### Thursday's Angel

**by Unforth**

**Summary**

Castiel, angel of the Lord, is at peace with the mission assigned him by God almighty. His job - no, his purpose, the meaning of his existence - is to slay demons. He can see them, their eyes blackened by the evil they’ve done, their souls corrupted beyond hope of salvation, and when he finds one, he sends them to hell. Yes, the work is hard, the price to himself steep, but God has commanded it, and it’s better that Castiel bear the stain of murder than some poor mortal suffer because Castiel wasn’t strong enough to do what must be done.

And tonight’s demon - a murderer at least twice over, confirmed by Castiel's own eyes - is no different, no matter how fair his visage appears when not warped by sin.

Castiel will do his duty, as he always has, and when the deed is done - and no sooner - he’ll pray for the souls of the fallen, and for the forgiveness Castiel knows God will not - cannot - grant.

*Please see author's note for more information (this is dark but it's not as dark as it seems and I've added some explanatory information there)*
Aaaaages ago in January Fandom Trumps Hate ran a charity auction that I participated in, with the winner getting to commission a fic from me, length determined by how much they donated to a charity from the eligible list. My winning bidder, mairisi, won a whopping 55,000 word fic, and requested Murder Husbands.

It's taken me all this time to come up with a concept I liked that fit the exact request, but finally it's here. This has been my NaNo project and I've got about 30k words already written, with an outline for the rest. It's basically 100% guaranteed to be longer than 55k; I'm estimating about 75k based on my current outline.

I will be posting chapters weekly on Saturdays until the whole fic is up. I'm guessing it'll be around 10 chapters, but I'm not sure yet.

**Heed the Tags!** This is a dark fic. I mean, it's murder husbands, and they're both serial killers (no wait Cas is an angel that's totally different, right?). However, having spoken with some folks on Tumblr, I get the sense that in my efforts to make sure that I've adequately tagged, I've kinda...oversold...how dark this fic is? So, based on these discussions, here are some **minor spoilers** that seem to set people's minds at ease:

1. Dean and Cas are both serial killers, and both crazy, and neither takes advantage of the other in their relationship. In as much as either of them is capable of having a healthy relationship, they basically do, once that relationship actually starts. Of the darker tags on this story (torture, past non-con etc.), the only one that applies to the Dean/Cas relationship specifically is the dubious consent, but it's mild dub con - more of the "all signs say yes except the actual words." So, still dub con, absolutely, but it's not related to manipulation.
2. Dean and Cas have similar victim profiles: both target specifically, explicitly bad people. The only innocent people hurt in this fic are hurt in backstory, off screen, and there is a ton of remorse for it.
3. This story has two primary plot lines: Dean and Cas meeting and becoming friends and then more, and Castiel pursuing a group of demons he's discovered in Lawrence, Kansas - hence Azazel and Alastair as characters, and the boy king!Sam tag. Needless to say this brings him smack dab into head on collision with Dean's backstory.
4. There will be no MCD for Dean, Cas, or Sam. All three will survive this story, and again - as much as people with this kind of story and psychological damage CAN have happy endings, this will have a happy ending.

*end spoilers*

This info seemed to help some of my regulars who were leery, and I don't mind sharing it at all. If you're concerned about specific content please feel free to get in touch with me either in the comments here or at my tumblr. I don't have the whole story yet so I can't completely guarantee that certain themes won't pop up but the big over-arching tags/trigger warnings aren't going to change. I've tried to tag for everything major, but...well...you know.
The bar patrons gave Castiel a wide berth as he strode to a vacant stool, steps rapid enough that the flaps of his trench coat belled out around his legs. The floor was sticky with spilled libations, the air miasmic with body odor, worn leather, cigarette smoke, and an undertone of stale urine. Disgusted, Castiel scowled at anyone foolish enough to glance his way. He hated the dimly lit bar, hated the dregs of humanity that inhabited it, hated that he couldn’t eradicate the dive everyone in it and everything they collectively represented. If any place required incineration by the cleansing light of the Lord...

...but the Lord couldn’t spare the might to illumine the dankest corners of hell itself, much less this den of distinctly mortal depravity. As pathetic and repulsive as these humans were, they were humans.

“What’ll ya have?” asked a bored man, blandly meeting Castiel’s cold expression, as he skimmed a filthy rag over the pocked, scarred wood of the bar.

Most of them were humans.

“Water, no ice, two lemons,” Castiel replied.

Green eyes watched Castiel from the shadows cloaking the far wall, further proof upon proof of the inhumanity of the creature. In the darkness where they lurked, the shade of their eyes should be invisible, but green shone out as bright as the faux stained glass lights, as bright as the brilliant, verdant fields of the four pool tables that stood between them, as taunting and elusive as the view of Elysium from Tartarus.

“Are you serious?” the bartender scoffed.

Weeks of searching had brought Castiel to the Black Rose that night, weeks of observation and consideration. He’d suspected the fair-haired young man was a demon from the first time, but Castiel had to be sure.

“Do I look serious?” Castiel stared the man down.

Twice, men who had left for assignations with the green-eyed demon hadn’t returned. Twice, Castiel had followed the demon to observe. Twice, Castiel had found the mutilated corpses of the demon’s victims. There could be no doubt. No matter how pleasing a countenance cloaked the young man’s evil, he was beyond salvation. Only death awaited the demon, and the same awaited anyone who prevented Castiel from following his God-given mission.

The bartender quailed, snarled a curse to cover the lapse in his nerves, and muttered sourly as he turned to the tray containing supposedly clean glasses and filled one with water from the tap. Annoyed at the distraction, Castiel turned back to his target.

The shadows were vacant.

_No...I will not be put off again. God’s will be done._

Scanning the room for his quarry, Castiel could find no one amidst the forsaken assembly who
would meet his gaze, no one who could stand to have their souls perceived and, inevitably, found wanting. Men and women moved, wraith-like, through the darkness, skirting wide around the bar to avoid him.

Typical.

If only Castiel didn’t radiate the aura of God’s touch. He’d tried to integrate himself into human society, tried to masquerade as a man for years, but his efforts proved futile. Castiel wasn’t human, his flesh body merely a vessel barely able to contain his God-touched grace, and no amount of mimicry enabled him to parrot humanity. Since he couldn’t blend in, he might as well stand out, and—

“You look lonely, sailor,” said a deep voice.

“I’m waiting for someone,” Castiel said quellingly, swiveling his barstool to rebuke the fool who’d dared speak to him.

The demon stood before him, handsome features twisted in a smirk, eyes cold and malevolent and strikingly green. For an instant, Castiel’s sight showed the man’s face as a parody of life – eyes black pits, features melted and molded as if flame had been taken to plasticine skin – then the semblance of humanity returned. When the evil was obscured from Castiel’s sight the man was...pleasant. Handsome, Castiel supposed a human would call him, with his brown hair spiked, his face bluff and open with beguiling friendliness, freckles scattered over tanned skin, tight jeans and a loose leather jacket enhancing his lean form. He was unblemished, appearance a cruel subversion of beauty, a disgusting reminder that fairness of form was not reserved for those fair of character, and—

“You’ve found him,” the demon said. He met Castiel’s frank gaze and leered.

“Yes, I have,” said Castiel, rising.

A thunk beside him drew his attention – the scowling bartender setting down Castiel’s water, two browned, slimy lemon slices floating on the surface. Castiel dug a bill of unknown denomination from his pocket and tossed it on the counter, focused on the demon. He’d lost track of the demon once in this hell on earth, and he’d not risk doing so again.

“Name’s Bill,” the man said, feigning a natural smile, the lie tripping from his tongue as he offered Castiel a handshake.

*Your name is Dean, you operate from a motel outside the beltway on the south side of the city, and tonight will be the end of your vile predations, fiend.*

“Emmanuel,” Castiel replied, taking the man’s hand and squeezing as they shook. Unflinching, the demon’s smiled widened as he returned strength for strength, his eyes locked with Castiel’s.

“I like it.” A lilt enriched the demon’s voice. Only long experience with the nuances of mankind, the nuances of demons, the nuances of the people who inhabited the dank, enabled Castiel to recognize the attempted seduction for what it was. “Well, Manny—”

“Emmanuel.”

“—sorry, Emmanuel,” the demon aped him mockingly. “Your place or mine?”

“Your place is my place,” Castiel said flatly.
“Possessive.” The demon nodded and dropped Castiel’s hand. “I like it a lot. My place it is. You’re driving. If you’re gonna own my ass—” He slapped his buttocks suggestively. “—the least you can do is gimme a lift.” The demon thrust his hips at air, as if even Castiel could have been ignorant of his innuendos.

“Oh, I’m going to do much more than that...Bill...” Castiel vowed.

Something shadowed to the demon’s expression led Castiel to suspect that Dean was less taken in by Castiel’s attempted deception than Castiel initially thought, but it didn’t matter. Whatever the demon suspected about Castiel, he had no idea what awaited him.

Demons were a scourge upon the earth, and Castiel would snuff them out, one and all, if it took him all of eternity.

“It’s a right here,” the demon said.

Ignoring him, Castiel flipped on his turn signal and transitioned to the left turn only lane. The road to their right was flooded by the orange glow of street lights, lined with businesses, and led farther into the city. Two gas stations stood sentinel on the left corners, a subtle indication that left led out to no-man’s land and that travelers were advised to fill their tanks before they ventured into the unknown.

“Makin’ me nervous,” the demon added.

“I’m not,” said Castiel. The roads were deserted so late but nonetheless Castiel waited until the green arrow appeared indicating that he could safely turn.

“No, no, you definitely are...”

“I’m definitely not,” Castiel corrected, accelerating down the road. “If you were concerned, you’d have taken the opportunity to escape while we were stopped at the light. Your door isn’t locked, and you’ve not donned your seat belt. You could have been free on the street in minutes, yet you made no attempt to leave. Do not attempt to deceive me, Dean.”

“Oh.”

Pause.

“Is that how things are, Manny?”

“Emmanuel.”

“Bullshit.”

“The simple truth,” said Castiel. “God is with us. He’s seen all you’ve done. Judgment is nigh.”

“Really?” the demon groaned, throwing his head back against the chair. “This is some ‘come to Jesus’ shit? And here I was hopin’ to have some fun tonight.”

“I’m aware of your misplaced expectations but your ‘fun’ is at an end.” The road stretched dark and empty before them as Castiel sped toward the abandoned church in which he’d taken temporary residence. That he’d found such a refuge was a sign; rarely in his travels was he able to rest peacefully on sanctified ground. Castiel was in the right place at the right time. Castiel was on the right track.
“Says you,” grumbled the demon.

Everything was prepared for the evening, a brazier burned down to coals heating his sword and brand, Seals of Solomon strategically placed to prevent the demon escaping, holy water blessed and placed on the altar, awaiting the time of Castiel’s need.

“The Lord almighty will not be gainsaid by such as you. You have slaughtered the innocent. You have violated His commandments. You have flouted His divine will.”

“‘The innocent,’” the demon echoed incredulously. “Wow, that’s...that’s special. At least it’s not a gay thing.”

“The Lord is indifferent to sexual orientation, as am I. What consenting adults do in the privacy of their bedrooms is their own business. Your crimes, however, are a peril to all society, and cannot be permitted to continue.”

“Sounds like you need to get laid.” The suggestive lilt was back in the demon’s voice. “Unless a vow of celibacy’s part of those holy orders of yours?”

“I’m not in orders.” Puzzled, Castiel glanced toward his passenger. In the deep dark of night, the demon’s eyes yet glittered, malevolent, irrepressible, mischievous as the demon’s knowing smile.

“What, actin’ out of the goodness of your heart?”

Unsure how he could be clearer than he’d already been – reminding himself of the importance of informing the damned of their crimes – Castiel said, “God sent me to punish you.”

“God did.”

“Yes.”

“Himself.”

“Yes.”

“Issued the order and everything?”

“Yes.”

“Holy fuck, dude, you are six kinds of crazy.” The demon laughed. “Putting you out of your misery will be the best thing I’ve done in years.”

“I am not insane,” said Castiel calmly. “Though you are not the first to accuse me of such. I am an angel, Dean.” The demon laughed harder. “Tonight, you reap what you have sown time and again throughout a lifetime of iniquity.” Gasping, the demon doubled over, slapping his knee. Disgruntled, Castiel decelerated for his approach to the overgrown gravel road leading to his temporary home. It wasn’t the first time Castiel had been laughed at, far from, but usually there was an edge of fear as the demon realized they’d been discovered, that their time was up. Dean…this demon sounded truly amused, and not the least afraid.

You will learn fear and contrition before the end. You will beg for mercy. I cannot grant that, but if your repentance is sincere, perhaps God can absolve you of your sins. Perhaps, when I someday return to Heaven, I will meet the redeemed.

...if I return to Heaven. If my Lord can welcome me back, after...
“And you said tonight wasn’t gonna be fun!” the demon finally managed. “I—”

Castiel supposed the demon’s lunge was meant to be surprising, but for the first time since their unorthodox conversation began, Dean resorted to a ploy Castiel was familiar with. The car confined them, the cab bouncing and jostling as they drove over the uneven road, and Castiel knocked the blow aside. A knife buried in his thigh instead of in his chest, breath-taking pain washing his vision red.

No. There is no pain. There is no breath to lose. This body is but a vessel. I am an angel, and this demon cannot harm my essential self.

Gears somewhere in the car shrieked as Castiel jerked the emergency brake. The vehicle stopped short, the demon grunted as he slammed into the dashboard, and before he could recover Castiel grabbed his knife hand and slammed it numbingly hard against the gear shift. Castiel’s other hand closed around Dean’s neck. Incredibly, the demon was still smiling, still huffing out shortling gasps. The demon’s free hand scrambled at Castiel’s grip, but Castiel was stronger, far stronger, God-given powers augmented by diligent daily toil to ensure his vessel was in prime physical condition. The throat clutched in Castiel’s grip spasmed as the demon’s hand fell away.

The demon was still laughing.

“You are diseased,” Castiel growled. A lick of pain jolted up his leg, through his torso, tingled down his arm, as the gear shift put pressure on the wound to his thigh.

“And baby, you got the cure,” the demon rasped out. His fingers clawed at the back of Castiel’s hand, his free hand reaching out—

—if he’s got another weapon stashed, if he tries to take advantage of the injury he’s inflicted, if he—

—and grabbed at Castiel’s crotch, kneading his soft penis and balls. “Not even hard for me?” The demon grinned, eyes gleaming with eerie, impossible light, and a bead of blood trailed from the corner of his mouth.

Forbidden heat flared through Castiel’s veins, pounded a counterpoint to the thump of his heart as he strained to render the demon unconscious, strained to ignore the imagined agonies of the mortal flesh of his inadequate vessel.

“That’s more like it,” smirked the demon.

Fury – not pain, and definitely not...definitely not the repulsive carnal desire roiling his forsaken flesh – painted the interior of the car deepest crimson. Snarling, Castiel slammed the demon’s head into the passenger’s side window once – twice – something cracked, something crunched, and finally the sickly, breathy laughter faded with a gurgle. The glass was a shattered cobweb opaque with blood and night. The demon went limp, blood matting the hair on the right side of his head as he lolled against the door. Satisfaction warmed Castiel through, left him weak as he slumped back into the driver’s bucket seat.

No satisfaction. No pain. No weakness. No arousal. No vengeance. No emotion. This tawdry vessel, this creature James Novak, he may cling to enough meager existence to perceive the ghosts of human feeling, but I do not. There is nothing but my mission on Earth. There is nothing but my duty.

I am Castiel, angel of the Lord.
The coppery scent of blood stirred the vessel’s long-repressed memories, the sodden mass of cloth clinging to his leg harkening back to bygone days – the work I did in Babylon, in Sodom, in Gomorrah. The splashes of blood across his gear shift and emergency break, the smear over his steering wheel, shone as red as the demon’s eyes shone green.

Dean’s face is beautiful with blood smeared like ichor over his cheeks and chin...

James Novak was a disgusting, pathetic man, punished for his sins by Castiel’s possession. The mortal soul that this vessel had once encapsulated had no right to walk free, to breathe clean air, no right to live and thrive when better, innocent men, women and children perished.

...but a single touch to my cock would be such a relief...Dean is so beautiful in his suffering...who would know? Who would stop me?

You are not me. I am Castiel, angel of the Lord, chosen to implement His will on Earth. You are a fading memory; you are lucky I haven’t snuffed you out, as I will snuff out this demon.

James Novak would be punished for daring to whisper his poison in Castiel’s ear.

Later. After. When I have dealt with the demon, Novak’s soul will quiet, blood lust sated, and his disease will no longer interfere with my purpose.

Castiel was always most at peace when he followed his Lord’s commandments and executed those tried and found wanting in the highest court of heaven.

I am Castiel, angel of the Lord.

God has commanded this infidel die. I have work that must be completed.

The thump of blood pumping over-hard through Castiel’s veins cooled and his breathing evened out. There was no pain. There was no desire. There was only the mission. Settling into his seat, Castiel released the emergency brake and started down the road again, strained axels creaking as the headlights picked out the outline of the dilapidated church. The demon stirred, murmured indistinct pain, but didn’t rouse.

And I must work quickly.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this one first chapter is short; I promise the next will be longer. Consider it a teaser if you prefer. : )
Part 1: Thursday, June 8th, Part 2

Chapter Notes

Um...surprise!

I know I said next chapter wouldn't post 'til next week, but I'll own...I was a little distressed by how little response this fic got? So I thought about it and talked it over with some folks and I think it was a combination of AO3 being buggy as hell last night and my dire warnings that this fic is dark. While it *is* dark, I think I gave the impression that it's darker than it is. As such, I've amended the tags, clarified the description a bit, and re-written my first chapter author's note, in the hopes that I can make it a little more clear what this fic is...actually like? And also I thought...well, honestly, originally this part was SUPPOSED to be part of the first chapter but I ran out of time yesterday and in my enthusiasm decided to post anyway...and I think that this addition will give a much better, much clearer idea of the dynamics you should expect in this fic.

So surprise! Second chapter already!

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The demon hung limp from the chains Castiel had mounted on the wall behind the altar, trails of dried blood forming a tracery over his face. His body swayed in the drafty room, knees and feet scratching scree, scree, scree over the rough-hewn floorboards. Even should the demon regain consciousness, the cuffs binding his legs to the ground would prevent him rising. The brazier behind Castiel gave a glow of warmth and dim light by which to work, his blade prepared and ready, and yet he hesitated for no reason he could fathom.

Before I enact God’s will…I must be sure it is God’s will. If this reticence is a warning, a last chance for the demon, a last chance for me…

If this mortal can be saved from the forces possessing him, I owe it to him and myself to try.

Scissors made short work of the demon’s layered shirts. Castiel pushed the fabric aside and froze, stunned. The light of the candles arrayed in the nave showed the demon’s chest mutilated by uncountable scars, pale and red, pocked and raised, small and long, a litany of unimaginable past torture. One nipple was gone, his belly button was sewn shut, and a gouge across his belly showed where, months or years after the initial violence, he had been disemboweled.

Awed, horrified, confused, Castiel swallowed and stared.

“Like what ya see?” said the demon, voice low and gruff. Castiel skipped back, furious that he’d not noticed his prisoner waking up, and assumed a defensive position out of reach. The demon rolled his gleaming eyes. “What’im I gonna do, spit you to death?” He made an expressive pthaw as he expectorated, glob of spittle falling well short of Castiel. The demon rolled his eyes again and rattled the chains binding him – hands to walls, knees to floor. “So, what’s the plan, Manny? After all that fire-and-brimstone talk, I’m expecting somethin’ pretty awesome. Don’t disappoint me.”
“The demon in you must be expelled,” said Castiel, shaking off the tension in his shoulders. The wound in his leg throbbed as he straightened. The demon was bound, captured, helpless. No matter how sassily he spoke, he was at Castiel’s mercy.

Castiel had no mercy.

But why the scars? Who hurt him? Has he been captured by past angels who failed to exorcise him? Unlikely. The scars he bears are for wounds inflicted to no purpose. No angel would do this.

No. Worse than that. These wounds were to a purpose: to maximize the pain the victim experienced. Such is how demons work. Once upon a time, before he was a perpetrator, Dean was a victim. Why would a demon do this to one of their own?

It doesn’t matter. Dean is definitely a demon, perhaps possessed by the same monster who inflicted these injuries on him. If there is a glimmer of humanity left within him, perhaps he will be saved. Regardless, I will do as I ought, as I must.

His chest must have looked spectacular weeping blood…

Steeling himself, Castiel drew the knife from his belt and advanced on the demon.

“Lemme get this straight – you’re about to carve me up like a prize turkey, and I’m the demon? Man, that’s rich.”

The demon laughed.

He laughed.

He’s a demon, violent and insane, and it’s foolish for me to heed his words.

“Exorcizamus te,” Castiel intoned.

The brazier holding his angel blade sparked, the knife growing hot in his grip. The demon laughed harder, tears pooling on his cheeks.

“Omnis immundus spiritus.”

If there was the smallest chance that the demon was savable…Castiel had never met one who was, but he owed it to the mortal Dean had once been to try to remove the evil enveloping him.

“Omnis satanica potestas.”

My mission is not to try to redeem, it’s to slay, knowing redemption is impossible for demons, at is it impossible for me.

“Omnis incursio infernalis adversarii.”

Castiel’s mind’s eye formed the shape of the demon’s trap carved into Dean’s chest, lines of fresh blood overlaying the criss-crossed white lines of innumerable scars.

“Omnis legio.”

The Lord is forgiveness and love and brightness…surely he will smile on me for attempting to bring salvation to the damned, will understand even should I fail, will not grow angry that I felt the attempt worth making…
“Omnis congregation et secta diabolica.”

The blade of the knife bit into Dean’s…the demon’s…chest, the resistance of skin scant under Castiel’s confident hand, and a bead of blood trailed down, down, down to the demon’s navel. The demon inhaled sharply, chest heaving, but Castiel held steady and carved straight the first line of the star at the center of the Seal of Solomon. Tightness bound Castiel’s chest and he struggled to draw breath, captivated by the red, made black-and-orange by the candlelight, as it burbled from the wound. A curtain of liquid gleamed, dark and light as it overlay tanned flesh and whitened scar tissue. Captivated, Castiel held his knife up to the light, crimson with a sheen like amber coating the steel.

“Now I know you like what you see,” said the demon smugly.

Something cracked and a fountain of sparks arced from the brazier. Distraction broke the wicked hold the demon’s blood had over him. Castiel turned to the metal bowl. Amidst the coals pulsating red and black with hellfire, the metal of his angel blade glowed orange and red, silver-yellow lines flickering incandescent along the length.

*The blade is to temperature – rarely does the brazier grow so hot as to bring it to shine like the sun. Is this supernatural heat a sign? A message? Am I to quit this farce of salvation and put an end to the demon’s existence?*

“Take a picture, it’ll last you longer.”

Castiel tore his gaze from the flickering blaze, turned back to the smirking demon. Blood soaked the waistband of his jeans black and his smile cracked the dried lines streaking his cheeks. The knife shook in Castiel’s trembling hand but he firmed his will, left his sword to heat, returned to before the demon, and placed the blade for the second line.

“Ergo, omnis legio diabolic—”

“Shut up already,” the demon interrupted. “You know I’m not buying all your angel-‘n-demon mumbo jumbo and there ain’t anyone else here, so save the song and dance and get on with it. I’m dying to get to the good part.” He rocked his hips strangely – the term is ‘licentiously’ – and the zipper over his crotch bulged.

He’s enjoying this.

With a sharp swipe of blade on flesh, Castiel cut the second line of the star. A thrill ran down his spine.

…am I…am I enjoying this, too?

The demon was speaking, but Castiel ignored him, muted the gruff voice to a meaningless buzz.

*God, no – I cannot, must not, derive the least satisfaction from the cruelties necessitated by my duty. Anything but that – anything but that I stoop to the level of James Novak, anything but that this vessel’s disease should infect me. Perhaps that is what the Lord’s message is meant to convey, the brazier conjuring the writing on the wall, if in language more abstract than that which was spoken to Belshazzar…*

A third slice, and a fourth, and a fifth, formed in the demon’s flesh under Castiel’s skilled hand. Blood cascaded from the wounds, coated the knife and Castiel’s hand, the heat of it spasmimg shocks through Castiel like he’d plunged his fingers into ice water. The words of the exorcism screamed through Castiel’s mind, mumbled unintelligibly through his lips.
Why, of all the demons I’ve slain, have I decided that this one deserves a chance to be exorcised?

The demon’s torn flesh gapped and contorted as Castiel carved the circle enclosing the star ascendant.

“*Audi nos,*” Castiel snarled, completing the ritual.

Nothing happened.

“What I’m gettin’ here is that you’re into the whole combo – the blood, the sadism, the chains, and the pseudo-religious bullshit – right? Got a priest kink, too? You think I look good now, you should see me in a collar. Bend me right over that altar…yeah, that’d be the good stuff, right in the sweet spot…”

The bulge in the demon’s pants grew.

Castiel stared at the bulge in the demon’s pants, stared at the blood seeping through the denim fiber by fiber. A shifting in his own trousers answered as the image formed of his mind – the demon splayed before him, torso clad in black, bare buttocks slashed with oozing red lines, Jimmy’s penis sinking in to—

*This man – this creature, this monster, this demon – has corrupted me.*

“Don’t get your tighty whities in a bunch, sister…” the demon chuckled. “Just helps show off that package of yours. Mighty sweet, that.”

