as they pushed into a waiting room, "I look like the King of Pop."

Sam rolled his eyes and sighed, but Harry made a mental note to look up what Michael Jackson had to do with anything.

"Too soon?" Dean asked, and when Sam gave him a sharp look, Dean nodded quickly, "Too soon."

"Don't get me wrong, I'm glad the CDC is here," the doctor was saying, "but what we really need is vaccine."

"You got that right," Dean agreed, looking at all the people there.

It was a depressing sight, Harry had to admit. The waiting room was packed full of very sick muggles, coughing with red noses. Some of them were already hooked up to IV bags.

"Well, tell me," Sam opened, "have you noticed anything unusual about the strain? Any signs of behavioural change, like aggression, maybe?"

The doctor furrowed her brows. "Excuse me?"
"Have the flu victims shown any signs of, uh, homicidal tendencies?" Dean asked.

The doctor blinked. "Uh… Symptomatically speaking, we're looking at a relatively mild case of swine flu here. Probably add up to a miserable week off of work, and that's about it."

"So, nothing unusual?" Dean continued.

She thought about it a moment as another attending came up to hand her a chart and pen. "Day and a half ago, we didn't have a single case. Now we're looking at over seventy - the infectious equivalent of a briefcase bomb. So, yeah, I might call that a little unusual," she added looking down at the chart to read and sign.

"Day and a half," Sam mumbled to them, looking at Dean over Harry's head, and Harry noticed he was standing between them again. He really needed to stop doing that.

"That's the same time those statues started crying," Dean confirmed.

"Yep."

"I'm sorry," the doctor interrupted, handing the chart back to the other doctor and blinking rapidly at them. "What was that?"

There was a beat, then Dean asked, "What was what?"


"Who would say that, huh?" Dean picked up. "Crazy people."

"Exactly," Sam agreed.

"Yeah, which we are not," Dean said definitively.

"No," Sam said adamantly.

The doctor looked unsure and like she didn't believe them for a minute. "Just... get us some vaccine."

The brothers nodded, Sam looking a little embarrassed and Dean looking down like a shamed child. Harry had to press his lips together to keep from laughing.

The doctors left, the other doctor looking at them strangely as well, and once they were out of ear shot, they both turned to Harry.

"Couldn't've said anything?" Sam asked.

Harry barely kept from laughing and just raised his hands in surrender. "You said to let you do the talking."

From there, they split up and agreed upon a place to meet. Dean went off to question a few nurses who dealt more with the patients than the doctors, Sam went to talk to accounting, see if there was a lead there, and Harry went to talk to the morgue.

"Excuse me?" he asked, knocking on an office door.
A pale old man with white hair and a pug face looked up at him from a desk.

"Yes?"

"My name is Richard Young, I'm an intern at the CDC," he showed the man his fake badge. "I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions."

"Are you British?" the man asked.

"Immigrant, work visa," Harry said automatically. "May I come in?"

The man shrugged, looking back at the folder in front of him. Harry came in and sat on the other side of the desk. The room was small and lined with file cabinets, but it was bright with natural sunlight coming through the large windows.

"Have there been any unusual deaths in the hospital lately?"

The man shrugged again, not looking up.

"Has anyone died from the swine flu outbreak?"

"Nope."

"Has anyone died recently from something there are plenty of vaccines for?"

"Nah."

Harry nodded slowly, wondering how to continue. The man was clearly uninterested. Harry bit his lip, then asked, "Has anyone come back to life on your table?"

Morgue Guy shrugged, blinked, then looked up sharply.

"Good, I have your attention," Harry smiled sardonically. "We're investigating a potential new disease, one that causes extreme aggression, as well as any reappearances of older diseases, such as the black plague or smallpox. As I'm sure you know, Ebola and swine flu are hitting the country pretty hard as well. Has there been anything similar or… let's say, more unusual than unusual come through your office?"

"That other question wasn't serious, was it?" Morgue Guy asked.

"Unless that has actually happened, no."

Morgue Guy huffed and tossed down his pen. "No, nothing weird has been through here. The worst death recently was some woman who had too much smoke damage to her lungs from a fire. As far as aggression goes, the most violent death lately has been a gunshot through the head, some gang thing."

Harry nodded. "How recently is recently?"

"Last four to six months."

Harry nodded again and pulled out a card from the stack of them he had in the inner pocket of his suit's jacket. He handed it to the man. "If anything unusual comes through, please call that number."

"Alright," Morgue Guy agreed easily, opening a drawer and tossing it in. "Anything else?"
"No," Harry said, holding out his hand. "Just thank you for giving me your time."

Morgue Guy shook his hand, giving Harry the slightest nods of respect, then went back to his work. Harry left him to it, not thinking there was anything to find there.

Not a very exciting first interview, but Harry would take it.

He waited by a line of vending machines for maybe ten minutes, using his iPhone and the free wifi to look up Dean's poor taste of a joke concerning recently deceased Michael Jackson, before a sharp whistle had him looking up.

"Yo. Feed your hippos," Dean said as he tossed a bag of pill bottles to him.