*I must kill him.*

Rounding, a growl rumbling in his throat, Castiel stalked to the brazier, tugged on the protective glove he’d left beside it, and took up his sword. Two feet long, made of steel so pure and polished it gleamed like silver when cool, now the blade hummed with vibrant heat and God-granted power.

“Woah, hold up – I’m a kinky bitch and I’m all for some edge play – in *every* sense of the word – but I draw the line at…whatever the fuck that is…” Despite the timidity of his words, the demon sounded unafraid, unabashed, on the edge of laughing with genuine, horrible mirth.

“I am an angel of the Lord,” Castiel gritted out. Holding the sword steadily, Castiel aimed true for the center of the symbol he’d carved in the demon’s chest, point set to sear through the demon’s blackened heart as Castiel had seared through the hearts of so many sinners before. “You will show me some respect.”

“Or what?” scoffed the demon. “You’ll cut me open? You’ll stab me with that silly thing? What even is that, a fuckin’ blade sharpener? I always wondered what that shit was for, seriously – why are those included in every damn commercial knife block? I—”

There was a pop and sizzle as Castiel brought the incandescent tip of his blade in contact with the demon’s skin. The demon screamed, amusement finally quelled, tears flowing to mingle with the blood on his face and chest. Smoke curled from the wound and the smell of burnt flesh permeated the musty air of the nave.

“I tried to save you,” Castiel muttered. “I tried. But you are past help.”

*James Novak is past help.*

“Fuck – course I am,” snapped the demon between agonized gasps. “Save me? There’s nothing left
to save. Get it over with.” His lips parted around frantic, rapid breaths as he strained to get enough air without pressing his flesh against Castiel’s sword. The wound grew as the heat necrotized tissue, blackened ash falling away from the cauterized flesh.

*Stab quick and true, Castiel. One thrust and done, as always. Enough torment awaits demons in the afterlife, I can at least grant them the mercy of a quick death.*

Castiel couldn’t move.

*Why do I hesitate?*

“He?” the demon croaked.

*Do it.*

“What are you waiting for?”

*What am I waiting for?*

“Kill me, you stupid son of a bitch. Let this shit excuse for a life finally be over!”

*Kill him. End his miserable, forsaken existence, and protect the countless innocents he will harm in the future if he’s permitted to live.*

*But…*

“You want to die?” asked Castiel.

*He knows he’s evil. He knows he doesn’t deserve salvation. He knows he deserves to be punished.*

“Fucking hell, have you looked at me?”

*That is not how demons think. Demons believe themselves infallible, always ready with an excuse for their depravity.*

*This demon…Dean is not past saving.*

The sword fell to the floor with a clatter, the metal charring the wood beneath. A splinter took flame, brilliant orange, only to fade to ash and cinders. Awed, frightened, Castiel stumbled back. The room seemed brighter than it had, Dean’s features illuminated, his face pristine and unmarred as if he’d lived in ease, a perception given lie by the agony apparent in every line carved into his torso. Dean panted, eyes wide, pupils dilated, sweat beading on his forehead, cheeks streaked with tears that dripped from his chin. A soft *pfft, pfft*, *pfft* and a puff of smoke marked each tear that vaporized upon contact with Castiel’s sword. Castiel’s butt hit the altar, knocking one of the candles to the floor. Wax extinguished the flame with a hiss.

“You’re not a demon,” Castiel stammered, hands gripping the lip of the surface behind him.

“What…wait…you believed all that bullshit you spewed? Buddy, I’m no demon, and you sure as shit ain’t no angel,” Dean managed around heavy breathing.

“I am…I am an angel…” Uncertainty that Castiel loathed suffused his voice.

*Why am I quavering? Why am I tottering? Why am I gripping the altar for strength?*

*Because the Lord is my strength, my support, my rock, and I am his eternal servant, his tool, his*
angel. I know his wrath, know his power, know his retribution. Today, I nearly killed where death was not warranted, despite the warnings I received beforehand. Had I taken Dean’s life…

…but I didn’t. I didn’t, and it’s not too late.

“I am an angel,” Castiel repeated confidently, standing straight. Pain lanced through his leg. This is a vessel. I feel no pain. I do not suffer. I am above this mortal flesh. Let it melt, thaw, resolve into a dew. I do not need it. “Why did you kill those men?”

“There are no angels,” spat Dean. “There’s no God. There’s no salvation. There are only men – and coming to terms with the fact that all that hate, all that pain, all that awful, is shit we do to each other, one person to another, just because we fuckin’ can.”

“You have no faith.” Castiel leaned down and retrieved his blade, revealing wood reduced to embers beneath. Even through his glove, heat radiated from the handle.

“But you do? Your God’s totally cool with the shit you were ‘bout to pull on me?” Dean rattled his chains suggestively.

“Your immortal soul is in peril,” replied Castiel.

“There’s no such thing,” snarled Dean. “And if there were, you’d burn in hell right next to me.”

“I know that,” Castiel said softly.

Dean’s jaw dropped. “What…so…you’re a damned angel? You think you’re Lucifer or somethin’? Man, if talkin’ to you wasn’t so fuckin’ annoying it’d be a Goddamn trip. What’re you gonna tell me next, the tin hat protects you from the little green men who took you up to visit God floatin’ on one of heaven’s clouds?”

“The Morningstar and I have never conversed,” said Castiel. “Nor would I ever claim his vaunted mantle as my own.” Turning to the stone altar, he carefully set the sword down, keeping a finger on it until he was sure it would not roll free. “Ophanim did not mingle with seraphim such as myself, and after his fall Lucifer conferred with none of Heaven’s host. And the conventional mortal view of Heaven is…flawed…an attempt by visionaries to use clumsy mortal languages to describe the ineffable. I can think of nothing I have seen that matches your description of ‘little green men,’ nor do I see what a flimsy helmet of aluminum has to do with—”

Dean groaned. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, I take it back, nothin’ about talkin’ to you is a trip. Shut up already! None of that shit you’re babbling is real, you delusional fucktard. And here I thought I was crazy, woohee!”

Taking the key from his pocket, Castiel approached Dean, cautious lest the demon…the man…lash out. Dean eyed him warily, clenching and unclenching his bound hands, a manic grin twisting his lips but not touching his eyes. When Castiel came close, Dean shied away. A scabbed-over cut on his chest cracked, fresh blood flowing over that previously darkened and dried, limning the edges of the gouge Castiel had burned over Dean’s heart.

“I’m sorry I hurt you,” Castiel said, grabbing one of the manacles and slipping the key into place. The cuff came loose and Dean went slack with a gasp, all his weight straining on the shoulder of his still-bound arm. Castiel stepped quickly to undo the other cuff, released Dean’s wrist, and caught him before he could collapse to the floor.

“If this is your idea of a first date, I can’t wait to reach second base…”
“Why did you kill those two men, Dean?” Castiel asked again.

“What, worried you’ll be next?” Dean smirked. Scowling, Castiel reached down and unlocked the manacles binding Dean’s legs.

“Absolutely. That’s why I’m unlocking you,” said Castiel. “I’m terrified.”

Dean chuckled. “Woah, angel boy with a stick shoved up his ass has a sense of humor? Color me shocked.” Hovering close, Castiel waited until he was sure Dean could support his own weight then stepped back. Dean rolled from his knees onto his rear end, bow legs splaying before him. He whooshed out a breath that turned into a groan as movement reopened the slashes Castiel had cut into his chest and slumped onto his elbow, letting his head fall back so far that his short hair brushed the floor. “That was some good shit you had going ‘til you went all ‘bad touch’ and tried to fuckin’ impale me. We could’ve had fun. Pity about your…everything…” Dean lifted his enough to give Castiel a hairy eyeball, then fell back once more.

Castiel’s fingers itched to trace patterns through the blood on Dean’s chest.

Fun…would that be Dean’s idea of fun? How? Why?

What makes me think he’s not a demon? Am I making a terrible mistake?

No. Over millennia of hunting the denizens of the depths, I’ve never once had one suggest they deserved their punishment. Men and women who’d murdered, raped, abused, tortured, and mutilated others, the worst upon the worst of humanity, all thought they deserved redemption, deserved to be spared from the final judgment they’d blithely sent innocents to face. Dean believed he deserved his fate. He’s different.

“I’ve asked you twice – don’t make me ask you again,” said Castiel ominously.

“What, or you’ll stab me? More?”

“Why did you kill those men?”

With an annoyed grunt, Dean rolled his eyes and lifted his head enough to stare Castiel down. There was attractive power and confidence behind Dean’s expression, assertive and in control though he lay prone and Castiel loomed over him.

Attractive?

Whether Dean is or is not a monster is irrelevant. He’s dangerous – to me, to others, and to himself.

“Do I wanna know what makes you think I killed anyone?” asked Dean.

“I—”

“And if you fuckin’ tell me you used your clairvoyant angel ESP shit to lay out tarot cards and spy through your crystal ball what the tea leaves said…”

Castiel frowned. “The tools of mortal witches are powerless trinkets.”

“But you’re the real deal?”

“I followed you,” Castiel explained. “And observed your behavior.”
“You did?” Dean blinked at him. “Wow, I totally missed that. Good thing dad’s dead, it’d fuckin’ kill him to know I let…you…get the drop on me.”

Castiel’s frown deepened. “Dean, I am an angel with hundreds of thousands of years of experience in military maneuvers, reconnaissance, and all forms of combat.”

“You’re a frumpy 40-something dude who hasn’t shaved in a week going through the psychotic break equivalent of a mid-life crisis,” Dean corrected.

“And yet I avoided your perusal for two weeks, convinced you to accompany me from the bar, and successfully incapacitated you,” said Castiel. “You’d be dead if I’d not realized I’d erred in naming you demon-possessed.”

“You sure about that?”

“You said—”

“I said I didn’t know you’d seen me with those two dudes,” Dean said. “But who do you think lured who from that bar? You’ve got the sex appeal of a leech.”

“You solicited me. And developed an erection in response to my behavior.”

Dean hitched one shoulder in the prone imitation of a shrug. “What can I say, everyone’s got a kink, and mine’s leeches.”

“We are getting nowhere,” grumbled Castiel. “I’m not going to kill you, Dean, but if you stray too much farther down your current accursed path, you will be beyond saving, and I will hunt you down. I’ve found you once. I will find you again.”

“I ain’t never killed anyone who didn’t deserve it.” Dean pulled himself to a seated position and shoved the torn remnants of his flannel shirt aside. On his side, a purple pucker spoke to some scant-healed recent injury. “Let’s see…the last two…the one outside Vinny’s thought he could get his rocks off and then stab me. How the fuck he thought he’d get away with that even if I didn’t rip his fuckin’ balls off is beyond me – musta been ten assholes saw us leave together. And the one a few nights ago, when I said I didn’t wanna fuck him after all, he kneed me in the crotch and jammed his sad excuse for a dick in my mouth.”

“He raped you.”

“Eh, only by the loosest definition,” Dean shrugged, gaze on the floor as he dug an errant pine needle into the cracks between the boards. “I mean, I seduced him, lured him to the middle of nowhere, then turned him down cold…wasn’t like I didn’t know what might happen. That said…if he hadn’t been a douchebag, he’d have kept it in his pants and he’d still be alive. But since he didn’t…”

That’s why Dean is different from the demons.

“You punished him, but only after he attempted to harm you.”

Dean is like me. Even if his ears are closed to the Lord’s voice, he still hears the call – to find the malefactors, find the demons, and end them.

“Didn’t get nothin’ he hadn’t earned a hundred times over,” agreed Dean. “If he’s done that to me, he’s done it to some other poor saps. Least I can defend myself, and keep him from attacking the next moron.”
“Dean, was your intention to test me as you tested these other men?”

“Ayup,” Dean said. “Truth to tell, still haven’t figured out if you passed or failed. You’re fuckin’ bizarre, dude. What even was all this shit?”

“I told you,” Castiel replied, disgruntled. “I—”

“Oh, I get you want me to think you’re an almighty angelic muckity muck,” Dean interrupted. “Listening to you, I’m even, like, 80/20 that you might actually believe that crock. But I’m not biting. I mean, unless that’s your kink, then I’d consider it.”

“Given what you’ve seen this evening, what has convinced you I’m lying?” asked Castiel, quirking his head to the side.

“Because I’ve lived through hell, or close as we’ve got in this bullshit excuse for a world.” Dean’s expression went bleak and flat. “And I’ve consorted with men who’d be demons, if such shit existed. And if there were a God, if there were angels, ya’ll would owe me one metric fuckton of an explanation for why the fuck those things happened to me, happened to my family. So, Manny, you got the dish? Gonna share the scoop? Wanna tell me why my guardian winged asshole skedaddled instead of saving me, instead of saving my mom and my dad and my brother?”

“God works in—”

“So fucking help me if you say ‘mysterious ways’ I will end you,” Dean said, soft and deadly. “And tear down any idol, bullshit excuse for a deity who could condone what was done to my family. I don’t give a fuck all for myself, but for their sakes, if Heaven exists it deserves to burn.”

Deeply troubled, brow furrowing, Castiel dropped to a squat beside Dean. Unthinking, he reached out and ran a finger over the long cut across Dean’s belly. Flakes of blood scattered before his touch, tacky spots smearing black over the pale skin, and Castiel stared entranced by the play of light over the wound and the way Dean’s skin divotted and puckered beneath Castiel’s gentle caress.

“What are you doing?” Dean asked hoarsely.

Castiel snapped back into the moment, snapped into awareness of what he did — no, not me, I’d never do that, it’s James Novak, and he must be stopped, repressed, destroyed — and pivoted back, slamming into the wall of the church behind him. A loose dangling manacle scraped the top of his head and the warmth of Dean’s body lingered against his finger, a ghost of a touch made manifest in the blood smeared into the lines of his knuckles.

“I’m so sorry, Dean,” he murmured. “If I’d known such a thing was befalling you, I’d have prevented it.”

“Good for you.” Dean watched him, wary, incrementally shifting back and away from Castiel. “That’s awesome. What about all your angel buddies, the seraphim and nephilim and, I don’t fuckin’ know, cupids and shit? What’s their fuckin’ excuse? Where was God when us poor bastards were gettin’ ripped to shreds all over creation?”

“I don’t know,” said Castiel. “Next time my brethren speak to me, I’ll ask. I will. I…”

When did they last speak to me?
It's been so long I can't recall with certainty…

...perhaps when the call went out to slay the first born of Egypt…

“You do that,” Dean replied sarcastically. “But don’t expect me to wait for the reply.”

“Your anger is fair, justified…I wish I could fix the past, wish I could undo the wrongs committed to you and yours, but that’s not in my power.”

‘Course it’s not. God fuckin’ forbid you be good for anything.”

“Dean—”

“I should kill you,” Dean said. “The only way you’re different from every other son of a bitch I’ve ganked is that even though you are utterly off the reservation you actually realize what you’re doin’ ain’t right. That’s gotta count for something.”

“That’s precisely what I think of you,” admitted Castiel. Dean blinked at him. “I’ve been slaying demons since time immemorial, and you are the first to concede that you deserved punishment for your crimes. I am God’s fist on earth, Dean. Such a duty is sacred and essential, but it also heavy and dark. To combat evil, I do evil, and I carry that stain upon my grace. But the alternative – allowing immortal, soulless, corrupted predators free-rein to wreak havoc on mankind, as they did to you – is unthinkable. The gates of Hell have long been open, and more demons spawn daily, freed from the nine circles below or created as wrong begets wrong and misbegotten men sell their souls for power. Angels are few in number, the earthly garrison spread thin. My heart is heavy to know that you, and countless others, have suffered because of my…because of our…failures.”

“Don’t give yourself a fricken aneurysm or anything,” Dean muttered.

“I’m not upset enough to be in danger of physical injury…”

Dean rolled his eyes and sprawled back against the altar. A whisper of metal on stone and then a clatter spoke to Castiel’s sword rolling and tumbling to the ground, but through their long conversation it must have cooled enough for the danger of fire to have passed, and Castiel didn’t seek to retrieve it.

“The fucked up thing ‘bout you is that it’s like lookin’ in one of those fuckin’ fun house mirrors,” continued Dean, using his palms to rub at his eyes, only to stop with a pained snort. Grimacing, he used one hand to tentatively explore the wound Castiel had inflicted on the side of his head. “Sure, you got this whole religious thing going on – not my kink, though if you start with the Latin again and draw that knife I swear on your hoity toity God I’ll come – but we both do all kinds of dirty-bad-wrong shit to clean out the scum of the earth. You call ‘um demons, I call ‘um fuckin’ assholes, but the idea is the same. What’s up with that?”

“Honestly?”

Surprised, Dean looked up, blinked. Castiel smiled at him.

“Do you truly want to know why we share these commonalities?”

Dean blinked again, threw up his hands, and exclaimed, “Sure, why the fuck not – lay it on me.”

“I think you’re an angel, Dean.”

For a stunned moment, Dean stared at him, mouth agape, and then he roared with laughter,
throwing his head back so hard it thumped against the altar stand.

...what a beautiful sound...

...fallen, battered, tortured, twisted until he forgot who he was...

...but Dean is like me, deeply, fundamentally. After everything that’s happened to him, his soul still shines as bright as the sun. That’s why the Lord heated my blade to incandescence. That’s what His signs and portents meant. I am no longer alone in my solitary fight against the demons. Aid has come, and I was almost too foolish to recognize that help for what it was.

Thank you, Lord, for this gift, for this companion, for this salvation.

Thank you, Dean, for your difficult service to this just but necessary cause.

Dean laughed, and Castiel watched him, listened to him, observed the play of light on Dean’s white teeth and the fresh flows of blood from the wounds to his chest and the lovely pinking of his cheeks as his humor overcame him.

For once, Castiel welcomed the trickle of heat that diffused through him as he took in the vision of a fellow angel given human form, his soul a beacon to guide Castiel back to safe shores.

But tomorrow, I still have work to do, so much work to do.

No.

We have work to do.

Together.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter posts Saturday, December 2nd, and I actually mean it this time. :)
“We should choose our next destination together.”

Misty morning sunlight scattered and fractured through the cracked, filthy panes of what, even when new, had been poor-quality stained glass. Missing panels allowed a breeze to flow into the room, lilting with the rise and fall of dawn birdsong. Castiel wondered, not for the first time since he’d arrived, why all the saint’s heads were missing. Only the martyr’s talismans spoke to which window depicted which scene – Saint Catherine’s wheel; lilies sprouting around the Virgin Mary as she received the Annunciation from a Gabriel who was naught but wings and a halo; Saint Francis amidst fragmented animal companions; and Saint Sebastian’s arrow-torn torso there, streaked with blood.

“Uh…fuck no?”

_The Saint resembles Dean, skin ripped and aglimmer with crimson like rubies, and—_

“Huh?”

Tearing his attention from the windows, he turned. Dean was the opposite of saintly decorum as he lounged atop the cleared altar, weight on his arms splayed behind him, legs kicking idly at the air. His ruined clothing and wounds were concealed by his snapped-shut leather jacket, the blood-soaked jeans dried black and constricted around his crotch. Distracting sensation Castiel longed to ignore itched between his shoulder blades.

“Ain’t no way on God’s green _earth_ I’m goin’ with you, Manny,” Dean explained, startling Castiel back to attention _again_. “And no amount of staring at my dick’s gonna change my mind.”

“I wasn’t...”

Dean gave him a skeptical look.

_Yes, I was._

“It’d save us both some trouble if I dropped trow now,” Dean added. “I’m up for it if you are.”

“My name is Castiel.”

“Holy non sequitur, Batman!” Dean laughed. “So does that mean you don’t want to fuck?” Dean’s expression suggested that whatever Castiel replied, Dean would think him lying. Castiel shrugged uncomfortably, wondering if he could reach the irritating spot on his back to scratch it if he tried.

“I’m unsure what my inclination – or lack thereof – to engage in coitus has to do with your traveling with me,” replied Castiel. “We share a mission, Dean. We share a purpose. Whether you acknowledge your divine origin is irrelevant. We can accomplish more together than apart.”

“And that right there is why there ain’t no chance in fuck-all I’m going with you,” Dean said, pushing himself off the altar. His boots clomped as he landed, floorboards creaking and bursting out eddying clouds of dust that caught the multi-colored light coming through the stained glass. The air seemed to bleed colors.
“I don’t understand.” Castiel scowled.

“Listening to five minutes of your ‘God be with us’ proselytizing nonsense is annoying as fuck. Over a thou’ miles of highway? You’d be a joy, I’m sure, like full-on Beethoven style choirs of duped devout suckers. I get that you’re lonely, Manny—”

“Castiel.”

“—Cassie—”

“Castiel.”

“—Cas...”

Dean was taller than Castiel but managed to look a challenge up at him through thick, long eyelashes. The bothersome itch shivered down Castiel’s spine, registered as heat in his navel, and he scowled, finally recognizing the feeling plaguing his ever-troublesome vessel. Arousal. Again. Compressing his lips into a thin line, Castiel let the nickname pass.

“I ain’t comin’ to Jesus, Cas.”

“I wasn’t asking you to,” said Castiel. I’m not exasperated. Dean is frustrating, yes, but he’s a good man. Patience and understanding will bring about the outcomes I desire. So long as he listens, so long as he hears, I’m sure, with time... “The Son and His preachings are not for the likes of us anyway.”

“What, we goin’ Old Testament fire-and-brimstone? No ‘lovin’ thy neighbor’ – in the biblical sense or otherwise – or turnin’ the other cheek? Well, at least Indy Jones Arc of the Covenant style is interesting...”

“I am a messenger, a warrior, an arbiter. Mercy is for the Lord, not for such as you and I. I protected Elisha. I decimated Sennacherib. I slew Canaanites that—”

“Never mind.” Dean threw up his hands and turned away. “I take it back. Not interesting. And definitely provin’ me right about the whole ‘travelin’ with you would fuckin’ suck’ thing. If you’re gonna spin a yarn at least make it good.”

He persistently defies God, persistently defies me. We serve the same master, pursue the same goal, and yet...

...Dean must be put in his place.

That would be...satisfying...

Castiel’s vessel’s penis reverberated with the vessel’s heartbeat.

This temptation...it’s dangerous, and I must resist. If Dean doesn’t wish to accompany me, that is his prerogative. I must bide my time. He is young – he will come to see the path that has been laid before him.

“Very well,” said Castiel tightly. Disappointment doused him like a bucket of cold water.

“Fuckin’...should I grab the popcorn?” Dean asked. Puzzled, Castiel quirked his head to the side. “For Sunday School Story Time with Angel Manny-Cas? But if I’m gonna sit through your bullshit it better be awesome. Or I’d better get laid at the end. Either way. Or both.” Dean turned back with
a leer.

Why is he fixated on having sex with me?

“If my stories displease you, I will refrain,” Castiel clarified. “My intent was to indicate that if you
don’t wish to travel with me, I’ll not force you. You may do as you will.”

…why am I fixated on having sex with him?

I’m not…I’m truly not…James Novak’s irrepresible desires are not me, not mine. My existence is
separate from his, divorced from the echoes of his forsaken soul. Thank God.

“Like you could force me to do anything,” Dean scoffed. Castiel raised an eyebrow and Dean
colored, grin broadening. “Oh ho, would you like to force me, Cas? Okay, you’re all high on angel
mojo, you think I’m one ‘a you? Think I can do the same? Hmm…” Dean bent forward, squatting
slightly, and lifted his hands to either side of his head, making an odd wiggling motion with his
fingers, brushing his temples and hair as he did. Sleeping on the hard floor had destroyed his
spiked style but he was no less handsome for...

Stop! I am not fixated!

“What are you doing?” Castiel demanded.

“Oh, oh, I’m gettin’ something…pickin’ it up loud and clear on angel radio…”

“De—”

“Hnhhn, you’re interfering with the signal, man.” Dean stretched his words out in an exaggerated
drawl. “Don’t fuck with my floooow. I’m gettin’ it…I’m hearin’...I’m jeeeeeelin’ that groovy
rhythm…better’n LSD…dude, it’s Raphael, Michelangelo, Donatello and Leonardo—”

“Those are Renaissance painters, not angels.”

“—and they’re sayin’ that underneath that frumpy-ass over-sized suit and backwards tie and styled
hair you are one kinky sonuvabitch. And those are Ninja Turtles, you heathen, not painters.”

“…they’re definitely painters. Well – Michelangelo might better be termed a sculptor, though he
excelled in both fields, and—”

“How long did you spend starin’ at David’s package?” Dean straightened up, opened his eyes, and
broke into a cocky, knowing grin.

…he’s smart, and quick…as dangerous as I suspected him of being last night…if he weren’t one of
my brethren, I might have no choice but to kill him despite my belief that his ends justify his
means…

“Too long,” Castiel admitted, recalling his last time in Florence, his first time there when he
attended the official placement of the finished David in the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore.
“Though, comparing the sculpture to the man that was, I feel Michelangelo’s own predilections
may have colored his interpretation of the hero. David’s scrawny lack of machismo was what made
his conquest of Goliath so remarkable, but Michelangelo preferred prettier youth. On God’s orders,
Gabriel tried to tell Michelangelo, to guide his mallet and chisel, to grant him an accurate vision to
produce a David fit to inspire even the lowest of men, but…” Castiel shrugged. “Michelangelo
always went his own way. Michael has boycotted the Sistine Chapel since before it was completed,
so affronted was he by how he was presented.”
Dean stared at him agog. “Holy shit,” he whispered.

“Now do you believe me?” Castiel grumbled.

“Holy shit,” Dean repeated, stunned expression breaking as he devolved into gasping laughter. “Fuck no, don’t believe a word out of your mouth, but has anyone ever told you – you’re fuckin’ hilarious?”

What a lovely sound…so dangerous…so, so dangerous…

…but be he angel or mortal, I’ll not kill a man because my twisted vessel finds him attractive. I’ve done many regrettable, wrong things in my time, but to do that would be to willfully commit evil and I will not…

“Nonsense,” said Castiel. “I’m not. If I could make jokes like Uriel…but we cannot all be so gifted.”

“Who?” asked Dean. Castiel opened his mouth to reply but Dean held up his hand. “No – seriously – don’t tell me, I don’t want to know. So, if you’re not the funny one – and you definitely ain’t the smart one – does that make you the pretty one?”

“The physical attributes of my chosen vessel are irrelevant,” Castiel said. “And didn’t you compare me to a leech?”

“Can’t have it both ways, twinkle toes,” said Dean, breaking eye contact, turning to stroll down the debris-strewn central aisle toward the broken doors opposite the nave. “Either you don’t care how ya look, or it bothered you that I compared you to a leech. Pick one.”

“It didn’t bother me, it…” Castiel shook his head as Dean glanced back over his shoulder and shot him that mischievous grin once more.

He truly needs to be put in his place.

“As diverting as this conversation has become, your banter irrelevant,” Castiel snapped. “I’m not going to kill you. My blade is reserved for the spawn of hell. And—”

“How do you say shit like that with a straight face?”

“—And, it appears you do not intend to act on your threats as regard my health…?” He waited until Dean shook his head in begrudging agreement. “…if you’re not to travel with me, what would you have me do?”

“Well at least you realize that hangin’ ‘round abandoned churches in the sticks ain’t everyone’s idea of a good time,” said Dean. “You drove my ass out here and, ya know, carved my chest open and tried to cauterize a hole through my heart. Least you can do now is buy me dinner.”

“It’s 8 AM.”

“It’s always 5 PM somewhere, Cas.”

“But not here.”

Dean slammed a hand against the cracked door, laughing, and laughed harder as the wood broke and the top half broke free and fell with a thud that startled the birds to silence.

“Listen, Mr. Smarty-Pants…oh fuck, forget I ever said that, even my kid brother sounded idiotic
spewing that shit when he was 8...you drove me out here to the middle of bumble-fuck nowhere, and now you’re going to give me a ride and buy me a Goddamn hamburger. Capiche?”

“No, non capisco,” Castiel replied, gathering up the duffel bag of his belongings as he followed Dean toward the exit. “Why would the Lord take the time to specifically condemn your hamburger? Unless – are you Jewish? Is it not Kosher?”

By the time Castiel finished his refutation, Dean was gasping for breath between bouts of laughter, glancing back at Castiel with tears running down his face.

“I like…” Dean snorted, chuckled, punched the door again. “I like…this version of you…way better…than the whole…‘woooo I’ll smite ye demon’…version…”

“We’re…both me? I’m just me, Dean.”

“You sure about that?” asked Dean, going serious so abruptly that Castiel froze, bag swaying in the breeze and bumping his injured leg. Twinges of mortal pain zinged to his extremities.

Yeah, Castiel...you so sure that good ol’ Jimmy never has any say in your so-called angelic course of action?

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” grunted Castiel.

“Oh yeah, Dean scores a hit.” Dean grinned, made a fist, and punched at air. “If I can’t score the right way, might as well take what I can get. Whaddaya say we blow this popsicle stand?”

“This is a church, Dean.”

“Now I know you’re doing it on purpose.”

“Doing what on...no. I’ll not be drawn into another of your baffling word games. Where would you like to go?” Castiel resumed walking, tone resigned. Castiel was an angel, a force of nature, and he recognized a kindred spirit. Dean was unstoppable.

But someday I will make him submit to my will...

...no, I won’t. That’s not the way. He will come around to the light of truth in his own time.

“Three murders in one town is about my cap – I think I’ve worn out my welcome here,” said Dean. Castiel reached past him and pushed open the lower half-door; it broke off the hinges and fell atop the top half with a clatter. Dean chuckled.

“You only committed two murders in Indianapolis,” Castiel said, frowning. He strode toward his old sedan, key in hand.

“Says you,” Dean replied, trailing in Castiel’s wake as he walked toward the passenger side. “Wait, my bad – of course, Cas, you sure got the jump on me, ha ha ha.”

Castiel scowled, unlocked the door, shoved his bag over the driver’s seat and into the back, and dropped down behind the wheel. The axles creaked. Games within games...Dean was like an earthquake, the grounds of discourse continually shifting and cracking beneath Castiel’s feet; Dean was like a volcano, apparently cool and calm but ever on the verge of an eruption; Dean was like a tornado, coming in and ripping apart the familiar terrain of Castiel’s world...

Dean was like an angel.
What a piece of work is man…

“Drive me to Cincinatti, Cas.”

I could drive away, leave him here, escape his troublesome, disorienting behavior…

“I thought you didn’t wish to travel with me.”

As powerful as he is, he will learn the truth about himself no matter what course of action I choose…

“Did I fucking stutter?” Dean rapped a knuckle against the glass car window. “And are you gonna let me in? It’s fuckin’ cold as balls out here. June my ass, I fuckin’ hate comin’ north.”

The thought of leaving Dean behind made Castiel’s chest ache. Biting his lip against a resigned sigh, Castiel leaned over and unlocked the passenger door. His hand had scarce left the locking tab when Dean jerked the door open and flung himself into the car. Motes of dust and flecks of Castiel’s vessel’s dried blood puffed into the air.

“Alright – you’re takin’ me back to Motel 6 to get my shit, and then you’re takin’ me to Bob Evans – a girl deserves a proper date after a night of foreplay – and then Cincy or bust. Now – floor it.”

Castiel scowled, put the car in first gear, and started them on their bumpy way back to the main road, accompanied yet again by Dean’s irreverent laughter.

As frustrating as he is…as frustrating as he clearly finds me…as determinedly as he said he’d not journey in my company…he’s traveling with me.

That counts for something.

…what, exactly, does it count for?

Shaking his head against his confusion, Castiel headed back into the city. So long as Dean didn’t interfere with his mission, Castiel could afford the distraction, even welcome it. He’d been alone for so long…

“I can drive you to Bob Evans, but I haven’t money for a meal.”

“What, can’t mojo up some dinero?”

“Even could I create pesos from thin air, they’d do us little good in the United States.”

“Hell…keep the jokes like that flowing and I’ll buy your fricken dinner.”

“It’s breakfast time, Dean.”

“Time is an illusion – breakfast time doubly so – and Bob Evans serves dinner all day long. And you’re not laughing. Do you seriously not understand a Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy reference?”

“I’ve never hitchhiked – that seems to be more your forte.”

“True, that – and I never forget my towel – but I do murder my ride, if some asshole gets too handsy…can’t all luck into a Zaphod Beeblebrox…”

“It’s no more than they deserve for abusing your trust and assuming the kindness of a ride gives
them the right to your person.”

“Exactly! Ya know, I could grow to like you, Cas…”

“Your approval or disapproval of me is irrelevant.”

“No, it’s not.”

Castiel grimaced and held his tongue, but the answer screamed loud and clear in his head.

You’re right. It’s not. I’m glad you approve. I approve of your actions as well.

Dean laughed.

And I could grow over-used to the joyful carefree lightness of that sound…

…no, I couldn’t. Should I hear it a million times, a million times a million, I cannot believe it would ever grow sour.

It is well he doesn’t wish to travel with me long.

“Lemme get this straight – you got enough for gas but not for a couple scrambled eggs?” Dean leaned out through the rolled-down window as Castiel stood beside his car, refilling the tank.

“Sustenance isn’t required by my vessel,” said Castiel. “And I have limited resources, so I optimize their use.”

Liar. I do need to eat. I do feel pain. I do grow tired. My vessel is a burden, a prison…will I ever fly free again?

Why should I, after all I’ve done?

“Liar,” said Dean in sarcastic echo of Castiel’s thoughts, rolling his eyes. “I heard that angelic, adorable little tummy rumblin’ when you caught a whiff of good ole fashioned American cheeseburger.”

“Dean, I—”

“Save it,” Dean interrupted. “Anyway, thanks for the meal and bizarro-world chitchat. It’s been real. Okay, no, it’s been utterly fake bullshit, but at least it killed the time. This is my stop.”

“Huh?”

“Where you heading next, Cas?”

“Cincinnati?” he asked, puzzled, looking toward the loop highway and the faint outline of the city skyline beyond.

“No, that’s where I’m heading. Where are you heading?”

“We’re not traveling together?”

Thank God.

“Uh…fuck no…the demons are allllll yours, buddy. I got a more human, mortal type of scum bag to hunt, thank you very much.” Dean pushed the door open and grabbed the beat up army knapsack
that, as far as Castiel could tell, contained all his earthly possessions. His height and the width of
his shoulders made a comical vision of his emergence from the tiny car.

“Even if you are correct that those you hunt are not demons – unlikely; I’ve never met a human
who could recognize demon sign, and the men you seek out act as denizens of the underworld are
wont to do – I’m sure there is plenty of demonic activity here that I can combat.”

Dean huffed an irritated breath, rolling his eyes again. “Okay, first – you thought I was a demon,
so sorry if I don’t exactly trust your hell-dar; second—”

“Hell-dar?”

“It sounded better in my head,” Dean said. “Second, you thought those douche bags I ganked
weren’t demons, thought they didn’t deserve it and that I did, so again, not trusting your take on
this shit. Third, this town ain’t big enough for the two of us.”

“Cincinatti is 80 square miles and has a population of almost 300,000 people. I’m sure there are
ample accommodations, but should all the rooms be booked, I am content to keep to my vehicle.”

“Why the fuck do you know that? Seriously, dude, you eat an encyclopedia? Wait, I forgot. I don’t
care. Scram. Vamoose. I’m doin’ Cincy, and I do not want your weirdo angel ass gettin’ me
arrested. Hit the road, Jack, and don’t you come back.”

...so he was using me after all, to get his next ride, to have a little company, and now that I’ve met
his needs...

“My name is Castiel.”

…it’s for the best.

“Thanks. Thanks for that.” Dean shook his head, but despite his harsh tone his lips quirked in a
smile. “You know what? Don’t tell me where you’re headed. Probably better if I don’t know.
But...hell, I dunno, maybe we’ll run into each other again sometime.”

The pump clicked to indicate that Castiel’s tank was full. Bemused, he withdrew the nozzle,
returned it to its holder, and hit the button for a receipt.

“That would be alright?” Castiel asked.

Dean shrugged noncommittally. “Might not completely suck.” Dean turned and walked away
without a backward glance.

Castiel stared after him.

Where am I going next?

I’d like to be going wherever he is going. But since that isn’t an option...

The honk of a horn yanked Castiel from his reverie, someone behind him annoyed that he remained
at the pump when he was done. With a full-body shake that set his trench coat swaying, Castiel
circled his car, got in, and started the motor. A fork of lightning struck in the distance to his left,
and a second, from a cluster of dark clouds rolling in on the horizon.

Demon sign. There.

Looks like Dayton.
He put the car in gear, drove to the gas station’s exit ramp, and looked over his shoulder to see if anyone was behind him – to see one last glimpse of Dean.

Dean was gone.

_Farewell…my friend?_

Pushing nostalgia aside, Castiel headed down the highway.

He had work to do.

He _always_ had work to do.

Chapter End Notes

So, to clarify a little about the structure of this story - it's divided into chapters but also into parts. The first three chapters mark the end of the first part. Each part involves a time jump. I considered splitting it into multiple works in a series...but meh, that seems like it's more trouble than it's worth. All of the Chapter Titles are the date when the scene takes place, and I'll also make sure to include a note indicating the end of each part.

_This marks the end of Part 1._

Next chapter posts Saturday, December 9th.
Chapter Notes

Additional Warning Pertinent to this Chapter: There's a little "ugh" involving eyes. I know there are a lot of people for whom that's a huge squick so please be aware! It's not to far in, and it's about a paragraph, with graphic description. Please contact me if you have concerns or would like additional details.

Flesh sizzled as Castiel drove his heated blade through the demon’s chest. The woman – the thing wearing the appearance of a woman – didn’t have time to scream before she died; her eyes went wide, her body tensed, her mouth fell open, and then she went limp against her restraints.

Her gaze pinned him.

Lo tirtzach…

…thou shalt not kill…

…the act I have committed is the crime the Lord meant to condemn. I know that. He told us, His shining horde – ‘whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.’ This woman has slain a dozen innocent youth with her neglect, indifference, and unwarranted cruelty. I do not violate my Lord’s Commandments by exacting her punishment, though I am angel shedding the blood of man, rather than man shedding the blood of man. To murder a murderer is to forward the cause of justice and right.

…an eye for an eye…

…I do not, cannot, contest that in slaying the damned I slay myself…

…stop looking at me!

Grimacing, hardening his heart against the guilt swallowing him, Castiel turned to the heated brazier and shoved the blade amidst the coals. A slow count of one hundred, with his eyes closed, restored his serenity, his certainty.

The Lord does not frown on my actions but He would frown on my doubt. I must have faith in Him and in the mission He has assigned to me.

Castiel withdrew his sword, tip glowing like the Star of Bethlehem in the dark, abandoned shack. The red light gleamed, demonic, off the woman’s eyes as they glazed with dust and death. Carefully, Castiel touched the tip of the blade to one orb and it burst with a pop, liquid burning off as it splattered, leaving blackened hole where her eye had been. The relief brought by her gaze averting was instant and palpable, and Castiel destroyed her other eye, freeing himself, vindicating himself.

…an eye for an eye…my task is done.

With a sigh, Castiel let the stress of the past weeks dissipate. Arriving in a new place, settling in,
observing, finding a demon or multiple demons, planning a course of action for combatting evil, always drained him emotionally and physically. The serenity that encompassed him when the deed was done, when the evil was vanquished, justified the toil. God smiled on his actions, and that smile was warmth and calm and a soft, quiet joy. One more evil being was gone from the world.

...one more of my sins is atoned for...

Applause cracked like gunfire through the silent night. Whirling, blade held before him, Castiel dropped into a defensive stance. The brazier was the only source of light, scattering flickering red over the grayed plywood walls, picking out the features of someone standing in the doorway. The peace of divine grace evaporated, replaced by a flurry of analysis.

...one opponent, roughly my height, stocky...

...not a police officer – no equipment, no back up, no flashlight...no flicker of red and blue through the cracks in the walls...

...weak spot in the floor is to my left where the boards rotted through, if I lure them – him? – there...

...opponent isn't armed and isn't reacting aggressively to my actions though I invite the initiation of combat...

...who?...

“Woah, Nelly, didn’t mean to freak you out – guess I got the drop on you this time, huh?”

Dean.

“My name isn’t Nelly, it’s—”

“Cas-ti-el,” Dean mimicked, lifting his arms. Castiel’s nerves flared, but instead of brandishing a weapon, Dean made exaggerated quotes in the air. “Thanks, Einstein, I got that.”

“Not Einstein, either,” said Castiel, resigned, shaking his head. He straightened, lowering his sword-arm to his side, but he didn’t release the blade. He’d set up a rock on the far side of the room as a safe place for it to cool, and the danger of imminent violence seemed to have past...

...but Dean was erratic, unpredictable, an angel who had forgotten himself, and until he remembered himself and his mission, until he explained how he’d found Castiel and why he’d come after saying they should part ways, Castiel would face him prepared. The fiery light made Dean’s answering smile inhuman, his white teeth stained as if by blood. Languid, at ease, Dean strode toward him, floor boards groaning under his weight. Castiel remained wary, but Dean skirted him and instead walked to the limp corpse. He put a finger under her chin, sweeping locks of pale hair from her cheeks, and lifted her head.

“What’d she do?” Dean asked, shifting the woman’s face to admire her features.

“Abused the foster children placed in her care,” Castiel explained.

Nodding absently, Dean stared into the holes where her eyes had been and used his other hand to pull something from his pocket. Castiel tensed, but it was only a cell phone, screen incandescent bright in the dimness, backlight illuminating Dean’s golden-tanned skin like grace shone from within him.
“Say cheese!”

“Huh?”

Castiel’s vision went white as a flashbulb went off.

“Fuck, I did not think that through,” grumbled Dean. Blinking, Castiel tried to clear his sight, but his night vision was ruined and the room seemed pitch black save for the dull glow of the brazier and the neon glow of Dean’s phone, illuminating Dean as he approached Castiel.

“Did you take my picture?” asked Castiel, angry and confused.

“Hell no, why’d I want a picture of your ugly mug?” said Dean, chuckling. He held the phone out toward Castiel, revealing a picture of Dean, lips in an exaggerated pucker as he posed with his head beside the dead woman’s. “Gotta say, ya do nice work.” He took the phone back, flicked the screen, and turned it again to show Castiel a zoomed-in picture of the dead demon’s face, made lurid by the oversaturated light of the flash. The black pits of her eyes saw nothing, skin pale by contrast and by gravity drawing her inert blood downward. “Why didn’t you torture her first? Am I special?” Dean waggled a suggestive eyebrow.

“You are special,” Castiel said. “I’m sorry you perceived my treatment as torture – given how incorrect my assessment of you was, that contention is apt and I apologize again for the unwarranted distress I caused you – but my intentions were good. Unlike this benighted soul, I believed you were not beyond salvation.”

“That was your first mistake.”

“So I sought to exorcise the demon.” Castiel ignored Dean’s interjection. “It was meant as a compliment – an honor – it was the first exorcism I’ve attempted in decades – in longer than a century, in fact.”

“Those ‘exorcisms’ work out better than mine?” asked Dean, a sarcastic edge souring his voice.

“No,” Castiel replied sadly. “When I first received the Lord’s command to eradicate the demonic plague besetting His most favored creation, I was optimistic…demons were once mortals, and I dared hope they were not past saving, that their core of humanity could still be revived. Experience taught me otherwise. Either they were unrepentant, unwilling to acknowledge they’d done any wrong, or they were glib in the face of pain and death, willing to say anything, promise anything, in the hopes I might spare them if recompensed with lies or lucre. The demons’ grip was too strong. In the end, I could save no one, and the one time I thought I had…”

Don’t you mean the two times you thought you had?

Castiel shook his head, the memory of his first…his second?...failure still bitter, of releasing the pedophile only to observe them that very night return home and molest their children again. He was the first that Castiel slew without compunction or compassion. Castiel should have realized as soon as the Lord opened his eyes to the demons among men that the Lord knew which souls were damned, knew their sins, and would not have led Castiel to those who could be redeemed.

And Castiel’s first failure…

...blood on his hands, blood soaking his shirt, blood soaking into the carpet, soaking their hair, masking their faces but not the terror in their dead eyes...

...blood on his cock as he stroked it, hard and aching, his body so hot, their accusing gazes
blocked by pillows, but unable to hide the blood on their chests, their arms, their legs, everywhere...so horrible...so gorgeous...

...no. That wasn’t me. That was not me. And for his crimes, James Novak has been possessed, and he is lucky that he is possessed by angel rather than a demon, even an angel such as I...

He may not plague me with his accursed memories. I will not allow it, will not allow him to push the blame for his actions onto my shoulders.

“You are special, Dean,” Castiel repeated.

“Wow...” breathed Dean, eyes wide with disbelief.

“What must I say to convince you?” asked Castiel.

If I can open his eyes to his angelic grace...what an ally he'd make...

“Convince me? Nothing. You’re full of it. But six months apart, I managed to forget how utterly fucking nuts you are,” Dean said wonderingly.

Castiel sighed. He should have known better than to think he could get through to Dean, convince him of his aptitude and his essential goodness. Too little time had passed since Dean’s encounter with Revelation. Dean needed more time to realize who he was, what he was, who he was supposed to be.

“Why are you here?”

“Curiosity.” Dean shrugged. “Saw a headline about two weeks back ‘bout ‘the Thursday Devil,’ got an inkling, thought I’d check shit out for myself.” Puzzled, Castiel tilted his head. “That’s you, Cas. I suspected as soon as I read about the MO, ‘specially the whole ‘cauterized wound through the heart made by an unknown object’ schtick. Sure sounded like that weird-ass excuse for a weapon you call a sword. Still wasn’t positive but now that I’ve seen the whole eye thing, I’m sold. And a little jealous. My nickname is the fricken ‘Man Mangler,’ what kinda of D-list horror movie bullshit is that? I’m sure the FBI would love a description of that thing,” Dean gestured to Castiel’s sword. “They are so fuckin’ confused, they actually floated the idea that you used a fricken curling iron.”

Even more puzzled, Castiel quirked his head so far to the side his ear brushed his shoulder and he frowned. “Are you...threatening me? Suggesting you’ll inform federal authorities about my activities? I’d rather you didn’t; my jurisdiction is God-granted but I understand that communicating that to the police will be...challenging.”

“Wha? No! No threat intended!” Despite Dean’s firm declination, his expression was coy, taunting. “This?” Dean held up the demon’s face. “This is a work of beauty. I couldn’t burn a Da Vinci, and stoppin’ you wouldn’t be any fun. I’m just sayin’...you got an impressive resume. Prolific. And they ain’t nowhere near catching you, so don’t worry. Surely you knew that?”

“While I am sensible to the need to take minimal precautions to conceal my identity and actions, I am indifferent to what law enforcement officials think of my work, and I don’t slay the wicked in an effort to develop a ‘resume’ or to be awarded a sobriquet,” said Castiel. Dean goggled at him. Castiel had no idea why. “However, since it seems to be of some import to you...I’m sorry that the media has given you a nickname that you find inadequate?”

Dean’s agog expression crumbled into helpless laughter.
How is he endlessly baffling?

“I can’t…I can’t believe you unironically used a word like fuckin’ sobriquet in casual conversation,” Dean laughed. “What the fuck are you?”

That’s what he’s laughing about?

Seriously! HOW is Dean endlessly baffling? And he says I’m crazy? I haven’t the least idea how to predict his mood changes, his reactions, his responses. I have no idea whether he’s telling the truth or lying. I have no idea what to make of him.

“I’m an angel,” said Castiel, rolling his eyes.

It’s intriguing, but…

“Be careful, Cas, you keep repeatin’ that line and I might start to believe you.”

...maybe he truly is a demon. Could he have deceived me, fooled me?

“Good. You should believe me.”

It’s unlikely, but it wouldn’t be the first time I’ve been tricked.

“Naw, definitely not good – pretty sure buyin’ your mumbo-jumbo’d make me as crazy as you are.” Dean shook his head, elbowing the corpse beside him. The dead demon swayed, dangling from chains bound to the ceiling, steel links squeaking as they ground against each other. “And don’t get me wrong – I’m nuts – but…” He lifted her head again, one hand on her chin, the other over her nose, and pulled her mouth open and shut as he said in falsetto, “you cray-cray, yo.”

Unsure what possible response he could posit to Dean’s antics, Castiel shook his head to clear his confused thoughts. Dean was a whirlwind, a distraction. Castiel had work to do and he couldn’t allow Dean to deter him or force him to deviate. Despite Dean’s allusions to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Castiel didn’t think him intent on betrayal – Castiel knew as much about Dean as Dean did about him, and if Castiel was arrested, before he spread his wings and alit to freedom there’d be no reason for him to hold his tongue. Crossing the room, he set his blade on the rock so it could cool, retrieved the manacle key and freed the demon from her shackles. The body tumbled against him, but the weight was less than he expected – less than it had been when he first bound her. Surprised, he looked across the back of her neck and realized Dean was on her other side. He grinned and raised his arm until it ran parallel to Castiel’s, warm against Castiel even though the layers Dean wore.

“Where to, doc?” Dean’s tone had an imitative lilt that stirred memories in Castiel’s vessel of cartoon shows that James Novak’s daughter had watched as a child.

Castiel didn’t watch television or follow the news. The entertainments of mortals were irrelevant to him.

“My name is Castiel,” he said, resigned. Dean chuckled. “I prepared a grave for this demon in the forest behind the hovel. I don’t require aid to transport her there.”

But I’ve sanctified the ground in which she will lie, and painted a devil’s trap onto the canvas that will enshroud her to ensure she doesn’t rise again…so if Dean is a demon, and he interacts with the protections I’ve placed, I will learn the truth…

“’Course you don’t require aid,” Dean scoffed.
...if Dean were a demon he’d not have been able to leave the church that first night we met, couldn’t have shrugged off my exorcism as if it were nothing.

“But wouldn’t some help be nice?”

*Whatever he is, he’s not a demon.*

“I get by with a little help from my friends,” Dean sang in a gravelly lilt. “Get high with a little help from my friends…”

*Is it so hard to believe he’s an angel, in the same way I’m an angel?*

“Are we friends?”

*Given his continually irreverent behavior…*

“Fuck if I know…but we ain’t enemies, and we’ve each watched the other murder some asshole, so I think that pushes the bounds of ‘acquaintances’…we ain’t lovers or fuck buddies, we ain’t family, there’s a whole lot we ain’t, and when ya parse the list down, all that’s left is friends. That work for you, Cas? You okay callin’ someone like me ‘friend?’”

*Am I willing to name Dean friend?*

“Why *are* you here, Dean?”

“ ‘Cause I couldn’t stop thinkin’ about you.” Dean shrugged. “Gonna lie and say you didn’t feel the same?”

“I do not lie,” said Castiel. “And even were it in my nature do so, I see no reason to deny that you have occupied my thoughts since we met. I yet hope you will awaken to your true nature.”

“No worries on that score,” Dean replied with a cold smile, “I know *exactly* who I am. And I’m startin’ to get a damn good sense who you are, too.”