Harry caught it and looked inside. There were about five big, white bottles of… "Bupropion?"

"Yeah. It's what I took when I got back from Hell. Take three a day, every day, and in a few months, we'll see where you are."

Harry frowned. "If this is about last night -"

"It ain't about last night. Look… life is life, right? And sometimes, life sucks. When it sucks, there's help. This," he flicked the bag, making the bottles rattle, "is help. I tried to score them last week, but," he shrugged. "I got dude here distracted and was able to grab 'em."

Harry looked from the bag to Dean. "I… thanks?"

Dean grinned. "Shrink them or something and let's find Sam."

Harry did just that, a little dumbfounded. Pills. Alright. Hippo feed, really. He guessed he shouldn't turn his nose up at that, and Dean himself said he took them when he returned from Hell, so they could only be helpful, right? Truthfully, though, Harry had no idea how he felt about them.

…

The lead was a bust, and Harry wasn't just as frustrated as the others but also mad that it was his lead that didn't give them anything new.

They talked to the clinics, a few locals, a couple of patients, and the witnesses to the omens, but it would seem that Pestilence, or whatever close to Pestilence, had moved on days ago. That, however, was the closest they had come to him.

It was night when they left town, deciding to call Bobby for any other swine flu outbreaks, see if they could catch up with Pestilence since the three of them were back in full commission. They were in Dean's car, engine rumbling loudly like it did, and had Bobby on speaker on Harry's new iPhone. Harry was sitting in the back with his arms resting on the front's bench seat, so he could hold the phone between the brothers.

"Let me guess," Bobby was saying, "just another steamin' hot pile of swing flu."

"Yep," Dean said.

"Doesn't make any sense, Bobby," Sam added. "Pestilence touched down here. I'm sure of it."

"Or something on his orders did," Harry said. "This outbreak was quick, but when it comes down to it, it's not particularly threatening."
"Yeah, why is he dealing them soft serve like swine flu when he's got the Croatoan virus up his sleeve?" Dean asked, voicing a continued worry they each had even though none of them had any answers. "I-I don't get it."

"Doesn't matter what the sick son of a bitch is doing," Bobby said. "What matters is this is the fourth town he's hit - that we know of - and we're still eating his dust. Did you get anything? We got even a snowball at probable next target?"

"Uh, no pattern we can see," Sam replied.

"Okay," Bobby sighed. "Hold on." There was an audible sound of Bobby's wheelchair, and Harry made another mental note to spell away the recent squeak of it. He knew it drove Bobby nuts. They heard a few paper-rustling sounds, then Bobby's voice came back over the line. "Well, far as I can tell, he's still heading east. So… head east, I guess."

"East?" the three of them asked incredulously.

"Bobby, we're in west Nevada," Dean pointed out. "East is practically all there is."

"Yeah, well, unless you want to come back here, you better get to drivin'." There was a muted click, then Harry's phone lit up with a flashing CALL ENDED.

Harry fell back into his seat behind Sam as Dean sighed loudly. He was just opening his mouth to ask if maybe they should go back to Bobby's after all until they found a new lead when suddenly, out of thin air, a man soundlessly appeared beside him, making him jump sky high.

"Say," the man said, "I've got an idea."

The brothers jumped, too, whipping their head back, then Dean was slamming on the brakes as Sam ducked down to his bag, pulling out the demon-killing knife, and lunging over the bench seat to the back to stab the man just seconds after the man soundlessly disappeared, the knife going into the leather instead.

Harry, the moment he saw the knife, pulled out his wand but was only able to keep from being thrown against the door as Dean roughly stopped the car.

"Did you get him?!" Dean barked.

"He's gone," Sam panted.

"Who the bloody hell -"

Harry was interrupted by a tap to Sam's window. They all jumped once more and looked over to said man who stood there outside the car, looking amused.

The stranger asked, "Fancy a fag and a chat?"

Chapter End Notes

Attention readers!! 21 March 2019
This fic is not abandoned, just due to personal reasons, not updated. I am thrilled to tell you that, though this fic is a big undertaking, I am no longer doing it alone! In addition
to the fic's official artist who's joined me, myrkky, two others have recently joined me as betas!

What this means for you is that there may be some edits in what's already posted. There has already been one embarrassing peddle to petal correction >.>

It also means more chapters are coming soon! I really do hope you enjoy this, and thank you so, so much for reading.

(Chapter 1 edits during week March 24-30)

You can go to This fic's official Tumblr blog to get recent updates, meet amazing people, and even check out some audio I made for this. Thanks again!

https://hpandthewb.tumblr.com/post/183598768924/harrys-birthday ">If you're confused about Harry's birthday

End Notes

Harry Potter and the Winchester Brothers
That's a link to the Tumblr I created specifically for this story. On there I will be posting progress updates on the chapters I'm working on. :) As well as music I've created for this.

Works inspired by this story Fanart for Harry Potter and the Winchester Brothers by myrkky, NSFW
Fanart for HP and the Winchester Brothers by myrkky

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!