*...gonna try with a little help from my friends…*

*The problem with having Dean around isn’t how confusing he is, or how erratic, or how handsome, or how irreverent.*

*Handsome?*

*The problem with having Dean around is that in his presence, James Novak stirs. James Novak remembers.*

“Where shall I drive you this time when we part ways, Dean? Since I’m assuming you still don’t wish to travel with me long term?”

*I don’t wish to travel with him.*

“You know what they say about making assumptions…”

*The evil that was James Novak must never awaken.*

“No, I don’t.”

*This vessel must remain under my control.*
“Ugh, ‘course you don’t, forgot who I was talkin’ to. Makin’ an ass outta you and me.”

The alternative is unthinkable.

“I don’t believe you are capable of behaving in a manner that would reflect so negatively on me as to constitute grounds on which a passive observer would call me an ‘ass.’ I can’t speak to the opinion your actions might foment as regards yourself, however.”

Castiel nudged the body they hefted between them, lifted a foot to advance forward, and Dean took the hint and walked with him.

“You usin’ all your big fancy words to call me an ass, Cas?”

Together, they carried the demon across the room, Castiel steering them around the rotted sections of floor.

“Now which of us is making assumptions?”

Navigating through the door proved impossible. Even one of them bearing the corpse would struggle; three side by side couldn’t fit. Dean tugged on the body, ignored Castiel’s attempts to shift the balance of the demon’s weight onto his shoulder, tugged again, and finally surrendered.

“You flirtin’ with me, Cas?”

Yes.

“Absolutely not.”

Castiel shimmied sideways through the doorway, dragging the demon with him. No sooner were they through that Dean lifted his side of the corpse once more and started toward the front door. The shack only had two rooms and no windows; Castiel hadn’t a guess who’d first built it or to what purpose, but it was abandoned and isolated and ideal for his purposes.

“So, what, are you angels celibate? I’d ask if you even have a dick but I know you do, seen ample evidence of that. Is it a chastity thing? You a monk? Savin’ all the nookie for the nuns?”

Dean proved more persistent about ceding control to pass through the front door. Leaning forward to see around the woman’s slumped head, Castiel scowled at him and got an ingenuous smile in return.

“Or for the abbot?”

Rolling his eyes, Castiel released his hold on the demon and permitted Dean to haul her into the chill air of a crystalline fall night.

“Angels do not engage in coitus, Dean,” said Castiel, stepping out beside him.

The dead white light of a crescent moon cast the forest into deep shadows punctuated by pools of light. Fallen leaves made a thick carpet on the ground that crunched with each step they took and obscured roots and rocks and hollows.

“Would you do one thing for me?” asked Dean.

The dark was no impediment to Castiel; though his feet caught on the cloaked obstacles, he knew the way to the secluded spot he’d chosen, sheltered ground wet enough to ensure the body would rot, unlikely to flood, path made difficult by thick tree cover and a thicket of brambles.
“I will consider any request you make but I cannot promise to comply with your wishes.”

Though Dean followed Castiel’s way, there was a constant struggle, a constant feeling like Dean would outpace Castiel if he could. He was always a scarce half-step behind, close enough that had they walked in file he’d have trod on Castiel’s heels, far enough that he could react to Castiel’s changes of direction without placing undue burden on either of them.

“Right, Data, I got it, you can’t use contractions and you’ve got no sense of humor. Don’t…I mean, do not worry, fair angel, I will not ask anything untoward or arduous of you.”

Aromatic pine scented the air as they passed through a stand of tall trees, the acidic ground beneath barren of undergrowth. Scurrying nocturnal creatures, fleeing their intrusion, caused the carpet of needles to rustle as if the forest itself lived and breathed.

“I understand your colloquialisms, Dean. You don’t need to imitate my manner of speech. How I talk is my choice, as how you talk is yours. And my name is Castiel, not Data.”

They took a hard right at the last tree in the pine cluster, startling Dean for the first time, and Castiel bore the brunt of carrying the corpse up the hill before them as Dean struggled to catch up, clatters and susurrating cascades speaking to rocks and dirt and foliage giving way beneath his feet.

“Say sex.”

Pausing at the hill’s summit, Castiel glanced back. Dean scrambled after him, breathless, the words made sultry by his efforts. The moon picked out the pink flush of his cheeks. Heat curled through Castiel, burgeoned and burst like verdant growth after a rainstorm.

“Why?”

Tearing his gaze from Dean, Castiel proceeded a step further into the forest, though his arms felt leaden from supporting the demon’s weight alone.

“Woah, hold up, I just…I need a sec.”

Huffing and puffing, Dean stood with his hands on his knees, diaphanous clouds of thin steam dissipating around him with every exhale.

“And ‘sides…what…you gonna sprain something? Come on, it’s one little word, three teeny tiny letters – say sex, Cas.”

I’m breathing in the air he’s expelled. I’m tasting him, sharing his essence. He tastes…sour.

“No.”

I like it.

“Come on…” Dean wheedled, taking up his side of the corpse once more.

That’s my imagination. Angels do not breath, and if I did, even I would not be able to taste anything of Dean from these vapidous leavings.

“‘Engage in coitus’ is a perfectly apt, accurate description of the act in question.”

He smells like leather and nicotine. I wonder if he smokes.

“Say ‘sex.’ Say ‘they fucked.’ Heck, say ‘they made sweet sweet love.’ Consider it a personal
favor – payback for my helpin’ you haul hell-girl all over the landscape.”

The undergrowth grew thicker as they descended the far side of the hill, following a smoothed depression formed by streams of spring snowmelt and rainfall, now awash with leaves.

“I cannot fathom what difference my choice of terminology makes to you.”

Ahead, the hill plateaued, thick with growth, before descending into a ravine carved by a dry, detritus-clogged seasonal stream. The flatland was an excellent sepulcher. The traps Castiel had meticulously placed and the prayers Castiel had intoned would keep the demon’s decaying corpse from corrupting the land in which she lay. The holy water with which he’d sprinkle the ground come morning would be the final seal, the final protection. The leaves that fell over her would decay, their nutrients seeping to the ground, and ultimately even the vile creature that he and Dean carried would provide food for new life, new existence, new creation, an endless cycle that was one of God’s greatest creations.

“Earth to Cas,” Dean snapped. “Wait, sorry, forgot what kinda voices you listen to – heaven to Cas…”

“Yes?”

“Why you gonna ask me a question and then completely fuckin’ ignore my response? Not cool, dude.”

“I regret to inform you that there is literally no definition of ‘cool’ that I am capable of satisfying the requirements of,” said Castiel.

“Bullshit,” Dean said. “You’re fuckin’ hilarious, and that thousand yard stare you got down pat? Fuckin’ priceless, and hot. Chicks dig that kind of thing.”

“My understanding, based on things you’ve said, is that men, women, and people of indeterminate or fluid genders are equally likely to be interested in or deterred by my person, but their attraction or lack thereof remains irrelevant to me.” Castiel wanted to sound frustrated, wanted to quell Dean’s smart comebacks with a single harsh declination, yet instead Castiel spoke amply, spoke his mind, shared himself in bits and baubles of conversation. Almost like…

…almost like I enjoy talking to him.

I was wrong to think that encouraging our companionship would prove a boon. I mustn’t spend more time with him than necessary.

“I get it, I get it, sexless robot angel – talkin’ to you makes me so fricken relieved I’m going straight to hell, heaven sounds boring as fuck.”

“The kinds of people worthy of passing through Heaven’s gates are those who find its pastoral quiet appealing,” said Castiel. “Heaven would no more welcome our volatility than Hell could stomach the goodness of the faithful. Regardless, we’ve arrived at our destination. Her grave is ahead.”

“‘Our?’” Dean echoed.

Castiel took a step forward, but Dean didn’t pace him.

“If you’re tired and require a break, please take one,” said Castiel. “I appreciate the help you’ve provided, but I still have much to do tonight and can’t dawdle.”
“You can ‘dawdle,’ ya just shouldn’t,” Dean joked, but he didn’t move. Castiel frowned; if Dean wasn’t going to help with the last paces he could at least release the demon’s body so that Castiel could finish her interment. “And – fuck, no, not letting you sidetrack me—”

“Me sidetrack you?”

“—you said ‘our volatility’ wasn’t cut out for heaven. You implied we’re bound for hell.”

“I mustn’t dawdle,” Castiel insisted. He tugged on the corpse, and Dean begrudgingly dropped his hold. The sticks Castiel had propped up to mark the corners of the grave stuck up ahead and he dragged the body toward them. The woman’s legs snagged on undergrowth, rustles overloud in the quiet of the forest night, obscuring any noise Dean might have made.

In silence, Castiel approached the grave.

In silence, Castiel stood above it, stared down at the black pit. The demon’s body was consigned to this mortal trench but her soul was already hours trapped in a far deeper, far more horrible pit, and it was no less than she deserved.

In silence, Castiel hefted her corpse, dropped to his knees, and deposited her into the grave as gently as he could. Once, a good person had inhabited that flesh, and for that her meat deserved kind treatment; besides, if Castiel flung her willy-nilly into the hole he’d dug, he might disrupt the binding spells and rituals he’d completed.

In silence, Castiel shifted aside leaves to reveal his inscribed shroud; he brushed off the foliage, spread the white blanket painted in black symbols in the night air, stirring the carpet of leaves and startling a bird into flight. The grave was deep enough that night cloaked the demon’s corpse save for a single ray of moonlight limning the lines of her face white, the remains of her eyes black.

In silence, Castiel cast the shroud over her.

Into the silence, Castiel murmured, “It has pleased Almighty God to take from this world the soul of Tammi Benton, and therefore I commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes. And Almighty God, by whose mercy this benighted departed may find rest, remand your holy angel to watch over this grave. Through Christ our Lord and God our Savior, Amen.”

A spasm of grief, transient and ephemeral, cast cold through Castiel’s.

I can still feel sadness for the dead, even one such as she.

Thank you, Lord, for allowing me some small hope of salvation, some glimmer of humanity beyond the unsympathetic, cruel prison of this cursed vessel.

Loose soil made a mound aside the grave, invisible at a distance but obvious close. Castiel’s shovel lay on the far side of the pile. Circling, Castiel took up the tool and set to burying the body. Across the clearing, Dean stood in a pool of spilled moonlight, a wide-eyed apparition.

“You said she’s going to hell,” Dean stammered.

“Shes already there,” confirmed Castiel.

“But for some fuck-ball reason you still prayed for her soul?”

“The prayers of the damned for the damned,” Castiel confirmed. “The prayers of an angel for a child of God gone astray. He hears, and perhaps He will show mercy. I’d not know; my assignment
to Earth blocks my knowledge of happenings in the Heavenly sphere.”

The work was easy the first few shovelfuls, the soil loosened from recent exhumation. Scarce-healed blisters on his vessel’s hands, formed when he dug the grave, reminded him that the task wouldn’t remain easy. He dug graves often, but not so often that his hands were calloused against injury.

“You’re serious.”

Startled by the proximity of Dean’s voice, Castiel looked up. Dean stood on the opposite side of the grave, staring down at the clumps of soil disappearing into the darkness, covering the white shroud and the demon’s white skin in scattered speckles like ash.

“I thought you were fuckin’ with me. You really think you’re damned for what you’re doin’? But you’re a fuckin’ angel, dude! You said God ordered you to do this. What kinda son of a bitch of a God would give you an order and then condemn you for following it?”

Fury painted the blue night black; seizing the shovel by the haft, he leapt across the trench and caught a startled Dean beneath the chin, driving him back, driving him to the ground, pinning him.

“You will not blaspheme in my presence,” Castiel snarled, driving the wood handle harder against Dean’s throat, forcing his chin up. Desperate breaths forced through blocked rasped from Dean as he strained ineffectively against Castiel’s weight.

“Some sins are too grave to be forgiven, however justified they are, however essential their commission.”

Dean’s hands scrambled at Castiel’s thighs, his torso squirming in an effort to dislodge Castiel from his straddling position, but he could find no purchase; as strong as Dean appeared, Castiel was stronger.

“This is the sacrifice my Lord has demanded of me – that one soul be sacrificed to protect countless others.”

Dean’s heels kicked at the leaf cover, whispering susurrations accompanying the collapse of the edges of the grave under his onslaught, pouring more dirt onto the corpse below.

“You will not lessen my devotion.”

Dean’s nails dug ineffectively into the fabric of Castiel’s pants.

“You will not denigrate my benedictions.”

Dean struggled to turn his head from side to side, but he was pinned, and each movement only served to further impinge his ability to breathe.

“You will not treat my mission as a joke, as you seem to treat the rest of life as a joke.”

Dean went limp, struggles ceasing, eyes alert as he stared at Castiel – a deliberate surrender, rather than the result of suffocation. Castiel eased the pressure on Dean’s chin and Dean sucked in a hoarse, deep breath. His chest strained against the clasp of Castiel’s straddling thighs.

*Finally, he knows his place.*

Adrenaline thrilled through Castiel, scoured his throat with rapidly inhaled frigid air, made his
limbs tingle with anticipation. Dean was not the sort of combatant to surrender for long – he’d regroup, return to the fight, and Castiel would force him to submit again, again, again, as many times as required until Dean understood he’d been bested, and that his place was beneath Castiel, open to him, obedient, smeared in blood—

James Novak! You will not seize control of me. You are damned, and will keep to your place, a passive agent, forced to carry goodness as punishment for your evil.

“I know it ain’t no fuckin’ joke,” breathed Dean. “Hell is real. Been there. Seen it. Lived it. I gotta laugh, else I’ll fuckin’ cry myself to death.”

Dean...

Who hurt you?

“And dude, is your package for real? Are you seriously that hung? Or do ya stuff before demon huntin’? Given me so many ideas…”

The tension and intimacy of the moment shattered. Castiel’s gaze jerked down; the crotch of his pants tented, his vessel’s penis erect and hard. Caught up in the exhilaration of a demon’s death, of Dean’s submission, Castiel hadn’t even noticed, hadn’t realized how close James Novak had come to throwing off his possession. Taking a deep, ragged breath, Castiel shifted off Dean, got a foot under himself and used the shovel as a prop to help him rise. Dean rubbed a hand over his throat, bruise blossoming purple over the fair skin.

There was a bulge at Dean’s crotch as well.

Castiel swallowed against a burst of arousal.

“I’ve got work to do,” Castiel rasped. “Stop distracting me.”

“So that’s a ‘no’ on fuckin’? Man, you keepin’ turnin’ me down cold, gonna give me a complex.”

Circling the grave, Castiel hefted the shovel and scooped another spadeful of dirt. “I regret to inform you…” he huffed, throwing the dirt over the grave and filling the shovel once more. “…that I will never…” He dumped the dirt directly over her face, covering her pale skin, until the blackness of her eyes and the blackness of the rich loam became indistinguishable. “…be interested…” Castiel’s hands twinged, aching already. His grip on the shovel was not so different from his sword grip, yet somehow digging always pained him, while hours of sword training were as nothing. “…in having sex—”

“You said it!” Dean crowed.

“…with you – or anyone,” Castiel concluded, leaning on the shovel for a moment’s break. His breath steamed in the cold.

“There’s gonna come a day, I’m gonna remind you that you said that and you’re gonna feel like a fuckin’ moron,” said Dean with a grin. He surged to his feet, apparently unharmed despite Castiel’s assault.

“Impossible.” Castiel raised the shovel once more.

“Gimme that,” Dean said, joining Castiel beside the mound of dirt and holding out his hand. Confused, Castiel refilled the shovel. “Dude. I can fill a fricken grave. Take a break.”
“I’m fine, Dean.”

“Course you are,” Dean said. “You’re a fuckin’ badass mother fucker and it’s fuckin’ hotter than hell. Even if you’re a loony tune. But you didn’t have to carry this bitch out here alone, and you don’t have to bury her alone. I’m here to help – you don’t gotta do all the heavy lifting.”

Castiel stared at Dean, searching for the innuendo, the subtext, the misdirection in his offer, but he could find none. Dirt sluiced from the shovel as his grip slackened, his focus on Dean. Leaf fragments clung to Dean’s disheveled hair. A smudge of dirt marred his cheek. Moonlight glimmered in his night-black eyes, so like a demon’s in their depths, yet so different in their vivacity and cheer.

Yes, he is relentless in his misinterpretation and his jocularity, but it’s not mean-spirited, not cruelly intentioned. Even when he mocks me, he laughs at himself as well.

And when he’s honest...

Dean’s lips spread in a smile, plush warmth emphasized by the fog of hot air that leaked free with his exhalations.

“And we don’t gotta stick together after this – but just for one night…neither of us has got to do this alone. Please?”

Is that why he came? Is that why he found me?

Is Dean lonely?

A companion might be nice. If that companion were Dean that would be even nicer...

A fantasy sprang to Castiel’s mind, of James Novak continually struggling against Castiel’s possession, of a battle of wills centered on his vessel’s carnal desire to possess Dean, to hurt Dean and see him bleed, see him beg, see him kowtow. Merely considering the prospect was exhausting. The vessel’s dangerous soul had been quiescent so long, but whenever Dean was around, Novak struggled against Castiel’s restraint.

Novak didn’t deserve another chance at this life. Novak could never earn the Lord’s mercy. Castiel had work to do, and this vessel’s eternal subervience and servitude had been earned a hundred, a thousand times over. There was no number of dead demons, no number of saved and protected innocents, that could even the scales of Justice on Novak’s behalf.

…and that is why Dean and I must not, cannot travel together.

But with Dean watching him earnestly, with the bruise growing over his skin, Castiel struggled to convince himself that the twinges of emotion he felt derived from James Novak. They felt like his feelings, his attachment, for the repressed angel standing before him, so dark and twisted and yet so open and fair and true.

Castiel handed Dean the shovel. Dean’s responding smile was like the sun returned to light the world. Dean set to his task with a will, taking up a position beside the dirt pile and energetically shoveling into the open grave. Even through the layers of Dean’s coat, Castiel could make out the play of his muscles, the shift in his stance, the strength of his broad shoulders and shapely frame.

What if…what if these feelings are not James Novak’s?

What if this is all me, all Castiel? A gift from the Lord, perhaps – a reward for my sacrifice and
efforts on His behalf? A gift in the form of a friend and kindred spirit and fellow fallen angel?

I don’t know.

How would I ever know?

At a loss, unable to look away, Castiel paced to the end of the grave, out of Dean’s way, and dropped to a cross-legged position, idly tugging his marking twigs from the ground.

“Thank you for being my friend, Dean.”

Dean froze, bent awkwardly with the shovel embedded in the shrinking pile of dirt. He blinked at Castiel, the shutting of his eyes like the beacon of a lighthouse winking out in the darkness of night, and broke into a slow smile.

“Anytime, Cas.” Dean hefted the shovel and dumped dirt over the demon’s corpse. “Anytime.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will post on Saturday, December 16th.
Part 2: Friday, November 24th

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You don’t want me along.”

Dean’s words shattered the silence that had reigned in Castiel’s car for hours, shattered the cocoon of isolation that Castiel had struggled to erect around himself as he considered how best to broach the topic of their splitting ways. Dean had given him no guidance on where he’d like to be dropped off. Castiel had only nascent plans for his next destination – a college student in Missouri had been acquitted of a rape that, based on the articles Castiel had read, he’d undeniably done, and only a technicality had seen him walk free – but Castiel was not convinced the case warranted his intervention. Before them, a train stretched out of sight in both directions, rail cars making their ponderous way down the tracks, clanking and straining, barring their path forward.

“Cas?”

Right. Dean had spoken. Dean expected a response.

“That’s correct,” Castiel reluctantly admitted.

If there was ever a moment I wished I could tell a lie…

“First time ‘round, you were all eager beaver for someone to ride shotgun,” Dean said, then grimaced and shook his head. “What changed?”

“Your reticence did disappointment me, but the more I reflected on it, the more I came to agree that your assessment was correct, and that we are mismatched as companions.”

...it’s not exactly a lie...

“Seriously? Life’s fricken weird…the more I thought about it, the more I thought we’d get on like a house afire,” said Dean.

“Whether we would or not is moot,” Castiel hoped his discouraging tone would cover his agreement. We get along well...far too well... “I thought our purposes aligned, but I’m no longer certain. I prayed to the Lord for guidance and received none as concerns you. As such…”

“No longer think I’m some kinda angel?”

The conversation was growing harder to navigate without prevaricating. Castiel kept his eyes locked on the worn, graffitied freight cars.

“I didn’t say that,” Castiel said at length. At least Dean had waited for him to reply, instead of inundating him with continual meaningless witticisms until Castiel lost track of what they’d been discussing. “However…in light of the Lord’s silence in response to my supplications…I wonder if I’ve misunderstood His will. I thought the scattering of our garrison on Earth a necessity forced by the scope of the problem and the scantiness of manpower – humanity’s population has grown exponentially while the number of angels hasn’t changed since the dawn. Yet, I thought surely His angels would work more effectively in teams. But His silence gives me doubts. I cannot risk misinterpreting His will – cannot risk defying through misunderstanding what He, in His wisdom, deliberately, explicitly commanded. I must pray for further Revelations, but even should my prayer not be granted…I cannot presume beyond my station. Without—”
“Shut the fuck up already, okay? You’ve convinced me,” Dean groaned. “You acted so normal last night I thought…but it doesn’t fuckin’ matter. I get it. Killin’ someone cools my jets for a bit too. The sunshine seems brighter. The birds sing. I get that ooey-gooey tingly happy feeling. You know the one. I usually get a good week or two – even a month – but hey, if your high only lasts a day…you’re way more of a wacko than I am. I shoulda seen this coming.”

“Dean—”

“Save it, Cas,” Dean snapped. The humor laced through his words faded, replaced by what sounded like genuine anger. Confused, Castiel tore his gaze from the endless line of train cars. Dean’s cheeks were flushed, arms crossed over his chest, hands tucked against his sides, lips a thin, pale line. “‘Cause I just realized – what I just said is utter bullshit. This isn’t your post murder-capade rush fadin’, this is you, smart psycho that you are, realizing that I fuckin’ hate it when you spew Jesus and pullin’ out all that He said She said God nonsense to piss me off and get me to leave you alone. And you accuse me of blasphemy? Usin’ your God as an excuse? Claimin’ you don’t lie? Don’t feed me a crock of shit. I learned from the most damned men of Hell, your little hoity toity haloed angel ass can’t pull the wool over my eyes.”

Is that true?

Is he right?

I didn’t describe my doubts to put him off...

…but I do know, have seen it amply demonstrated, how uncomfortable I make Dean with the bountifulness of my faith.

Castiel’s eyes flicked to the rearview mirror, reflecting a view of empty road, winter-desolate, stretching back the way they’d come. They’d waited at the railroad crossing for close to an hour, but not a car had come up behind them.

If he cannot accept my Lord, he cannot accept my existence. I have no will, no autonomy, no existence, beyond God’s mission for me, God’s message imbuing my grace with purpose.

His gaze returned to Dean. Dean, who watched him warily. Dean, who scowled at Castiel’s impassive expression. Dean, who went from joking to deadly serious in a heartbeat, who’s quick wit gave Castiel whiplash in conversation after conversation. Dean, who set Castiel’s pulse racing, who’s presence was as much of an adrenaline rush as felling a demon.

And yet...

…I would have lied to him, could I have. Can I truly pretend my unanswered prayers are why I seek escape from Dean’s presence? I know the lie in my soul, though every word is technically the truth. Intentional self-deception is no less criminal than a lie told to another.

Rolling his eyes, Dean slid a hand to the button for his seatbelt, his other reaching to unlock the car door. “Don’t even know why I’m bothering. You don’t want me around; ‘why’ is pretty fuckin’ moot. Save the sermonizin’ for the flock, I—”

“You’re right,” Castiel admitted softly. Dean froze, hand on the handle that opened the door. The seatbelt rushed through his hand with a zzzzzt and clasped close around his throat, hiding the bruise Castiel’s shovel had left. Castiel missed it instantly, longed to reach over and tug the belt aside and see the mottled wound with which he’d marked Dean. Swallowing, he forced himself to continue. “I did pray – have prayed – will always pray for guidance, and I sometimes receive it, but in the
absence of replies I have and will continue to forge my own path. With no specific injunctions against traveling with you… it is wrong of me to use my mission as an excuse. I’m sorry.”

“So?”

“So’ what?” asked Castiel, forming the quotations with his fingers.

“Did you really just… with a straight face… seriously… no, not gettin’ sidelined, not now.” Dean spoke in a rush as he fumbled the belt from around his throat. “So, if that’s not why you’re ditchin’ me, what’s the real reason?”

A long silence was broken only by the screech of a train wheel, sparks flaring from the roughened steel. The train continued. The road stretched empty behind them. They might have been alone in the world, alone in hell, trapped with each other and no exit, no end in sight, an eternity in each other’s company. Sartre had described hell as a closed room forcing sinners to cohabitate; Castiel wouldn’t mind, so long as the person sharing his personal damnation was Dean.

“You terrify me,” Castiel whispered.

Dean’s gaze went soft, his expression vulnerable, and years seemed to melt off his worn features. The change was so brief, gone so quickly, that Castiel thought he’d imagined it, and Dean’s reply did nothing to convince him otherwise.

“What, think you’re my next victim? Gonna lure you out of the shallows and bump ya off? Remember what I told you ‘bout my preferred victims? That you? You want to take a slice outta my fine ass? Plannin’ to rape me, Cas?”

Dean, prone beneath him, abasing himself, covered in blood…

Dean, his legs spread wide, his penis hard…

Dean, taking whatever I choose to give him, forced to like whatever scraps I offer him…

Dean—

“I’m not,” Castiel snarled, voice hoarse.

“Ya know how Poe wrote that shit about the tell-tale heart? You got the tell-tale cock…”

There was a bulge to Castiel’s pants, a surge of heat emanating from his penis, to his mortification.

“That makes no sense – Edgar Allen Poe was writing about the heart of a murderer betraying his killer, whereas…” With a ragged breath, Castiel forced himself to the barest appearance of calm. “Whereas, I cannot deny that picturing you subjugating yourself to me appeals to my vessel in… highly inappropriate… ways, but I swear, Dean, on my immortal soul and my almighty Father, that I would never violate you.”

“Already have,” Dean pointed out.

“Yes… yes, I know… I’ve apologized, and will again and again, for my unwarranted assault. I thought you demonic…”

“And now you think I ain’t, unlike these other poor fuckers you violate?”

“They are demons, Dean. The things they’ve done—”
“Every single one? You dead-to-rights positive?”

“Aren’t you?” asked Castiel. “About those that you slay?”

There was a beat pause.

A bell on the gate blocking the crossing tolled, though Castiel couldn’t guess why. The train yet stretched into the distance.

“Yeah, I am,” Dean murmured.

“See, you do have faith in something,” said Castiel. “And I am sorry, Dean, that I mistook you. I wasn’t wrong when I named you killer; but my understanding of your motivations was deeply flawed and I’m glad that we had an opportunity to talk before I committed a heinous crime. Do I think it possible that I’ve erred so before? Of course. Even an angel is not infallible. I am not God. But do I think it probable? No. The chances are infinitesimal that I would meet two such as you, two whose grave misdeeds have even the barest of excuses. What you do – luring predators into the open – is incredibly brave and commendable, and that you do so at grave personal risk to yourself is awe-inspiring. You’re a remarkable man – one of the most remarkable I’ve known.”

“’m not.”

“And your disbelief is why you cannot conceive that there aren’t other people like you – cannot believe that you might be an angel cloaked in flesh, memories lost,” Castiel continued. “You’ve seen far too much of the darkest of mankind. I’ve seen both the brightest brights and the darkest darks that the human soul can encompass, and beneath the scum of the evil that was done to you, your soul burns as brilliant as the sun.”

“Now I know you’re lying. You—”

“That’s why you frighten me,” said Castiel. Dean’s effacing interjections were meaningless, strangely out of character compared to his bravado and jocularity, strangely in character with his certainty that he was damned and deserved death. “The way I feel when I look at you…”

So much power, so much strength, so much courage, so much boldness, surrendering to me, desirous of me, suffering for me… it’s heady, delicious... I want him, want that feeling to go on and on.

Is that how God feels, when I serve him?

...seeking to imitate my Lord, seeking to force Dean to my will as God forces me to His, would be blasphemy, more power than man or angel was meant to know.

“Oh, is that all?” Dean broke into laughter, ever confusing to Castiel, ever baffling, ever alluring. “I freak you out cause I make you horny? That is... that is so much more prosaic than I expected.”

“I’m glad you find my distress laughable,” grumbled Castiel. “Your irreverence in the face of my struggles is a heartening reminder of why my temptation is like unto that of Eve in Paradise.”

For some reason, that brought Dean up short. “Woah... that’s some temptation... so am I Adam, the snake, or the apple?”

“All of the above?” Castiel sighed. He was naked before the storm, helpless in the face of Dean’s ingenuousness.
“Think you’d better polish up on your scripture,” said Dean. “Cause if I’m Adam, and you’re Eve, that means you’re made from my rib, and that’s all kinds of fucked up. And ‘sides, my life experiences, kinda on the opposite trajectory.” Castiel quirked his head in a silent request for further explanation. “Adam started out buck-ass naked and unashamed, found out about the best shit in life – good food, sexy ladies, coming his brains out, the works – and got all modest and shy. I started out as a good little well-behaved Christian soldier, wouldn’t even show my dick in the locker room, only kissed the girls, and then with explicit consent. But one bite of that forbidden fruit? Oo-ee, I am a one-man kink machine. You want the weird stuff? I am here, queer, masochistic, and damn proud.”

Masochistic…that means he likes pain, enjoys pain, is sexually aroused by pain…that explains his bizarre reactions to me…

...and what explains my equally bizarre reactions to him? What explains my desire to cause him pain, to force his obedience?

And if Dean is a willing masochist, does that mean he’d be a welcoming recipient of attentions such as those I crave?

No! I do not crave Dean bloody and bound before him! I am not James Novak. He is my vessel, nothing more.

“Get the feelin’ you ain’t quite so at peace with what you are, though,” Dean added thoughtfully.

“You’re mistaken,” said Castiel. “I am, to my core, sanguine in my nature.”

“Well, tells me one thing ‘bout you, anyway…” Dean trailed off, expression laden with expectation. Castiel waited patiently for Dean to continue and silence stretched out once more. Dean rolled his eyes and gave a slight shake of his head.

“I have to ask?” asked Castiel. Dean grinned. “What has my reply clarified for you, Dean?”

“You’ve lied twice. That I know of.”

“I’ve not.”

“Sure thing. You lied when you said you can’t lie, and you lied just now when you said you’re all good with the halo-and-wings gig.”

“Don’t presume to tell me my feelings on my nature.”

“I don’t presume nothin’. But if you were as easy ‘bout stuff as you think, why the anger? What’s there be to be afraid of? And, most important, what’s with that over-eager dick of yours? You keep sayin’ sex is off the table but looks to me like little Cas has a different idea.”

“Little…Cas…?”

“What I’m tryin’ to get through to you is – you ain’t gotta be conflicted,” Dean continued. “You wanna fuck, I’m game.”

“I do not wish to engage in—”

“Hn hn hn!”

“I do not wish to have sex with you.”
“Three lies.”
“Dean…”

Castiel could grow to loathe the pained silence that so often strained to the point of shattering between them. The spark of Dean’s vitality was addictive; when Dean quelled it, Castiel felt its absence as a pain in his chest. It seemed impossible that they’d only met twice, impossible that they’d spent mere hours together. The connection between them was…

...impossible?
...miraculous?
...God given?

Lips fixed in a stern line, Castiel sat rigid in the driver’s seat, eyes fixed on the dash.

0 miles per hour.
0 rotations per minute.
Check Engine light on.
Oil Change light on.
A quarter tank of gas.
Nowhere to go.
Trapped in a car with Dean.
At least Dean’s hand no longer rested on the door handle.

No. I want him to leave. I should want him to leave.

Or should I?

Interactions with mortals are inevitably complicated. And if Dean isn’t a mortal…immortal interactions are even more complicated. Who knows what tricks our memories play, what forms Dean’s unknown angel has worn in the past? So many friends of ages gone missing or departed…Anna, Samandriel, Hannah, Hester, Inias, on and on…Dean shares many traits with Balthazar, perhaps Dean is he? Or perhaps Dean is a boon companion of the past who I cannot place because of the travails I have suffered? Perhaps the connection I feel to Dean is my grace reacting to his, recognizing him, though the constraints of my vessel prevent me from seeing what my essence knows so well.

Or maybe this is James Novak’s ploy to take control, to wrest his body from me.

Until I can be sure, I must be cautious.

How can I ever be sure?

“My presence makes you that miserable?”

“Yes…and no. And that’s the problem.” Admitting his dilemma felt like defeat, though they were not at odds in a way where victory and loss should be factors. Castiel wanted Dean to stay, wanted
to travel with him, wanted to slay the forces of evil at Dean’s side, but he had too many questions, too many uncertainties, too much doubt.

*An angel should be sure, certain, confident, to strike swift and true. Doubt is tantamount of blasphemy. And yet…*

He was *not* enough at peace within himself to join forces with Dean.

“S’ok, Cas.” Dean’s gentle smile was forgiveness Castiel hadn’t earned. *He’s an angel, lost, alone, and he came to me for guidance, and here I am…craven, pushing him away…*“You ain’t gotta force yourself. I’ll go. Can’t promise to stay away, but…well, I’ll keep hopin’ you see the light, and keep on keepin’ on.”

A sound caught in Castiel’s throat, an unfamiliar spasm palpated his chest, forcing a bark through his lips. It took him far too long to realize he was *laughing*, that he found it hilarious that Dean was waiting for *Castiel* to see the light, as Castiel awaited Dean awakening to divinity. The smile that answered Castiel’s humor only heightened his amusement, until he slumped against the car door, laughing so hard he cried.

*When was the last time I laughed?*

*When was the last time I cried?*

*When was the last time I expressed the least inkling of my vessel’s humanity?*

*Dean has to leave.*

“Don’t worry – I *will* be back.”

Castiel yet laughed as the car shifted beneath Dean’s weight, as the door squeaked open, as the door slammed shut, as Dean’s presence faded from Castiel’s awareness.

Castiel yet laughed when a honk forced him to awareness of his surroundings. Dean was gone. The train was gone. A car behind him flashed headlights and honked to prompt him to drive.

*When did night fall?*

It was time for Castiel to move on.

Chapter End Notes

End of part 2!

The next chapter will post on Saturday, December 23rd.
A *shung-shung-shung* sound clattered through the reader as Castiel scrolled through microfiche, photographs of old yellowed newspapers blurring to oblivion as they sped by on the projector screen. The date he needed – November 3rd, 1997 – was at the end of the roll, and anticipation drove Castiel to turn the dial to maximum rotations. Castiel’s days in Lawrence had been frustrating and fruitless. Demon sign abounded – too many storms, too many youth disappearances, too many abandoned homes, too many people with too little hope – but Castiel had despaired of finding the being responsible for the desolation. Even prayer had seemed powerless, but Castiel’s faith never wavered, and with the Lord’s hand to guide him, the Lord’s sight to lift the pall from Castiel’s eyes, he found a name, and a picture, of a likely culprit.

Sam Winchester, listed as deceased on May 2nd, 2010, was unmistakably alive in a photograph dated March 19th, 2016. His name wasn’t given in the text accompanying that image, nor was there mention of him in the article it accompanied – a police blotter piece about a sorority party from which a young woman had disappeared from – but his appearance hadn’t changed enough in six years for Castiel to be fooled.

The young woman had subsequently been found dead: mutilated, assaulted, and tortured before a bullet was shot through her brain.

The case remained unsolved.

The microfiche reel clicked as Castiel reached the end of the tape and he grumbled and rolled it back. November 3rd was the last day on the reel, and the article Castiel sought was the second earliest reference to Sam Winchester he’d found in the library’s reference material. As the first reference was a birth announcement from May 2nd, 1997, Castiel hadn’t bothered to load it. That an article should appear about him at such a young age made Castiel suspicious.

`Screen 1,005, Column 1…there.`

Whatever had happened was front page news, the most prominent headline for the day.

**Three Alarm Fire on Oak Tree Drive Kills One, Injures Three**

Residents of the usually-quiet Quail Run neighborhood woke to sirens and flickering firelight as 1542 Oak Tree Drive, residence of the Winchester family, was enveloped in flames at approximately 11 PM last night.

John Winchester, co-owner of Guenther Automotive on West 6th, owned the home and resided there with his wife Mary Winchester, born Mary Campbell, and their sons, Dean (age 4) and Samuel (age 6 months). Mary Winchester died in the blaze while attempting to reach her infant son; John, Dean and Samuel have been admitted to Lawrence Memorial Hospital, where they are being treated for smoke inhalation and mild burns.

According to a preliminary report by the Lawrence Fire Department, the fire started in the family nursery and arson is suspected, though no accelerant has been found. The police indicate that members of the family are not currently under suspicion, though are not forthcoming on details as
Damage to the home was localized to the façade of the house. The heroic efforts of the LFD prevented the blaze from spreading beyond the home.

A memorial service for Mary Winchester is scheduled at Yellow Creek Funeral Home on November 8th at 12 PM. In lieu of flowers, the family has asked that gifts be made in Mrs. Winchester’s name to the Youths’ Hunter Fund, 785-555-6431.

Castiel read the article, read it again, read it a third time. There were many hints – people to follow up on, locations to visit, leads that might provide Castiel further information on whether Sam Winchester yet lived and if he was a demon – but his eye kept catching on the name of Sam’s elder brother.

Dean.

Once again, James Novak’s spirit ventures from the darkness to interfere with my ability to execute my responsibilities. Dean is not the most common of names, but neither is it particularly uncommon. I have not seen him, will not see him, and thinking on him is a distraction I can ill afford. If this Sam Winchester is a demon, his crimes might have started as early as his six month birthday with the death of his mother, and only grown more depraved since then. That must be my priority. I’ve never heard of one damned from infancy but the maliciousness and malevolence of demons cannot be over-stated. If it amused one to corrupt an innocent child…

The images that accompanied the image provided no edification. One showed the Winchesters smiling in a staged portrait, Mary beaming as she held her infant, John with a supportive hand on the shoulder of his eldest son. Dean, as pictured, was a chubby, smiling youth, specific features made vague and muted when reprinted in smudged black ink. None resembled anyone Castiel had seen before. The second image showed the damage to the house limned in the highlights and lowlights of a spotlight. A second floor room, presumably once the nursery, was a black, gouged-out wound in the side of the building.

As eviscerated and cauterized as the eyes of the damned.

Taking his notebook in hand, Castiel added information on the Winchesters and their home to that which he’d already gathered, rewound the spindle to the beginning, removed it, loaded another microfiche, and scrolled to the next article that had caught his attention. Though Lawrence wasn’t small – home to nearly a hundred thousand people – the Winchester family made the news often – unjustifiably often.

As Castiel followed up on his leads, he built a picture of their life. John Winchester served in the army in Operation Desert Storm, returned home, married his high school sweetheart, and launched into a successful career as a mechanic. Mary Winchester had a tragic background, her parents having been brutally murdered while her husband was at war. The murder of the Campbells was described in lurid detail in the local paper, and a Google search revealed it had made national news.

Their case also remained unsolved.

Perhaps Sam Winchester wasn’t the demon of this scenario – perhaps, instead, some unknown malefactor victimized the Campbell and Winchester families and Sam was merely the latest to suffer at the hands of that demon. The nursery scenario was ominous and odd, and that Samuel was pronounced dead some years later yet clearly among the living was suspicious. As sadly prepared as Castiel was to accept that an infant might be possessed and made to murder his mother, the boy
couldn’t have had a hand in the murder of grandparents who died five years before he was born.

After the fire that killed their mother, the Winchesters continued to occasionally feature in the local paper. An article announced that John Winchester’s garage was shutting down. Another mentioned the success of Dean Winchester’s Little League team. Sam Winchester won the 4th grade Science Fair. John Winchester remarried, a woman named Kate Milligan, and they had a son three months later named Adam. A follow up article on the ten year anniversary of the fire discussed the two tragic, unsolved cases related to the Winchester family. A commemorative insert from June, 2007, showed photographs of the graduating classes of every local school – Sam Winchester, 10 years old and just beginning to be recognizable as the boy from the adult photographs that had set Castiel on the scent, graduated from Kennedy Elementary School, and Dean Winchester, age 14, graduated from…

Castiel’s hand froze on the dial as he scanned the class photograph. About a hundred students stared at the camera, eternally smiling and young, but he didn’t see the chubby, freckled youth whose team had gone to the Little League World Series.

No.

He saw, unmistakably, Dean.

Impossible. Confirmation bias. It’s just a name, it’s just a coincidence, it’s just…

…it’s just Dean.

How?

Could Dean’s brother be a demon? Could Dean and his family be party to a tragedy of this magnitude?

How could I have believed for a moment that Dean’s family wouldn’t be wrapped up in something akin to this?

But…but something like what, exactly?

Scanning the stack of microfiche rolls he hadn’t examined yet, Castiel skipped several that he suspected were irrelevant news tidbits and withdrew the one dated May, 2010. Loading it, hands shaking, he scrolled to May 2nd, 2010 – Sam’s 13th birthday, and the anniversary of his death.

The alleged anniversary of his death.

Expecting a brief note in the obituaries, Castiel sped past the front page only to scroll back as he recognized John’s beaming face in the glimpse that whizzed by.

Collision between Semi-Truck and Sedan Kills 3

In the latest tragedy for a family long plagued by misfortune, at midnight last night an 18 wheel semi-truck collided with a sedan driven by young Dean Winchester, son of John Winchester, as they drove through the intersection of McDonald Drive and West 2nd Street, killing Dean, John, and Dean’s younger brother Sam Winchester, a passenger in the backseat.

According to witnesses, the truck careened out of control after passing through the McDonald Drive toll plaza, ran a red light and t-boned the car. A fire ensued, destroying both vehicles. The temperatures were so hot that first responders were unable to reach the victims until firefighters
extinguished the blaze.

Records from the truck company that owned the semi-truck indicate it carried several tons of an undisclosed combustible material, and bore the required markings as containing a Class 3 Combustible Hazardous Material. The driver of the vehicle, believed to have survived and fled the scene, has not been identified or located. Preliminary findings suggest the truck experienced a mechanical failure.

“The bodies of the two young men were burnt beyond recognition,” explained Emergency Medical Technician Ava Wilson, a first responder on the scene. “If we’d not been able to retrieve Mr. Winchester’s identification we’d not have been able to identify the deceased family members, the damage was so extensive. It’s one of the saddest accidents I’ve ever responded to.”

The deaths of John, Dean and Sam Winchester mark another grim chapter in the lives of a family that seems cursed. Mary Winchester, John’s wife and Dean and Sam’s mother, was killed in an unsolved arson incident on November 2nd, 1997, and both John Winchester’s and Mary Winchester’s parents died in mysterious circumstances.

John Winchester leaves behind a widow, Kate Milligan, and a 6 year old son, Adam Milligan. Ms. Milligan could not be reached for comment.

Witnesses describe the driver of the vehicle as an older man with a mustache, approximately 5 feet 8 inches and 200 pounds. Police are offering a $500 reward to anyone who helps locate him. He is wanted for questioning only and is not currently suspected of a crime other than fleeing the scene of an accident.

The microfiche version of the article included a grim image of twisted metal in stark black and white. Grabbing his phone, Castiel navigated to the Lawrence Journal-World website and located the online version, which featured color photographs. The burned-out skeleton of the car was even more grim set against a background of verdant green spring growth, mangled beyond recognition, driver’s side collapsed where the full momentum of a speeding truck struck it. No distinguishing feature of the vehicle remained, only bare steel bars, blackened ground revealing that the blaze had been so hot it seared the road surface. Only springs showed where seats had been. Even the steering wheel had melted.

No one could have survived that...

...unless they weren’t in the car when it was struck, or they were removed immediately after, before the blaze started. And that would explain why only John’s body was retrievable. John Winchester may actually be dead, whereas Sam and Dean definitely aren’t...

Any doubt Castiel had on that score vanished when he looked upon the pictures of them in the paper. At 17, Dean was the spitting image of the man Castiel knew, if more lean with youth. 13 year old Sam hadn’t hit his growth spurt yet but his face and hair were equally unmistakable. Both brothers lived, and if Sam had suffered as Dean clearly had…there was no chance the smiling youth in the class picture in the paper had been subjected to the torture whose history was carved into Dean’s skin, which meant that Dean’s torture and scarring had occurred after the traffic accident that “killed” him.

The deaths of the Campbells and the Winchesters, the fire at Mary’s house, the closing of John’s business, all were suspicious but lacked anything conclusive, anything that proved the Devil’s hand at work.

The crash was absolute proof. The circumstances defied explanation unless an external mover
steered events to their tragic conclusion.

Follow up articles in the newspaper over the following days indicated that the driver had been found but could recall nothing of the events of the night, that he’d been indicted, and eventually that he was convicted and jailed, assumed to have been under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Ms. Milligan sued the trucking company and won a settlement, citing incorrectly maintained equipment. No further investigation was conducted, for the authorities believed the three men dead and the driver at fault.

“Attention Lawrence Public Library patrons: the library will be closing in 15 minutes.”

Scrawling notes so quickly his normally neat handwriting was a scrawl, Castiel cleaned up his workstation, reboxed the rolls of microfiche he’d used, and carried them to the returns cart for the librarians to reshelve. He was tired – his vessel was tired – but the need to act drove him on.

He had to find Sam Winchester.

The thin, blonde woman who answered the door looked aged and worn compared to the happy wedding announcement picture Castiel had seen in the newspaper.

“’I’m sorry to bother you at this hour,” said Castiel. “Are you Kate Milligan?”

“I am.” Used to being met by skepticism and wariness, Castiel was surprised by her open smile and the softening in her eyes. The ease only lasted a moment before her lips turned down in a concerned moue. “Is everything alright?”

“Everything” is never alright. The world is beset by problems, by evils, by demons, and—

“Again, my apologies – I didn’t intend to alarm you.” Castiel had been among humanity long enough to realize a literal answer would not assuage her worries and would likely get the door slammed in his face. He wanted to reply with absolute, counterproductive honesty, but… “I’m investigating the mysterious circumstances of the deaths of the members of the Winchester family.” Her expression pinched, eyes narrowing. “I’m sorry to stir painful memories, but I was wondering if you might have time to answer a few questions?”

Reluctance and uncertainty removed the last traces of a congenial welcome from Ms. Milligan’s face. Darkness lowered the early evening of the January night, but the interior of her home was welcome, warm, and bright, a haven against the monsters, good and evil, that lurked in the winter cold.

Castiel didn’t belong within.

“I’m not s…I mean…” Ms. Milligan bit her lip.

Castiel waited patiently. Heated air oozed outside, warming his face, a stark contrast to the cold wind raking her porch.

“Ma, is everything alright?” A light male voice called from within, and then a youthful head emerged from a doorway down the hall. The child must be Adam Milligan, not yet hit his growth spurt. Ms. Milligan bore a superficial resemblance to Mary Campbell – John Winchester apparently was fond of lean, muscular blondes – but the resemblance between father, brothers, and half-brother Adam was unmistakable. His face was leaner, his eyes larger, but he had the same short brown hair as Dean, the same plus lips, the same dimpled chin…
Nostalgia and desire seethed in Castiel’s gut and he grimaced.

“Everything’s fine, Adam – have you finished your homework?” There was a playful reprimand in her voice, the polite woman who had greeted Castiel returned as she glanced over her shoulder and gave her son a stern look.

“No,” he sighed. She quirked an eyebrow at her, he rolled his eyes in return, and ducked back into the room from which he’d emerged. Ms. Milligan turned back to Castiel, her joviality melting away once more.”

“You should leave,” she said unhappily. “I don’t mean to be…difficult, an impediment in your investigation…but the loss of my husband was – is – painful, and my step-sons were darling children. I’d love to see justice for what happened to them, and a fair outcome for that poor, duped truck driver, but…the Winchesters were cursed. I don’t know how, I don’t know why, but it’s common knowledge ‘round these parts. My friends and family warned me not to wed into the family, and I kept my name, and phrased my vows carefully, in the hopes that…” She flushed.

“Call me superstitious, but whatever demons plagued them… I can’t have them follow us, do you understand? Adam needs me. And I need him. I must protect him…”

No! You must tell me about Dean, about Sam – you must know something, and I—

“I understand. Thank you for your time,” said Castiel, voice as frosty as the January air. “I’m sorry to have troubled you.

James Novak, be quiet and save your selfish, inappropriate desires for the afterlife you have earned in spades. I have other leads to investigate, and Ms. Milligan is absolutely correct: calling attention to herself, stirring the ghosts of the past, could endanger her life and that of her son. It is appropriate, respectable, noble, for her to shield her family.

“I hope you find the truth,” Ms. Milligan said, all sincerity and gentle smiles once more. “Truly…I wish…” She shook her head, hair brushing over her shoulders, and with a sad smile and a slight shrug, she withdrew into her home and closed the door.

Disgruntled, Castiel stared at the glowing window, a bastion of happiness in the cold, dark evening. The flaps of his trench coat beat about his legs. Shoving his hands in his pocket, he turned, walked down the stairs and returned to his car.

Now what?

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter posts Saturday, December 30th, 2017.
Part 3: Thursday and Friday, 25th and 26th

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, sorry this is a day late, the holidays totally demolished my writing time and I didn't get a chance to finish editing.

Outside the street lights of the city and the sprawling University of Kansas campus, Lawrence shut down early. The suburban streets were quiet and dark, homes closed and isolated, neighbor separated from neighbor by well-kept fences and manicured hedges.

The reports Castiel read indicated that, though the Winchester family home had been rebuilt after the fire that killed Mary Winchester, John had moved his young children elsewhere rather than return to it. Public sales announcements had suggested multiple changes of hand, but until he drove by Castiel didn’t realize the home was currently on the market. Castiel could act officially, contact the realtor, request a tour…but that sounded like a lot of bother. Parking before the home, time passed. Night deepened, the streets grew deserted, his powered down car grew cold, and the neighborhood became quiescent.

No light came on in the Winchester home. No curtains cloaked the interior from prying eyes. No decorations adorned the porch. The homeowners weren’t in residence.

Emerging from his vehicle, Castiel approached the front door. He knocked and rang the doorbell, expecting no answer and receiving none. A lockbox looped around the knob, but would not open when he shook it, not that he’d expected it to. Stepping to the nearest window, Castiel pressed his face to the glass, a hand shielding his eyes from the distracting glow of nearby street lights. The room within was dark, contours limned in blues so deep they were scarce distinguishable from the night, but there was nothing to see save bare walls and old carpet. White paint glowed luminescent, gathering what little light there was like a halo, and the grassy texture of a shaggy carpet reflected enough illumination to appear surreal, surface appearing to shift like the seabed in a current.

Circling to the back of the house, Castiel approached the back door. Elbow wrapped in his button up shirt, suit coat and jacket, it hardly made a sound as he drove it through the door’s glass. He carefully caught the shattered fragments to prevent them tinkling on the concrete walkway, indifferent as they nicked his hands. He pocketed the pieces to dispose of them later, pulled a pair of latex gloves from another pocket, reached through the broken pane and opened the door.

Castiel needn’t have bothered breaking in.

The damn thing was unlocked.

Closing it behind him, Castiel could only shake his head and realize that, though he should be, he wasn’t surprised. Something as inexplicable as an unlocked backdoor on a vacant property up for sale was part and parcel of the many mysteries surrounding the Winchester family. As ludicrous as it was to imagine a connection between anything at the home now and the sordid, tortured past of the family who once live there – it had been almost 20 years since a Winchester walked through the kitchen that Castiel entered – Castiel felt a conviction, the word of God whispered in his ear, that his search here wasn’t futile.
The door was unlocked for a reason.

To let Castiel in.

And, potentially, others?

Night shadows revealed white particle board cabinets and a pale, scarred countertop. Castiel stalked across, stepping lightly, wary of squeaky boards. Beyond, a hallway stretched to the front of the house, black broken by the navy of the front door windows. Questing fingers revealed bare, smooth walls punctuated by the void of a door on his left and, after a half dozen feet, the evenly spaced poles of a staircase bannister. The public spaces of the first and second floor would yield nothing, the rooms made barren and sterile to present a blank slate to a potential purchaser. If anything remained of those who had once lived there, it would be small, subtle – scars on the walls, a forgotten box in a basement or attic, nicks in the carpet or floor, nothing that would be visible, even with Castiel’s eyes accustomed to the dark.

Making his way upstairs, Castiel reluctantly took out his cellphone and activated the dim flashlight. In the hallway, the glow showed little. Three doorways opened to empty rooms on his left and right. A few paces past where he stood, the flooring changed from old worn wood to carpet, marking, Castiel suspected, the spread of the fire and the section of the home that had subsequently been rebuilt. Castiel proceeded down the hall, but the small bedroom that was once the nursery, once a burned-out husk, looked ordinary, of a piece with the rest of the house.

Castiel didn’t bother searching the remaining upstairs rooms; a glance through each doorway showed there was nothing to find, even the closet doors left open to advertise the sizable interiors. Turning his gaze and flashlight upwards, Castiel searched the ceiling, broken only by light fixtures until…

…there, before the hallways dead-ended at a bathroom, was the trapdoor leading to the eaves. Heart thudding anticipation, Castiel stood on his toes to grab the tucked-away draw string and pulled the hatch down, revealing a sturdy folding ladder.

Cautiously, Castiel climbed them, using the camera on his phone to see what lay ahead before thrusting his head up into the unknown, but he needn’t have been so cautious. The attic was unfinished, floor rough, slanted ceiling formed of roof support beams, the space between each beam stuffed with insulation. Stained paper backing spoke to past leaks. Tears and wear spoke to age, fluffy pink revealed wherever the paper gapped. The exposed wood was dark with age, and the lack of a tell-tale gleam on the few smooth walls suggested that there were no windows. Rather than take the chance, Castiel circled the room, masking the light, and only when he was sure there was no chance of observation did he increase the illumination of his beam.

A scratch-scratch suggested some tiny intruder seeking shelter from the unexpected brightness.

Where the lower stories showed no evidence of the painful history of the house, the attic revealed multiple clues. In place of unfinished boards, the corner over the nursery had been rebuilt using smooth two-by-fours, nails new enough to gleam. The beams above that section bore the scars of fire damage, gouged arcs showing where the wood had been reduced to coals that fell free, some beams replaced. The insulation was new as well, and the surrounding insulation looked to have been inundated, presumably when firefighters turned their hoses on the blaze. Dark spots blossomed over the water-rippled paper, mold blooms that died when the water dried.

Except…

Except why replace some of the insulation, but leave other insulation so damaged that it grew
mold? Castiel might think money an issue save that all the repairs he’d seen thus far had been high quality. Whoever bought the home from the Winchesters cared enough to do a thorough remodeling before they resold the property. That suggested subsequent damage, irrelevant to Castiel’s investigation, but what he’d seen niggled at Castiel as he searched the nooks and crannies along the walls, the only places where some forgotten trinket or lost document might be hided. What little he found, he mentally inventoried.

A bubblegum wrapper.

Two bobby pins and a hair tie.

Four piles of sunflower seeds, neatly shelled, mixed with sawdust and splinters.

Mouse droppings.

A sprung mouse trap.

A rusted, nicked razor blade.

A torn corner of glossy paper, presumably from a photograph, but with no recognizable feature on the front and with a few letters – “The f—” – written in a loopy script on the back.


The last, at least, Castiel could identify and place – the Winchester’s must have at one point retained the paper containing Sam’s birth announcement – but the page in question detailed a Cinco de Mayo sale at a local car dealership, “Deals so Good You’ll Stage a Revolution!” The page betrayed a depressing, if unsurprising, lack of knowledge of the history of Mexico, but bore no other significance.

I was led here for a reason. That I can find no evidence is a personal failure I must rectify.

Frustrated, Castiel dimmed his flashlight once more, waited for his eyes to accustom to the darkness, and listened to the furtive sound of his mouse companion emerging from hiding. When he could make out the staircase as a square of blue against the black, he descended to the second floor, the first, searched until he found a door in the kitchen that led to the basement, and headed down. Impatience made him hasty. He castigated himself as he went down the staircase but he needn’t have bothered; no amount of haste would cause him to miss anything in the pristine, vacant finished room. Inexplicably, the basement was the nicest room in the house – smooth, clean walls, a neat laundry area complete with shelves, and a tile floor, suffused with a pleasant aroma of lemon cleaner. A door at one end gave Castiel brief hope of striking gold, but it led only to a crawl space, also neatly organized, and…

…crawl spaces…

Castiel had searched the attic and not found any sign of a mouse in hiding, heard no movement while he was active up there. How had the mouse gotten in, and where had it gone?

No longer concerned about being quiet – the house was empty, save for vermin who’d not report him – Castiel vaulted up the stairs to the first floor, to the second, and tugged down the attic trap door. There hadn’t appeared to be any place beneath the eaves that could hide an extra room, but there had to be something. His flash of insight couldn’t be mere coincidence. Breathing hard, Castiel pulled himself into the empty, pitch-black room and pictured the exterior of the house, trying to overlay what he’d seen out there with where he stood now.
…low slanting roof…

…second floor windows covered by Venetian blinds…

…a stone chimney silhouetted against the night sky…

…where was the chimney?

Grabbing his phone, Castiel turned on his flashlight again. There was no evidence of the chimney, though the stonework should pierce the attic before him. The corner where it rose was the one damaged by fire, and there was nothing but a blank wall. Approaching cautiously, Castiel examined the wall, knocked on it gently, and confirmed it was hollow.

…but it would be hollow regardless…

There was no door, no gap, no entryway. The nearest slanted roof beams were scarred, the nearest insulation appeared freshly dampened, splotched with black spots. Castiel reached out, ran his hand over it, confirmed it was dry…

…and the insulation gave beneath his gentle touch.

Tucking the phone in the lapel pocket of his shirt, Castiel used both hands to pull the worn panels of insulation away, though his skepticism ran rampant.

Why hide an entry under the worst insulation? Why make it so flimsy that the merest touch reveals the truth? Dean, despite his lackadaisical attitude, is brilliant and competent and meticulous in covering his tracks. If he weren’t, he’d have been caught committing his crimes.

Caught by someone other than I, that is.

A narrow, dark line, matching the silhouette of a support beam, marked the tiny entrance into the crawl space. Light from Castiel’s phone, fuzzed dim by the cloth of his shirt, revealed the outlines of where the beam had been cut away, and something glinted beyond.

A window.

With an alarmed hiss, Castiel grabbed his phone and swiped the flashlight off.

Impenetrable darkness fell.

Given the hour, the odds of discovery were slim, but if even one neighbor saw a light in a house they knew to be deserted…

I suspect Dean of sloppiness, and then myself make a mistake even a child would have been cautious of.

Why do I believe Dean involved in this hidden space? There’s no reason to suspect him…

…but my thoughts fly to him because I want to suspect him.

No. My vessel wants to suspect him, wants to see him. I want…

Castiel shook his head, forced his breathing to calm, and waited. The tell-tale mouse scritched and scratched at the floor boards, chittered as it chewed on something. Incrementally, his eyes accustomed to the darkness. The main attic room behind him remained pitch, but before him were the navy squares of the window, four panes through which the glitter of stars punctured eternity.
By that low light, Castiel advanced, using his peripheral vision to enhance his ability to pick out shades of gray, sucking in his stomach to shimmy through the tiny gap.

A person with even a trace of excess fat would never fit through.

Dean would fit.

Based on the pictures Castiel had seen, Sam would fit as well.

And Castiel had to stop tying his current investigation back to Dean, tying his life back to Dean. Since they’d met, far too much of his existence had revolved around the enigmatic, boisterous killer. Dean was an angel, meting out justice against men who attacked and assaulted and hurt him, men who deserved it, men who were demons. He was harmless to the innocent – no, beyond that, he was a guardian to the innocent – and dangerous the guilty.

Dean was dangerous to Castiel.

...and that neatly sums up the conundrum of my existence, the conundrum of my angelic presence in this soiled vessel...

...focus, Castiel!

Fabric tore and pain spiked up his leg as Castiel won through the gap. Scarce lit in shades of blue and gray and black, he could make out only that the room was tiny. Shrugging off his coat, Castiel moved toward the only source of light, the only reminder of a world outside the void of the former Winchester family home. By touch, he traced the outlines of the window frame, glass uncovered, a flimsy, rickety bar above suggesting curtains once hung and were now absent. Castiel draped his trench coat over the bar, tucking it around carefully until every star was eclipsed, every trace of the world beyond gone. Anticipation curled through him, and no amount of castigating himself, ridiculing himself, could make it fade. The house was barren, bereft of personality, ghosts of the past forgotten in an effort to sell the home without leaving a trace that might prompt a buyer to ask awkward questions.

Castiel pulled his phone out.

Stop being a fool over Dean Winchester. Stop allowing him to corrupt me. Stop stooping to the level of the basest of humanity over a fellow angel. Stop—

Castiel flicked the flashlight on.

A tiny room, perhaps three feet wide, greeted him, the bulk of the chimney protruding from the exterior wall.

It wasn’t empty.

It was…

Castiel shook his head.

The walls and floor were blackened by the fire, the insulation charred, with no evidence of repair work. Ashes made a pile below the window, all that remained of the missing curtain. Empty food wrappers were piled between the support beams, mixed with seed shells, the dregs of unknown past meals, and mouse droppings. Five empty liquor bottles were grouped in one corner, one half-filled with cigarette butts, a second coated in wax, the stub of a candle wedged in the neck.
The false wall…

A sparkle caught Castiel’s eye, pulled his attention from that which he couldn’t bring himself to look upon yet. A pile of razor blades, some rusted, some pocked, some chipped, some edged black with blood, made a horrific mountain near the bottles.

…and the back of the false wall…

*James Novak was a coward. I face the evils, within and without, even if I fear their influence on me, even if I know I cannot vanquish them…*

*Dean’s right, I am a liar. The evils without do not daunt me, but those within…?*

Castiel turned to the wall.

If madness could be expressed in written words and scribbled art, it was stained into the rough plywood. Much was nonsense, unknown tallies or large blotches that, though blackened with time, were surely blood. Sometimes the outlines of earlier creation was hinted at by line or curve within those stains but none of what had been deliberately destroyed was decipherable even by the harsh, bright light of Castiel’s flashlight. That those spots hinted at worse than what was clear was itself insanity, for what was evident was awful. Word written large and small, thick in blood or carved thin by blade, spoke to agony that defied description.

*Save me.*

*Someone help, anyone help.*

*Father, mother, please.*

*It hurts* was written over and over, text jagged or smooth, sometimes in writing so disparate that Castiel wondered if multiple hands had bled raw terror into mere words.

Art as a child might have done depicted a mouth opened in an unending scream, the letters of that howl curving around and through the other work. Symbols carved into flesh were drawn with living blood, wounds overlaid as the scars on Dean’s chest were overlaid. Blasphemy was writ large, too, a cross scrawled over *Fuck you*, a brow shredded by a crown of thorns, God damned in such harsh language that Castiel shied away. The pain of whoever had adorned the wall was palpable.

*Whoever adorned the wall?*

Splinters stuck out jagged where a blade had been taken to the lower corner of the wooden wall, the initials D.W. inscribed in angular script.

*Am I truly going to continue to deny what’s evident?*

The floor was stained dark by past flames, the insulation speckled with black mildew dots.

No.

The floor was stained dark by past flames and blood, the insulation splattered with arterial flow.

*Outside, too…not mold on the sodden-looking insulation. Blood.*

*Dean’s blood.*
When did he do this? When did he come here? Why would he do this?

How long was he forced to silence? How desperate must he have been for expression that he chose this means of release? He must have been in unspeakable pain. A vocal scream was impossible, would have revealed his presence to the home owners, to the neighbors, to everyone, but this existential scream, this flow of life’s blood to express agony beyond comprehension…this he could do.

How did he survive?

Stepping into the crawl space was like trespassing in Dean’s brain. Castiel felt soiled and bloodied, not because of the filth, not because of the debris, not because of the ash, not because of the heinous things he read, but because coming here, entering this space, was a fundamental violation of Dean’s person, his humanity, his soul, his grace.

When Castiel believed Dean a demon, Castiel had attacked him, cut him, bled him, tortured him.

When Castiel believed Dean a blasphemer, he’d attacked Dean, forced him to submit, inadvertently aroused Dean, aroused them both.

Castiel had been disappointed with himself at the outcome of both encounters but understood their necessity, understood the miscommunication that occasioned them, and forgave himself his transgressions, knowing the Lord forgave him.

For this transgression, though…

There was nothing of Sam Winchester in this room, nothing of demons, only Dean’s tortured past laid bare in a way that Dean could never have wished revealed, never have wished to share.

Castiel felt like a rapist.

James Novak was disgustingly familiar with that sensation, enjoyed that sensation, but Castiel… Castiel was sickened by what he saw, sickened by his reaction, sickened that he continued to stand and stare, examining the minutiae of Dean’s soul.

He shouldn’t have kept searching the house, shouldn’t have pushed. He should have restricted his investigation to Sam Winchester, or perhaps left this demon hunt to another angel, as soon as he realized his personal connection to the case.

But what Sam has done is wrong. And whoever brought Dean to this agonized state…they are wrong, evil, and must be stopped.

I will not let this lie. My purpose on earth is to vanquish any and all who create pain this visceral.

But I wish I’d not violated Dean’s privacy to achieve that purpose.

So why do I continue to look?

Turning off his flashlight required a shameful, monumental effort of willpower. The room plunged into darkness, though the after-image of what he’d seen was burned into his retinas, glowing red as if emblazoned in fresh, angelic blood.

Whoever did this made my angel bleed.

Castiel didn’t wait for his vision to adjust. The dimensions of the room were seared into his mind.
Reaching out, he grasped his coat and pulled it free from the window. His memory of Dean’s scrawls projected onto the night sky, made new constellations from the familiar configurations of stars.

*I will make them suffer, worse than they made Dean suffer, worse than any mortal has ever suffered.*

The mouse squeaked in fright, claws scrambling over wood as it fled, when Castiel pushed back through the narrow crawl space back into the attic.

*I will exorcise them to the deepest depths of hell.*

Carefully, as if he were laying an infant to rest, Castiel replaced the insulation he’d heedlessly pushed aside before.

*They will envy Judas’ fate.*

The stairs creaked as Castiel stalked descended and refolded them into the ceiling. There was no one to hear, no one to care. Noise was transient, an echo that was the only trace of Castiel’s disturbance of the house.

*Even if Sam Winchester had a hand in this, though he is Dean’s brothers…*

Castiel swept his coat back on as he returned to the first floor. The weight in one pocket slammed into his leg, something pricked him, something tinkled – the glass from the broken window. Castiel had left traces of himself, in broken glass and scuffed foot prints and flattened places on the carpet, and his leg throbbed a reminder that his vessel’s weak, mortal flesh had torn as he’d entered Dean’s sanctuary.

Especially *Sam Winchester, if he had a hand in plunging Dean into this torment.*

In a room so stained with blood, no one would find the drops that Castiel had left behind.

Unconcerned, Castiel left the house, closing the door behind him. Only when he was in public once more, returned to the sight of God, did he take care that none observe him returning to his car.

Castiel would not give up this hunt. Sam Winchester must be found. The truth must out. No one else must suffer as Dean had suffered.

This was Castiel’s mission on earth. Purpose fired his veins, pushed his vessel’s fatigue away. The car motor hummed to life as he turned the key, lights flashing on to show the stark suburban streets made ethereal by night and winter.

Questions floated, unbidden, to the forefront of his mind.

*If Dean didn’t wish that room found, if Dean didn’t wish his sacred privacy to be violated, why the blood splatters on the visible insulation? Why the damaged insulation panels that someone would in time replace? Why the evidence of his present writ large?*

*What if Dean wanted to be found?*

*Why would Dean want to be found?*

*By whom would Dean want to be found?*

*More questions, always more questions, and little hope that God or Dean will provide me answers,*
no matter how fervently I pray.

God helps those who help themselves. He has led me to the tragic puzzle that is the Winchester family.

It is for me to fit the pieces together, learn the truth, and lay waste to the demons who have destroyed so many innocent lives.

It is for me to be honest with myself and admit...

...I only care about one innocent life that they took. For Dean may live, but his innocence was obliterated in blood and pain, scarred over in his mind as his body was scarred by the pain wrought on his flesh.

I will do this for myself, and for God, for the woman who disappeared from the sorority party, for countless other unknown victims, for Mary and John and Sam Winchester...

...but truly, and solely, I will do this for Dean.

Energized by his discoveries, Castiel navigated the Lawrence streets to investigate the other addresses he’d gathered.

Of the garage that John Winchester co-owned, no sign remained. A Dollar Tree, employees locking up for the evening, occupied the lot amidst a regulation-minimum number of scraggly, winter-bare trees.

The Campbell home, site of their murder, was also gone. Photographs showed a stately, well-maintained Cape Cod. The replacement was a modernist’s dream with a black façade, gleaming windows and manicured landscaping.

The schools the Winchesters had attended remained, closed for the night, and as desperate as Castiel was for information, he couldn’t believe their school records would provide more than minimal insight. If they’d engaged in behavior extreme enough to be diagnostic while in attendance, that would have made the local newspaper as so much of the family drama had.

Location after location, Castiel found the past erased to such an extent he grew suspicious. One or two homes gone, one or two places scrubbed clean, was normal with the passage of time. However, less than 10 years had passed since the supposed deaths of John, Dean, and Sam; less than 20 since Mary passed; and even the Campbells were barely 30 years gone. Other than the Winchesters’ old home and the Milligans’ house, nothing remained of the places that had been important to the family. Kate Milligan’s attitude suggested she distanced herself to the utmost from the memory of her deceased husband and step sons, and the Winchester home had deliberately been reworked to erase evidence of the Winchesters’ tragedies, but for the rest...

That time erases all is normal, and over the centuries I have seen much lost never to return, but even I find it painful that I will never again gaze on the wonders of Babylon and Alexandria and Rhodes; even I yet mourn the destruction of the First Temple. For one so young as Dean, still so connected to the world of mortals? No wonder screamed his soul on to the walls of the attic; the world believes him dead and even the places he knew are gone.

There was nothing to see, nothing to find, and it was unusual and discomfiting. Castiel had done similar investigations time and again and there was always a trail. Until now.

Next time I see Dean, I must help him find his place.
Next time?

Troubled, Castiel returned to the church where a kindly pastor had granted him free access to a spare room. The bed was rickety. The springs squealed when he shifted. The blanket was thin. The window was drafty. The fare offered spare. Castiel knelt on the bare stone floor and begged God’s blessing on the man who’d granted such munificent gifts to Castiel. Too many nights, he slept in his car; too many days, he ate nothing; too many times, cold air burned his lungs, dehydration roughened his throat, and the icy touch of the cold seared him like winterfire.

Angels don’t need to sleep.

Angels don’t need to eat.

Angels don’t need to breathe.

Angels don’t need to drink.

Angels don’t feel the cold.

If Castiel needed proof that he that he fell farther every day, every week, that he obeyed God’s injunction to pursue the demons on earth, his subjugation to the needs of his vessel was incontrovertible. Castiel’s grace was fading, his mission tarnishing the essence of his being. One day, he’d be fallen in truth, and then what would happen to him?

It doesn’t matter. This is my purpose. Whatever the personal cost, God’s command is absolute, and the work is good and right.

Laying on the bed, Castiel slipped a hand in his pocket to retrieve his phone and nicked his hand on the glass shards from the window he’d broken earlier.

Angels don’t bleed.

A bead of black spread over his finger tip, broke and flowed to etch the cobwebbed lines of his vessel’s palm.

With a sigh, Castiel rose, emptied the glimmering fragments into the room’s tiny garbage pail, and turned on the dim lamp. The light was amplified by a silvered, foxed mirror. Aside from the bed, the room contained a small table, a sink, and a toilet, suitable lifelong retreat for a monk or pensioner or ascetic.

Which of those am I?

All, perhaps…

Castiel’s blood gleamed red, a glitter in the wound suggesting an embedded shard. Turning on the faucet, Castiel sluiced cold water over the wound, numbed it, rubbed at it until the sliver worked free and washed down the drain. A quick inspection his fingers showed several other nicks to his hands, a splinter in his thigh that he had no memory of, and a gash to his leg bad enough that it had soaked the torn cloth surrounding it with blood. His nerves flared, triggered by concerns that he might have left more evidence in the Winchester home than he’d supposed, but reflection silenced his worries. After injuring himself pushing through into Dean’s cloister, Castiel had spent long minutes in seclusion. Even if he did bleed extensively enough to soak to the floor – unlikely, since his socks and shoes were dry and unstained – there would be no distinguishing his blood from the stains that saturated every surface of Dean’s mind.
I wonder where Dean is now…

Castiel pulled off his trench coat, his suit jacket, his tie, and undid the buttons of his dress shirt. Another shameful decline: once, he could use his grace to cleanse his clothing but now he had to do laundry. Hopefully, the priest had a sewing kit Castiel could use to repair the tear to his pants. Such mortal concerns were increasingly central to Castiel’s day-to-day existence, essential for him to blend in with mortal society. He didn’t want to pass as a human, but if he didn’t make a token attempt, he’d draw attention, draw attention to the demons he slew, draw the eye of law enforcement and risk capture. While he wished the authorities could be his allies, he knew better than to think they’d understand him, believe him, and leave him to his mission. He need think only of Dean’s insistence that Castiel was insane, his rank disbelief in Castiel’s divine nature. If even one such as Dean found Castiel incomprehensible, how much less prepared were the minds of lesser mortals to accept the complex realities of heaven, no matter how many said they believed in guardian angels.

I wonder how Dean reached this point in his life. I wonder what separated him from his brother.

Turning off the light, Castiel returned to the bed, took up his phone, and stared blankly at the glowing screen.

Did Dean want his room at the Winchester home to be discovered? And if so, who was he hoping would find it? Does it predate the death of his father and the disappearance of his brother? How did he survive the car crash?

Did he survive the car crash?

The screen went blank from inactivity.

I’m supposed to be thinking about Sam, hunting Sam to discover if he is in truth a demon, and instead…

With a sigh, Castiel set the phone aside. Limpid moonlight streamed over him and he lay back, raised his hands, stared at the black silhouettes. His joints ached, the cut on his finger throbbed, and he clenched his fists, unclenched them, to stretch out the muscles. He was growing older. He felt it in his bones.

Angels don’t have fists. Angels don’t have joints. Angels don’t have bones.

Angels don’t age.

What am I?

Angels don’t doubt.

Except that I do. I am filled with doubts.

I am imperfect, either by God’s design or by the purposeful corruption of this vessel.

And I have no idea what I can do about it, save to continue on as I’ve begun. I have no idea what I can do except expunge as much evil from the world as possible before I am expunged.

Castiel slipped his eyes closed and dropped his hands. There was much to do, but tomorrow was another day. Eternity was surely closed to him but he had time – he still had some time.

Sleep now, angel…
Castiel shuddered at the voice in his head, so like Novak’s, but obeyed nonetheless.

...sleep...

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter posts Saturday, January 6th, 2018.
Dr. Matt Ganswith, obstetrician, suffered a heart attack on June 13th while attending a patient at his practice.

Turning the dial, Castiel scanned microfiche pages until he found the next name and date on the list he’d compiled.

Mrs. Lydia Arbiter, homemaker, died of a seizure on June 21st and was found by her eldest child, Martha, age 6.

Grimacing, Castiel removed the microfiche for the first six months of 1988 and popped in the next. So far, he’d checked six names, and all six were deceased, their deaths announced in short obituaries in the Lawrence news.

Mr. Roger Namby, registered and licensed plumber, was electrocuted yesterday, October 26th, while doing routine plumbing work for a customer. EMTs were unable to revive him at the scene and he was pronounced dead at 2:05 PM.

All the deaths appeared to be the result of natural causes or plausible accidents, but there were too many, and the dates clustered unnaturally. How had no one noticed the pattern? But, he supposed, an investigator would have had to look for a pattern amidst the apparently unrelated incidents, and that the deaths would be linked was so unlikely, so outlandish, would have been so difficult to orchestrate…

Mr. Ed Campbell and Mrs. Sandra Wallace were the only casualties in a two alarm fire that destroyed the Happy Acres Elders Community on October 31st. The couple had been roommates since they’d entered the senior living home.

…yet someone must have orchestrated it. Coincidence only stretched so far.

Mr. Allen Campbell, patriarch of the Campbell family and owner of Allen’s Wrenches Hardware Store, passed away on December 12th after a shelf collapsed at the business and crushed him.

The deceased were friends of Mary Winchesters, or family members, or service providers, or acquaintances. Reading between the lines, Roger Namby had actually died at the Winchester house, but there wasn’t any sign of suspicion falling on the Winchesters or on anyone else.

Mrs. Amanda Campbell committed suicide on December 19th, a week after the unexpected death of her husband, Mr. Allen Campbell. The couple leaves behind no children. Inquiries for funeral services should be directed to Mary Winchester nee Campbell.

With the death of Amanda Campbell, no member of the Campbell family remained in the Lawrence area. Castiel had sketched out a family tree based on his research; entire branches were crossed out. A few distant cousins remained, those who had moved away and whom Mary hadn’t known, but the gist of his research was clear.

Acquaintance with Mary Winchester was a death sentence.

Rubbing his temple with one hand, fighting off the fatigue that afflicted his vessel, Castiel stared at his notes. Many of John Winchester’s friends had also passed, and he too was the last scion of his family, which unusually made a neat single branch back for as many generations as Castiel could
trace, father to son, father to son, until John and Mary had two sons. Those of John’s relations who weren’t dead had left Lawrence. Perhaps some instinct had warned them that, despite the lack of evidence connecting the deaths, they were in danger if they stayed. Regardless, there was no one, no one, to whom Castiel could speak who had known the Winchesters well except for Kate Milligan and Adam Milligan. Even Sam and Dean’s school friends had met with mishaps or scattered about the country.

Who could have coordinated such a sweeping…crime spree?...over the course of years, decades?

Why would anyone do such a thing?

It’s not so dissimilar from what I do, when I find a demon cluster…

...Dean could do it, too...

There’s another killer. Another hunter. Except one without a conscious, without remorse. They’re not killing sinners. Humans existence, ultimately, is the sum of a person’s impact on the world – what they create, who they know. Whoever has committed these crimes is single-mindedly destroying one family and all trace of their existence.

If Sam Winchester is a demon, he’s not the only one. He wasn’t born when this – whatever ‘this’ is – began.

But why have the Milligans been spared? Why are Sam and Dean alive? Why has Dean returned to the Winchester home? Who else is involved? So many questions...

...Dean could answer them...

...I cannot, must not seek him out.

Why not?

Castiel slumped back in his chair and unspooled the last microfiche. Despite the increasing futility of the task, Castiel had checked every name on his list, every connection he’d been able to locate, to the very last.

He was out of names.

Taking a deep breath, letting it go slowly, Castiel swiveled his chair to the desk behind him. Sam and Dean’s yearbooks made two neat stacks. Castiel had already investigated their classmates, figured out their friends as best he could based on candid shots of them at school and at play, discovered the same alarming, depressing patterns as he had with Mary’s friends.

Fatigue addled his imagination, his vessel’s needs interfering with his grace, his ability to hear the whispered hints that God gave him. Rubbing itchy grit from his eyes, he grabbed the top books again – 1998-1999, for Dean’s Kindergarten year, and 2002-2003 for Sam’s, Castiel opened them and flipped through side by side.

Maybe he’d missed something. He compared their classes, their classrooms, their teachers, their clothes, everything…but nothing caught his eye.

He took up their respective first grade books and again, paged through each.

Nothing.
Second grade.

Nothing.

Third grade...the only thing that Castiel noticed was that they had the same teacher, a Mr. A. Lehne.

Fourth grade...once again, four years apart, they had the same teacher – this time, a Mr. A. Heyerdahl.

The brother’s school wasn’t large, and their ages were close. If they hadn’t had a teacher or two in common, that would have been weird.

And yet...something about Mr. Lehne and Mr. Heyerdahl niggled at Castiel. He flipped through his case notebook and scanned through the information he’d recorded. Neither name appeared on his lists – teachers weren’t friends or family and if there’d been a plague of teacher deaths someone would have noticed, so Castiel hadn’t checked them. He reached the first page of his journal. Taped within the cover was a printout of the two photographs that had drawn Castiel’s suspicions to the Winchester family: Sam Winchester’s last class picture from June 2010 beside the recent image of him at the sorority party. The photo of the party was grainy and blurred, depicting a chaotic scene of people who’d been in attendance, including an ethereal dancer believed to be the girl who’d been found dead.

Castiel hadn’t spared attention for the other people in the image.

He should have known better.

Mr. Heyerdahl was there, his face cut off by the edge of the print, but his gaunt cheeks and wide eyes and scruffy beard were unmistakable. Castiel grabbed the year book from when Sam was in Mr. Lehne’s class, leaving the picture of Dean in Mr. Heyerdahl’s class open. Heyerdahl had his hand on Dean’s shoulder in the one, and Mr. Lehne stood directly behind Sam in the other, both with a predatory look in their eyes. Castiel stared at Lehne’s face until it was inscribed in his memory and searched the sorority house picture, but didn’t see him.

Lehne might not be involved.

But Heyerdahl...

The smile – the leer – on his face as he held onto Dean was demonic, and, looking at Dean, Castiel saw tension he hadn’t noticed before. Dean’s eyes were tight, his lips compressed, his shoulders hunched. Dean didn’t welcome his teacher’s touch, but saw no way to escape it.

The girl who had disappeared from the sorority house had been found murdered, but there had been other disappearances, other deaths, other teenage boys and girls who were never found, some presumed dead, some not.

Including Sam and Dean Winchester, believed dead, but actually...

...actually what? After the accident that killed their father, what happened to the two young men? Dean had been 17, Sam only 13, and now, nearly nine years later, the man that Dean had become bore no resemblance to the smiling boy whose image was scattered across the pages of the school year books.

Except...
…except, at 25, Dean bore a slight resemblance to the fourth grader flinching under Mr. A. Heyerdahl’s grip.

With renewed purpose, Castiel dove back into the archives, armed with two new names to investigate. He’d let Sam distract him, let the discovery of Dean’s involvement divert him, let the conundrum of Mary Winchester’s cursed life sidetrack him, and he’d lost sight of his goal.

He had to find the demons.

His preliminary investigations into the missing youth had found nothing, but he’d not known what to look for. Now, he did. Every instinct screamed that Heyerdahl was linked to the crimes, and that Lehne was as well, though the second supposition had little support from the evidence he’d accrued so far. Gazing at their images, he could see their vessel’s features twisting to dark, evil inhumanity by the demon housed within. That the evil was evident even in still images years old was profound, deep, and unnerving. The depths of depravity he suspected the two teachers of…

…what Mr. Heyerdahl did to Dean…

…but he wouldn’t act without evidence, without proof. If he could connect the victims, the missing youth, to one or both teachers…Lawrence was a city, but not so large that he could believe that the teachers would randomly be linked to more dead teenagers, any more than he could believe it an accident that all of Mary’s family and acquaintances were dead.

Research was a rabbit hole, and Castiel tumbled down to the depths as surely as Alice had. Time ceased to mean anything as he focused on his task. The Winchesters and Campbells were writ large over the history of Lawrence, in the news so often it strained credulity. By contrast, Heyerdahl and Lehne were ghosts. Even articles that should have featured them, didn’t. When their students succeeded, the principal was credited instead of either of them. When articles mentioned other teachers, they were omitted. Even pictures that included them were only partially labeled. Searching for their names in the microfiche directory produced few results, and Googling them produced little more. He couldn’t determine when or where they were born, how long they’d been employed, what their areas of expertise were. The only definite information he had was that both men were still employed by the school, and that Heyerdahl also worked with the university – he was listed as faculty of the history department. Based on their biographies, they 50s, but it was hard to say for certain, and they might have spawned spontaneously from hellfire and damnation, for Castiel could find no evidence of their existence before they arrived in Lawrence.

It was hard to say anything about them for certain, which stirred Castiel’s suspicions farther. They were teachers. Their positions required certification and they had to pass background checks. Castiel couldn’t even find out what their first initials stood for, much less when they were born or if they had criminal records. Someone at the elementary school must be complicit in their crimes – if there are crimes! Don’t put the horse before the carriage! – or willfully incompetent, or else there was no explaining their employment.

More data, and more questions, and still a dearth of explanations for anything he’d learned.

Lawrence, Kansas – the Winchesters – were maddening.

Castiel itched to act, to confront Heyerdahl, but he didn’t know enough yet. He was increasingly sure he was on the right track, but…

Innocent until proven guilty…

....stop being obstinate…do I truly still doubt their complicity?
But I have to be sure.

...and maybe if I investigate thoroughly enough, I’ll learn more of Dean...

The list of missing children was 34 names long, and Castiel’s initial investigations had taken his entire first day at the library. He’d scanned newspapers, read about their cases, found little relevant, but he’d not focused on their lives before they went missing. He’d been so intent on how they’d disappeared, searching for connections to Sam Winchester, he’d not bothered considering the youth as people.

All had been in high school or college.

All had been under 21.

The first had disappeared in 1985 – the same year the Campbells were murdered, and while that smacked of coincidence, the more Castiel learned of this case, the less he believed anything he’d found could be ascribed to coincidence. Just as God’s hand was obvious steering Castiel to the answers he sought, Satan’s hand was obvious in the plague that had afflicted so many in Lawrence – including the missing children. Every single youth who had vanished was from Lawrence, even those attending college. None was from even so far as Oskaloosa.

Two of the victims were born the same year as Dean, and Castiel took up the school year book once more. The odds of them also having gone to Dean’s school, the chances they were in Heyerdahl’s class...

Both children, one boy, one girl, were in the image.

Heart pounding, Castiel grabbed the other yearbooks, checked photograph after photograph. Not every missing youth had attended Heyerdahl’s class. Some were in Lehne’s class. Some were in other classes. But every single child had attended the same elementary school.

Castiel was stunned.

The children attended Kennedy Elementary School, stayed in Lawrence, ultimate attended the university, and disappeared between when they were sophomores or juniors. The connections between the cases seemed obvious – Castiel had discovered the links in scant days! – yet there was no sign in the coverage of the cases that authorities suspected the commonality. Those who were found dead, yes, the cases were linked, but those who had disappeared, their absences were ascribed to running away, drugs, alcoholism, ‘alternative’ lifestyles, relationships gone awry, all the usual deviancy attributed to teenagers.

Perhaps the connections wasn’t so obvious as Castiel thought. There were other names, names he’d not investigated for any number of reasons, the background noise of undergraduates who had actually run away, actually overdosed, actually fled the rigors of academia. Most patterns were obvious after the fact, but before...? That Castiel found the links, and so quickly, must be the Lord, guiding him to those cases that were relevant, helping him see the pattern behind the claxon of meaningless data noise.

The truth clamored to be out, and if mortals couldn’t discover the truth, the divine would intervene. Castiel had met Dean for a reason – that he’d known all along – and he’d only scratched the surface when he’d supposed that they were drawn together because Dean was an angel.

Dean was an angel, tortured and twisted but still so holy Castiel couldn’t bear to be near him, but there was so much more for Castiel to learn.
Praise God, in His infinite wisdom, for guiding me to this horror, that I might have the chance to right it.

I will not fail.

Two to three students were missing from every graduating class, going back to 1985.

Heyerdahl and Lehne weren’t necessarily to blame – surely other faculty had been on staff for 30 years – but…

Heyerdahl and Lehne were both hired in 1985.

Heyerdahl or Lehne, one or the other or both, had taught the majority of the students.

Only Heyerdahl had the connection to the university.

Heyerdahl knew Dean, looked at Dean and held Dean as if he owned the boy.

And Heyerdahl was in the photograph with Sam Winchester.

Staring at the piles of documents, yearbooks, and notes that Castiel had scattered across the table, he took a deep breath and let it go slowly.

Every answer brings more questions…so many questions…

Should he confront Heyerdahl? Or Lehne? Should he follow one or the other, observe their behavior, form a plan of action and exact God’s punishment? He didn’t know how Sam fit into this…cult? Murder ring? Sex trafficking circle? Was Heyerdahl was a serial killer or a kidnapper? What happened to the missing children?

How had no one noticed?

What was Dean’s place in this vast conspiracy?

Dean’s involvement is irrelevant.

I must stop lying to myself. It’s as I suspected earlier. Nothing about this case is coincidence. Not even Dean’s involvement.

Not even my involvement?

Impossible. Whoever coordinated this couldn’t have planned so far as to imagine an angel would be involved. If they did, they’d never have left so much evidence of their actions.

“Attention Lawrence Public Library Patrons: the library will be closing in 5 minutes.”

Now what?

Castiel didn’t have answers. He’d received no specific Revelations from the Lord – not that he had any right to ask for detailed answers; he’d been given ample divine guidance, more than he had any right to hope for or expect – and he had too many leads and too many questions to feel sanguine pulling the figurative trigger. As organized as Heyerdahl seemed to be, if Castiel acted before he had enough information, he risked failing catastrophically. All the evidence he had suggested that he was the only entity on earth who understood the extent of the crimes perpetrated in Lawrence. If he acted impulsively, impetuously, too soon, he risked failure. Aside from the personal consequences should the demons thwart him, there were the children to be considered. That
Heyerdahl and Lehne met the youth in elementary school and didn’t act until they were older suggested intentional grooming, long-term planning. They surely had a list of children they thought to victimize in the future. If Castiel failed, if all he learned died with him, evil would triumph again and again.

_As it nearly triumphed with Dean. What did they do to him?_

_But I must not lose sight of the forest no matter how I might be captivated by a single stunning tree. Dean is but one victim of many, and only more significant because he is known to me…every victim deserves equal mercy, equal salvation, equal weight in my eyes._

Castiel scrubbed a hand down his face.

_If only there was a sign of how I should proceed…I don’t need anything so obvious as the guiding star shining bright over Bethlehem, just a nudge, a confident first step to set my path…_

A yawn stretched his jaw.

…_a sign…_

He knuckled at another yawn.

“Excuse me, sir, the library is closing…”

Castiel nodded to the librarian as he struggled to repress a third yawn. He wasn’t that tired. He could do more that night. Heyerdahl’s address might be on Google, or he could visit the elementary school now that he understood its relevance, or…

…_a sign…_

The yawns were a sign.

The librarian stared at him, polite smile beginning to twist into a scowl. Castiel hadn’t budged from his station before the work table.

“Sir?”

“Thank you,” he said gruffly, moving so abruptly that she squawked and jumped back. “Good evening.”

…I asked for a sign, asked repeatedly for guidance, and I yawned – I yawned repeatedly. Do I need more than that?

I’ll retire for the evening, and hope for a dream of insight, or for a clearer way forward in the morning.

_Thank you, Lord; as always, without your omnipotent benevolence, this poor angel would be lost. But with such portents to guide me…I know I’ve not fallen from grace. Not entirely. Not yet._

…_someday, yes…_

…_but not yet…_

“No!” she screamed, faceless, voice reverberating, layered like the hosts of heaven spoke as one. “Stop, Jimmy!”
Blood splatter masked her features, drenched her hair, ran over her skin as if her flesh melted. Blood pooled on the floor, coalesced into the shape of a second person, a second woman, a child—

—no nonononono no—

—blood covered Jimmy’s hands, his arms, the woman’s blood, the child’s blood, his own blood pouring free where the flesh had been flayed away. His nails cracked, blackened to dried flakes, charred embers all that remained of his fingers. A howling wind picked up, whisking bloody-matted hair into his face, scattering the woman’s blood to a fine mist until she dissolved to nothing but a lingering shriek.

All that remained was red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

There is no forgiveness.

Red.

The Lord’s words, powerful enough to rattle Jimmy to the bone, brought a peace, had always brought peace, would always bring peace.

Red.

There was no saving him.

Red.

And in that, there was salvation, of a sort – a freedom from care, from responsibility…and there
was an opportunity...

Red.

Red.

Red.

Red.

Blood rained down from the heavens, reigned up from the depths of hell, bathed him, baptized him anew.

Red.

—no, not this anything but this, I—

Red.

Jimmy raged at the rising flood, no ark to protect him from the wrath of God. Forgiveness? Salvation? There was no such hope in his future, and his mission was as tainted as he was, tainted by him. He tried to swim, tried to escape, tried to float with the torrential flows encompassing him, but the blood seared like lava, froze like an inexorable glacier bearing down on him, and he sank into eternal damnation, dissolved as surely as Claire and Amelia’s souls had sublimated and ascended into—

Red.

“Noooooo!”

Screaming, Castiel awoke and sat up—

—couldn’t sit up—

Red.

—still a dream, this is still a dream, a nightmare from this damned vessel. I am Castiel. I am free. I am doing the Lord’s work. I am not bound. I am not a prisoner. I am not in Hell. I’m not yet in hell—

—the room is not red—

He tried to rise again, eyes open to his cloistered room lit by moonlight, and again he failed. Flailing against the unknown restraints, against the ties binding his body, against the chains entombing his soul, Castiel scrambled and struggled. Fate fought to drag him to Hell and as when he’d dreamed, when he’d remember the misbegotten person his vessel had been, there was no escape, no salvation, no hope, and—

“Woah there, Cas. That musta been some dream.”

A low chuckle, the voice of Satan himself, arrested Castiel. Panting, heart beating at his ribs like artillery fire, adrenaline painting the room in red streaks, he collapsed against the bed. The shriek of the rusted springs was like nails on a chalkboard, like the steel skeleton of a skyscraper melting and twisting, like the bow being drawn across the Devil’s violin.

“Clowns or midgets?”
Clarity came to Castiel, and peace, as surely as when God had told him…told James Novak…that Novak’s crimes damned him beyond hope of redemption.

I know that voice. I know…

“Dean.”

The lamp flicked on.

“Heya, Cas.” Leaning casually against the sink, body a sleek line, belly flat, hands gripping the porcelain so tightly that his skin tone matched the white china, Dean grinned and shot Castiel a cocky wink. “Why don’t you take a sec, calm your jets, sort out up and down and all that jazz, and then we’ll have a little chitchat.”

“I am calm.”

Castiel tried to rise from his bed.

He still couldn’t.

“Oh, yeah. All that screaming and struggling just oozes zen feng shui throughout the room,” Dean agreed. “I feel more one with my chi already.”

“I am calm.”

With peace, reason returned. Connecting with the physical sensations of his vessel was often a challenge, but now that Novak’s repulsive dream was fading, Castiel could interpret the stimuli he felt. Something coarse – rope, probably – bound his wrists and chaffed at his socks, binding him to the bed.

“You tied me up.”

“Thank you, Captain Obvious.”

“Why?”

“To make all my kinky fantasies come true,” said Dean with a mockery of a saintly expression.

“That can’t be true,” Castiel scoffed.

“With everything you know about me you really think tying you down isn’t prelude to some serious woo-hoo?”

“With everything I know about you, Dean, I’m well aware that fulfilling ‘all your kinky fantasies’ in one night, with only me, when I’m bound, is impossible.”

Dean blinked then broke into rueful laughter. “You got me there. Pegged me again, Cas.”
“I’ve not hit you with anything.”

“No, nor have you reamed me up the ass, or done any of the other various interpretations of the word ‘pegged,’ but man have I got some ideas,” agreed Dean, sighing. “If only…but you don’t engage in coitus and even if you did…this time, I’m here for business, not pleasure.”

“Your business involves tying me to the bed?” Castiel snapped.

Blink.

Cold metal pressed into his throat, hot air dampened the air around his ear, and Dean breathed, “Why the fuck did you talk to my baby bro, Cas?” Pain nicked at his throat, blood beading free where the sharp blade slid over his flesh. The room flashed red again, Dean so close that Castiel could see nothing else.

—my hands – no, Jimmy’s – no, James Novak’s hands – dyed red, stained red, eternally red, and—

“I’ve not…” Castiel’s voice shook as he struggled to retain himself, struggled to fight down his vessel’s hallucinations. “I’ve not spoken with Sam Winchester.”

“Adam, you lying son of a bitch – why’d you talk to Adam? Do you have any idea what—” Dean hissed through his teeth and he shifted, settled to sit on the edge of the bed beside him. The blade never left Castiel’s throat, didn’t shift a millimeter. “Why are you in Lawrence? You come lookin’ for me? You gunnin’ for me again?”

“I will answer you, Dean – but understand – you are threatening an angel, and if you kill this vessel I will grow more powerful than you can possible imagine.”

“A Star Wars reference? Now?”

“The wars of Heaven span far beyond the stars,” Castiel snapped. “And no mere human-forged metal can coerce me. I reply because I respect you, and consider you an ally in this mission, not because you have imprisoned me nor injured this pathetic meat I’m forced to wear.”

“Really?” drawled Dean, dragging the blade over Castiel’s flesh. Pain pricked through him, tingled outward, and Castiel gritted his teeth.

I am not James Novak. He doesn’t control me. His body is not my body. I am formless and eternal. He is…he is nothing, he is as nothing…

…it hurts…


“For the same reason I journey anywhere,” Castiel replied. “I seek demons. And I believe I have found three.”

“Have you, now?” Dean bared his teeth in the imitation of a smile, his tone vicious. “Who’d that be?”

“Mr. A. Heyerdahl,” said Castiel. Dean’s expression went flat. “Mr. A. Lehne. And…”

“And Sam.” Even Dean’s voice was emotionless. The deadness was jarring compared to his usual wide range of inflection. Dean always expressed something.
“I’m not positive,” Castiel acknowledged, sympathetic. No one, not even someone like Dean, could be sanguine learning their brother was a demon.

“I am,” said Dean. He jerked the blade away, smeared the blood limning it on to his pants, and snapped it into a sheath at his waist. Rising, he paced across the room. “Mister A. Heyerdahl,” he mocked. “Mister A. Lehne. Fucking hell. You are a clueless fuckin’ idiot with a Goddamn death wish, Cas. They’ll eat you for breakfast and spit your bones onto the prairie and there ain’t a cop in the county that’ll take the case serious.”

“You know them.”

“‘I know them,’” Dean imitated. “Oh, yeah, they’re old friends. Don’t fuckin’ pretend you haven’t figured that out already. And don’t think they don’t know you’re sniffin’ around. And no more of that Mister so-and-so bull. Their names are Alastair and Azazel.”

“The Grigori,” snarled Castiel. Dean’s eyes narrowed in suspicious confusion. “‘And Azazel taught men to make swords and knives and shields and breastplates…and there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray and became corrupt in all their ways.’

“The fuck?”

“Enoch 8, lines 1 through 3,” Castiel explained.

“Fine, fine, they’re demons—”

“Grigori.”

“—whatever. You wanna kill them? Be my guest. Text me a selfie with Alastair’s bloodless corpse if by some fuckin’ miracle you succeed. But you won’t. One delusional paranoiac versus all those Gregories? They’ll never find whatever’s left of you.”

“Grigori. And I sense a ‘but’ coming.”

“Dicks come, not butts, but don’t matter, nothin’ prescient to predicting an upcoming orgasm, already told you we’re in for kink galore tonight.”

“Dean…”

The knife was at Castiel’s throat again.

Dean’s face was inches from his, obscuring the room, made a haloed shadow by the lamp behind him.

“But, Manny, Cas, whoever the fuck you are when you’re not drugged out of your brain on WWJD bible bullshit? If you harm one hair on Sammhy’s head, I swear to your God or the devil himself that I will find whatever pieces of you are left when those ‘Grigori’ are done with you and I will make you suffer until you wish that Alastair had his hands on you again.”

Absolute conviction, absolute certainty, was set in every line of Dean’s expression, and his steady hold on his knife served as proof that he could do as he threatened.

“Sam Winchester is a demon,” Castiel replied, unchastened, unafraid.

His heart raced.

Dean’s fraternity with Sam couldn’t change the truth.
“Not you, not anyone, knows what my brother is – what my brother has become – better’n I do.” Dean’s voice was gravel, his breath bitter in Castiel’s nose. “And he’s mine. Mine to confront. Mine to deal with. You get in my way…” The blade skimmed the curve of Castiel’s neck, so sharp that only the hot flow of blood over his skin betrayed that Dean had cut him. Pain would come later. No…no pain, that’s impossible, I’m a— Dean snapped the blade back across Castiel’s throat. “Do you understand?”

“Dean—”

The blade jerked up, slicing Castiel’s skin apart, the knife handle slamming into the soft flesh behind Castiel’s jaw. Agony burst outward and instinct screamed that he couldn’t breathe and he needed to, had to, Dean must let him, and—

Angel! I’m an—

“Yes or no, Castiel. Do you understand?”

Castiel tried to croak an answer, but no sound came until Dean eased back enough for Castiel to draw a ragged breath.

“Will you see justice done?” Castiel demanded hoarsely.

“What, you think I’m gonna call the cops? The fuck is that gonna accomplish?”

“Sam is a demon,” Castiel reiterated. The blade yet rested on his skin and his heart pounded fear, Novak’s too-mortal terror whispering that Castiel should stop challenging Dean, stop inviting further injury. Castiel quelled the voice. Dean couldn’t hurt him, not really, and whatever the vessel suffered, however much the vessel suffered, was less than James Novak deserved. “I’ve only scratched the surface of Sam’s crimes but I’m certain they are numerous and heinous. He and his brethren cannot be allowed to continue. Demons must be exorcised and sent to Hell. If you forbid me doing it, if you stay my hand – will you do what must be done?”

Silence stretched out, broken by the soft plop-plop-plop of the leaky sink spigot, the soft plop-plop-plop of Castiel’s blood dripping from his neck wounds to the mattress.

It’s wrong to ask anyone to commit murder, and especially to commit fratricide…

…but Dean is an angel, and his brother is a demon, and there is no hope for them but to replicate the struggle between Michael and Lucifer, the struggle between Abel and Cain. For brothers such as they, there can only be one end.

So God has commanded.

But can Dean to accept that?

“You better fuckin’ believe I’ll kill my brother,” Dean breathed. “But when I’m ready.”

Of course he can. How incredible is he…

“Very well.”

He sees his task and accepts it, as he is right to do. This is his cross to bear, as I bear mine and James Novak’s both.

“I fuckin’ mean it, Cas! If you—”
“Dean Winchester,” Castiel interrupted sharply. “I swear on the Lord Almighty and on the grace of my immortal soul that I will not attempt to slay Sam Winchester, unless you request my aid or instruct me to do so. I can offer you no more binding oath than that.”

Silence stretched out again, heavier and deeper than before, and Castiel scarce breathed lest the blade cut into him once more.

*James Novak’s cowardice infects me, destroys me. I need not fear breathing. I need not breathe. Dean’s blade cannot hurt me and air cannot sustain me. And yet…*

Castiel couldn’t make himself inhale deeply.

*Sometimes, I am certain that carrying me is James Novak’s punishment.*

*But sometimes, I wonder if bearing his vessel and being forced to call it my own is my punishment.*

*If only I could remember what infraction I have committed in the eyes of God, to warrant incarceration in this despoiled flesh, to force cohabitation with this blackened soul…*

“That’ll do,” said Dean hoarsely. He draw back from Castiel, drew back into the light, his expression bright with awe. “I, uh…if…when…I go for Sam, if you and I are still…whatever the fuck we are…maybe…maybe I’ll give you a buzz. I could use the help.”

“You’ll ‘buzz’ me? Are you a barber? Or a bee?”

“Yes, I am.”

The tension shattered as Dean broke into uproarious laughter, though there was a hysterical edge to his voice that brought an ache to Castiel’s chest. The longer his humor burst out, the more genuine it sounded, the walls reverberating with mirth and glee so loudly that Castiel worried his host might awaken. The ghost of a genuine, heartfelt smile twisted Castiel’s lips unfamiliarly.

*When was the last time I smiled? When was the last time James Novak smiled? For either of us…a lifetime and a day, I think…*

Even the silence that returned when Dean finally stopped felt easier, lighter, and echoed with the peal of gales of humor as pure and sweet as the intonation of the finest crafted bell. The mortal guise the Lord had granted Dean was a blessing; no angel could be so carefree, so pleased by so simple a jest, yet there Dean stood, grinning, relieved, serene. He twirled his knife idly in one hand, blade shimmering beneath a curtain of crimson, eyed Castiel, and smirked.

“With that matter settled, would you free me?” Castiel suggested, lifting one bound arm mere inches, the most he could, by way of emphasis.

“I’m thinkin’…no…” Dean’s smirk spread into a leer. Pacing to the foot of the bed, he ran his knife through his hand, smearing Castiel’s blood red over his palm, cleaning the blade. The dull buzz of fear resumed in Castiel’s head, shivered icy hot down his spine.

*After that conversation, Dean wouldn’t hurt me. I have nothing to fear – I never had anything to fear from the likes of Dean Winchester – and my vessel would do well not to give in to this absurd quaver.*

“You look mighty pretty trussed up, Cas…tables are turned now, ain’t they?” Dean stopped at the
foot of the bed, gaze raking the length of Castiel’s body, leer breaking into a grin, and Castiel quelled his vessel’s absurd, futile desire to flail against his restraints. The effort of keeping his limbs still cost him; his chest rose and fell with rapid, uncontrollable breaths, every movement prompting twinges from his cut neck.

“No…” Castiel had grown so hoarse, his throat so dry, that the word rasped near silent. He swallowed, berated himself, and tried again. “No tables, turned or otherwise, in this room.”

“So, so pretty, at my mercy,” Dean continued, only a glitter in his eye and an increase flushed to his cheek in reply to Castiel’s jibe. “Blood smeared on that soft skin, soakin’ the mattress to make a halo ‘round your head…look like I defiled a priest, the way your collar’s gone all sodden…”

In a blink Castiel’s mind – James Novak’s deranged mind! – conjured an image of their positions reversed: Dean bound to the bed, Dean’s throat streaked red with blood that flowed anew with every breath he took, Dean beneath him, before him, vulnerable and at his mercy. Arousal drowned out Novak’s pain and fear, quickened his breathing yet further.

Dean chuckled. “What’re you thinkin’, angel?”

“That whatever absurdities are flitting through your mind, you should relinquish your unholy aim and free me,” Castiel gritted out.

“Hn, hn, hn,” Dean tsked, waving his bloody hand toward Castiel, one finger extended as if scolding a child.

“What—"

The bed springs shrieked as Dean climbed onto the bed, knees straddling Castiel’s legs. He shimmied up the mattress until he hovered over Castiel’s thighs. Castiel strained to lift his head enough to see what Dean did, movement sparking pain that burst like a flashbang over his vision. There was a predatory gleam in Dean’s eyes and his hand fell to Castiel’s crotch.

Lord and saints above protect Castiel from sins of the flesh, but that felt good.

“Dean,” he croaked.

“I know, angel – so hard to fight those oh-so-human urges, ain’t it?” Dean leered at him, meeting Castiel’s eyes as his hand kneaded at Castiel’s vessel’s sensitive flesh.

“Please, Dean…don’t…don’t…” Castiel threw his head back, eyes snapping shut, unable to watch, unable to finish his demand…his meek supplication…that Dean stop. How long had it been since he’d been touched?

Never – I’ve never been touched – because I need no physical satiation – and the needs of Novak’s flesh are irrelevant…

How long had it been since Castiel had experience rapture?

...don’t stop...don’t stop...please, Dean, don’t—

The pressure on Castiel’s cock vanished and he bit his lip against a disappointed hiss.

“I’m many things, all of them fuckin’ sexy as hell, but even I’m not so far gone that I’ll keep touchin’ someone who says no,” said Dean. “Something, something, become the evil I fight, ya know what I mean, insert appropriate bullshit here.”
Disappointed, relieved, furious with himself, Castiel looked up once more, unable to interpret the rustles and tings that accompanied Dean moving above him.

Dean’s hand was at his crotch.

Dean lowered the fly of his jeans.

Don’t look…don’t watch…whatever he’s doing…

Dean had left a bloody handprint directly over Castiel’s vessel’s penis.

I have to see…

Dean slipped nimble fingers into his pants and withdrew his erection. In the dim light of the room, his length was flushed an unhealthy shade of dark red, though the blood smearing over the flesh as Dean took himself in hand and stroked made the skin pale by contrast. Desperate to focus on something, anything, Castiel looked to Dean’s face but Dean’s expression was no better, head thrown back, mouth agape, eyes closed, bliss slackening every hard, tired line.

And how beautiful would he look with his neck smeared with blood as mine is, with his chest bare and torn? How perfect would he sound with my name the blessing of rapture on his lips? How ideal would the weight of him feel in my hand?

Dean’s hand slid over his length, grip slickened with Castiel’s blood, thumb massaging at the tip of his penis. A vocal undertone enriched Dean’s exhalations as he slowly drew his grip down his length then back up. The tiny slit gaped black, leaked thin liquid that mingled with the blood to create strange, threaded patterns that seeped over the head of Dean’s dick like capillaries and arteries…except it was Castiel’s blood, not Dean’s, mixing with Dean’s essence, tracing the essential lines of life and being and grace and—

Don’t look! Castiel – James Novak! – stop this!

“Like what you see?” Dean’s voice was deep and guttural and gave Castiel the strength to snap his gaze away from Dean’s gentle stroking. Dean’s eyes were on him once more, dark and beautiful and piercing and frighteningly knowing. A leer twisted his lips, breaking around every passionate breath he took.

Don’t look! Don’t think about what he’s doing! This is…this is assault? I don’t want this!

Liar.

Watching Dean’s face was as enticing as watching him masturbate. Even when Castiel ignored the movement of Dean’s hand over illicit flesh, Dean’s expression reflected every wave of bliss, as evocative as if Dean touched Castiel. His pupils dilated, his eyes went out of focus, his cheeks flushed, his lips twitched, his throat bobbled and corded, and he was...

Dean was beatific, unearthly, spectacular…divine.

I do want this.

“Fuck, Cas…”

I want to watch.

“…the look on your face…”
I want him to watch me.

“…you are such a fuckin’ liar…”

I want to touch him.

“…tellin’ me to stop…”

I want him to touch me.

“…you’re eatin’ me up like I’m your fuckin’ cherry pie…”

I want—

“You are not a pie, Dean.”

I do not want!

To his mortification, Castiel sounded wrecked.

Angels do not experience desire!

Dean threw his head back and groaned.

I am not to be swayed by the mortal fallacies of the disgusting man I’ve been forced to share a body with!

With Dean’s gaze off him, with the connection forged by eye contact gone, Castiel’s gaze strayed back to Dean’s hand, working vigorously over his penis, twisting, stroking, two fingers fondling his testicles, his hips working into every movement, the bed rocking beneath them.

James Novak is consigned to Hellfire eternal, as am I, but his disease isn’t mine – though I fall, I fall for the right reasons…I will…I must…

“If you say ‘coitus,’ I swear to fuckin’ God…”

What would God think of how I’ve fallen? What retribution would He wreak, knowing I’ve permitted this blasphemy?

“Dean…Dean, please…”

Just…just stop…do not force this depravity on me, do not force this desire on me…

“That’s right, angel – talk to me, tell me what you want…but so help me, if you lie again…”

…but I want…I want so much…

Dean went still save his hand squeezing and pulsing and rubbing over the head of his penis.

…he’s so stunning, so strong, so astonishing, so close, so willing…

“…I can’t…”

…and I’m so electrified by his presence, his spirit, his soul, his grace…

Dean’s eyes flew open and he tumbled forward, body close enough that Castiel could feel his heat, far enough that they didn’t touch save for the brush of Dean’s open jacket against the cloth of
Dean smelled of his sweat, a tang of alcohol on his breath, the musky scent of leather clinging to him.

"Why not? Why can’t you, angel? Tell me!"

"…please…"

...please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please...

Castiel had no idea what he was begging for.

I cannot lie, cannot pretend I do not know why I’m begging – whatever self-deception I attempt, the Lord sees me, the Lord knows how I yearn...

“You’re so fuckin’ beautiful…ain’t done nothin’ to deserve you under me…I’m…”

I’m begging…Jimmy is begging…we’re begging…for Dean to touch me, for Dean to spare me, for God’s gaze to be averted for long enough for me to have this eternal moment without facing the dire consequences.

Dean went rigid, his expression slack, and though Castiel could no longer see Dean’s penis, he was sure Dean had achieved his orgasm, and Castiel felt…

…Castiel felt…

...abandoned, alone, forsaken, desperate, hot, so hot, so needy...

...please, please, please...

“I’m sorry,” Dean whispered.

A whimpering moan escaped Castiel as Dean’s proximity washed over him, intoxicated him as no alcohol could. His lips moved of their own accord, uncontrollable, air rasping from his throat.

“Please…”

“Cas?”

No...no, don’t...

“Please, Dean…please…”

Dean pushed himself up, settled on his knees, opened a chasm of space between them save where Dean’s butt rested over Castiel’s legs, where Dean’s calves sandwiched Castiel’s thighs. Dean’s expression was slack, bemused, lost, his penis going limp in his gripping hand. Wet streaks soaked into Castiel’s shirt and pants, overlay the bloody handprint stretched grotesquely over the bulge of fabric over Castiel’s erection. Desperate for...desperate...Castiel squirmed against his restraints, tingling arms straining against rope, overheated flesh aching for contact.

Jimmy...James Novak...stop!
Castiel couldn’t stop.

He **needed**.

*No. Not me. This isn’t me. This can’t be*—

*Liar.*

The smile that broke over Dean’s face was unmarred by wariness, open and genuine.

“Tell me what you need, angel,” Dean whispered, guttural voice raking over Castiel’s mind as he longed for hands to rake down his torso, nails to scratch furrows along his sides.

_For every hurt he’s caused me, for every slice he dared make in my skin, there will be retribution until he sobs and begs me for release, and in my efforts to mimic the infinite mercy of my Lord and Savior, God Almighty, I will grant it to him._

Eventually.

“Dean…” Frantic, panting breaths strained the injuries sliced into Castiel’s throat, fresh blood soaked so far down the front of his shirt that it dyed his vision as he stared at Dean.

_And that’s not James Novak’s desire, can’t be his, for he is too forsaken to formulate such adulatory filth._

_That desire is all mine._

*I am fallen. I am forsaken._

_And I want…_

“Tell. Me.”

Unable to vocalize his reprehensible, irresistible desire – unable to restrain himself – Castiel’s hips thrust up from the rocking mattress, drawing obscene attention to his all-too-human desires, his all-too-angelic expression of need. Dean chuckled, aloof mask returning to bring focus to his expression.

“Gotta use your words or – nothin’.”

Castiel whined in frustration. What Dean asked was **impossible**. He could never…would never…

*Why not?*

Castiel rutted up again, springs straining and squealing beneath him.

“Alright. Fine. Your choice…”

Dean released his penis, shifted his come-streaked hand to hover in the air above Castiel’s crotch. Rage snarled through Castiel’s, forced a growl from his throat, but he quelled himself to silence. He’d not demand. He’d not beg like a common cur. He’d not—

*I already have begged. This isn’t a matter of pride, it’s a matter of self-denial and self-delusion._

_And he’s so close…so so close…if I…*
Thrusting his hips up knocked the bed against the wall with a clatter, destabilized Dean badly enough that he rocked backwards, and brought the head of Castiel’s penis – my vessel’s penis, James Novak’s penis, not mine, not— – into contact with Dean’s palm. Sensation exploded outward, so profound, so essential, that Castiel groaned. What part of Castiel was not yet lost to decency begged that he stop, begged Novak to relinquish his hold on Castiel’s mortal flesh, but resisting the temptation of release was impossible. Castiel thrust up again, again, again, each time rubbing sensitive flesh against Dean’s hand, each time bathing him in unspeakable bliss. With every burst of pleasure, his mental protestations grew quieter until his mind was silent save for each ecstatic visit to a heaven he’d long thought out of reach. Dean murmured encouragement, words indecipherable over the rush of blood through Castiel’s ears and the tortured sounds of the shaking bed, but Dean’s meaning was insignificant. His tone, his support, his voice reaching Castiel like prayers, were a lifeline to sanity, a hint that maybe, maybe, what they did together wasn’t profoundly, essentially, world-alteringly wrong.

If a mortal and an angel…

…but if two angels…

…if Dean and I…

Groans leaked from Castiel, eyes shut but a vision of Dean etched into his eyelids, head straining back against the flimsy pillow as his hips strained up to Dean’s grip and salvation. Incomprehensible, indescribable feeling mounted in him thrust after thrust, each contact between penis and hand as small as a single grain of sand, as vast as those grains accumulated into an Everest.

Dean’s hand matched Castiel’s downward thrust, gripped Castiel through his pants, squeezed and rubbed his length. With a gasp that scarce escaped his corded, tattered throat, Castiel went rigid and the world obliterated to motes of blackness that buried him like ash.

Our mountain is not an Everest, it’s a Krakatoa…a Vesuvius…lost and alone, left to mummify while my soul descends and I—

“Holy shit…”

Castiel blinked but the darkness remained, encompassing him.

…maybe I’ve already descended…

“I just made an angel come his brains out!” Dean crowed. “I. Am. Awesome.”

Dean wasn’t just calling me ‘angel.’ Dean actually believes I am divine.

I am divine, in nature and spirit and essence, and this descent into indulgence cannot erase that, nor can his belief or disbelief alter me.

“Dean…” croaked Castiel, awed, the forsaken feeling fading, replaced by a glow of heat, a flush of grace.

“Wish I could see your face right now…” Fingers traced slick lines over the curve of Castiel’s chin, smeared through the blood on his throat. Twinges of pain, not unwelcome, accompanied the slight tug to the wounds drawn parallel into his flesh. Castiel blinked again but the room remained dark. Forcing his eyes open, Castiel gazed around. A glimmer off the mirror reflected from the open window, a sliver of a moon visible in the square of navy blue. A matching glimmer twinkled in Dean’s eyes like twin stars looking down at Castiel.
“Why did you turn the light off?” Castiel murmured.

“Didn’t.” There was a laugh in Dean’s voice, a smile, the air of false jocularity gone once more. Castiel loved when Dean spoke, without airs, without his spiteful verbal defenses arrayed at full strength.

…I…love?

“You did.”

Impossible. We’ve barely met. We barely know each other.

“I did…what?”

Is intimacy and long acquaintance required for affection?

“You broke the lamp.”

Have we not been intimate – physically, emotionally, and experientially?

“Bed knocked into the table, lamp fell, psssh…” Dean made a gesture as of dust scattering before his hands. “…shattered the bulb…”

John 3:16…for God so loved the world…

“Dude, you came so hard you broke the fucking lamp…”

God can love the world, for it is His creation, begotten of Him as surely as Jesus Christ was. Is it blasphemy to compare this disgusting act of fulfilled lust to the Lord’s sacrifice of His beloved son? What does that say for my passion for Dean – what does it say about I that I’d think such a parallel apt?

Dean’s fingers brushed tenderly along Castiel’s jugular, painted hot behind Castiel’s ear, played over his scalp.

…it’s almost certainly blasphemy…

“I hate you,” Dean whisperered as if speaking the gentlest words of love. Something in Castiel – his heart, or his soul, or his grace, he couldn’t say – went frigid.

But I’ve known myself damned since ages past, and what I feel for Dean is beyond mere lust…and what he feels for me is…compulsion? I wish I knew. We are both angelic, both fallen…the odds of us finding each other save by the guidance of God are slim…

“I should hate you. You’re just like them in so many fuckin’ ways…but in all the ones that count…fuck if you couldn’t be more different. I don’t know what the hell to do with that.” Dean pointed an accusing finger at him. “Shit was simple before I met your feathery ass."

…this line of thought is dangerous – Dean is dangerous – if I continue in this vein I might truly come to believe that this depravity was the will of my Lord…

“You have to go.”

What if it was?

“Yeah.” Dean nodded. “I should.”
Dean didn’t move. He stared down at Castiel, eyes narrow, gaze searching, intensity baffling. After what felt like eons of eye contact, a millennia under scrutiny, as if the Lord himself laid Castiel bare, examined his sins, and passed unknown judgment, Dean pivoted, swung a leg over Castiel’s, and arose off the bed.

“Don’t forget what you promised me, Cas,” he warned. Castiel’s mind was blank, devoured by post-coital pleasure and by memorizing views of Dean’s face that preoccupied him when he tried to recall what they had discussed earlier. “Wow, you are gone after a good fuckin’. I’ll have to remember that.” Dean chuckled mirthlessly. His expression was hard, and he continued as if pledging the most solemn, sacred vow, “If you harm one hair on my brother’s head…”

“I swore on my immortal grace and the Lord Himself,” Castiel replied. “Can there be any oath more sacred, more powerful, more binding?”

A shift took Dean’s face out of the dim light cast through the window and rendered him invisible. Frustration, mortifying and inappropriate, made Castiel scowl. He should be irritated that Dean would doubt him. Instead, he was put out that he could no longer see Dean’s face.

And I cannot lie to myself and pretend my annoyance stems from any other cause.

What has he done to me?

Dean has to go.

“No, I s’pose there can’t be.” There was wonder in Dean’s voice that set Castiel at ease. “You keep that faith, Cas.” A beat pause. “I’m glad one of us can.”

In the darkness, only the click-clack of the door opening and shutting indicated Dean’s departure.

Castiel was still tied to the bed. Dampness made his clothes uncomfortable, sweat causing his shirt to cling to his torso. Pungent blood dried tacky on his skin, scabs cracking whenever he shifted his head. His underwear clung unpleasantly about his penis, made a mess of his pubic hair. He longed to itch and relieve the irritation, but he couldn’t. Fatigue gnawed at him; satisfaction sapped his resistance.

I should free myself, clean up, wipe away the blood and bodily fluids.

Castiel could find no impetus to free himself.

I don’t want to be free.

Why don’t I want to?

There was something…satisfying…to being debauched, to being debauched by Dean, and Dean’s words haunted him.

Keep the faith...

…glad one of us can...

…your feathery ass...

... made an angel come...

Whatever quips he attempts to obfuscate his true feelings, Dean believes I’m an angel.
A smile gracing his lips, Castiel let his eyes slip shut. There’d be time to free himself in the morning. The feel of rope binding his wrists and ankles, of blood on his throat, of semen around his genitals, was as reassuring as if Dean lay beside him and held him.

…but next time I see him, whenever that is, there will be Hell to pay for what he’s done to me…

...no, not Hell to pay. Dean and I both have ample damnation in our future, and the suffering we will find in the depths of the pit will be excruciating, undesirable, and beyond our control.

Whatever punishment I mete out for Dean’s presumption of control, it will be something he’ll enjoy.

And Dean likes to be cut and beaten and hurt…

The thoughts should terrify Castiel, yet as he attempted to curl onto his side despite his bindings, he felt no remorse nor regret.

Something is wrong with me. James Novak’s influence, or…

…or the inevitable conclusion of the path that I have walked during my time on earth?

I don’t know. I’ll likely never know. But Dean believes me of Heaven, and I am more certain than ever that he is divine as well. I am no Job, to be sent irresistible temptation that I must still somehow resist, to have my faith tested time and time again. I cannot believe my merciful Lord, knowing me damned, knowing that I know myself damned, would bring me to this juncture out of spite or as a test.

My meeting Dean is God’s will.

Content, sanguine, Castiel surrendered to drowsiness. Gentle thoughts lulled him, brought peace such as he couldn’t recall since his time in James Novak commenced years before.

I am angel.

And this angel does sleep.

And this angel does eat.

And this angel does breathe.

And this angel does bleed.

And this angel does experience, enjoy, pleasures of the flesh.

Let God’s will be done.
**Part 4: Thursday, April 5th**

**Chapter Notes**

...uh...oops?

So like right after I posted the chapter before this, I got really sick, like had to go to the ER, and I was almost 8 months pregnant, and I was sick and sick and sick almost right up until my baby was born at the end of February and just...

yeah.

I'm sorry.

But I'm back. And I'm not gonna bother with a schedule any longer. I want to finish this story, come hell or high water, and I'll be posting as I finish scenes, because I found that extremely motivating with the story I just finished.

Loads to come with this, I'm guessing the finished story will be around 75k, so...buckle down and get ready!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Green eyes, tanned skin, bow legs...was that Dean?*

Castiel’s foot was on the brake before he could stop himself, though another glance dispelled the brief illusion. The man carrying groceries to his car was definitely not Dean – he was too short, and dressed differently, and his facial features were completely different, not even a single freckle along the bridge of his nose. Grimacing at his inanity, Castiel pretended he’d hit the brake to come to a stop at the end of the parking lot, looked both ways, and turned. He’d finished shopping, his scant funds nearly depleted. The simple foods he could afford were in the backseat. He’d have to make them last. That he took money from his victims to care for his vessel and his vehicle was reprehensible, disgusted him with his greed and the earthly requirements of the unholy mortal body to which he was bound, but if he didn’t sustain his flesh he’d not be able to continue to hunt.

*Perhaps it’s time to find a target...*

No.

Castiel would never stoop to hunting a demon solely to refill his wallet.

His stomach...James Novak’s stomach...rumbled.

In several weeks of aimless driving, Castiel hadn’t seen a single demon sign. The newspapers he accessed online or at the library told him nothing. The faces he saw were sometimes twisted with greed, lust, envy, a panoply of sins on display, but none betrayed the twisted inhumanity of demonic possession. Castiel couldn’t remember a time when he’d gone so long without a target; he often spent weeks on research to confirm his suppositions and plan how best to remove a demon from the world, but he usually found a new mark within a few days. The dregs of humanity were routinely evil enough to hide in their midst one or more men and women who were beyond salvation. Making his way out of the parking lot, Castiel waited at the red light before the main
road and debated whether to turn left or right. He’d rarely felt so directionless, so adrift. His prayers for guidance had not been answered. Restlessness and doubt and errant desire itched beneath his skin, dimmed his grace.

...what if I sought Dean?

Every day, Castiel grew more human.

Why? Because I want to?

Absurd.

How long before I am unable to complete my work? How long before I am mortal?

Father, why have you forsaken me?

A car behind Castiel honked; the light was green and, not bothering with a turn signal, Castiel hastily went right. He’d arrived in Terre Haute the night before, slept in his car in a Walmart parking lot, and conceded that morning that, no matter how little he wanted to, he had to eat. The smell of rotisserie chicken and fresh-baked pizza had nearly driven him to distraction but he’d restrained his gluttonous impulses and left with two bags of high-calorie, low-cost, nutritious food that required no preparation and reflected no surrender to his impulses: cereal, apples, canned corn, spam. Lack of access to cold storage kept him from healthier options, and with no stove, the highest-calorie carbohydrates - rice, beans, pasta, potatoes – were denied to him.

What he’d obtained was adequate.

Castiel needed only enough to fuel him and ensure his body had enough nutrition to sustain his training regimen. He’d conducted his morning workout routines in the chill pre-dawn, ignoring the stares of his fellow vagrants who emerged from their vehicles to watch. The weather had thankfully been mild, and as the sun rose it grew warm; Castiel hoped it would remain so. If it didn’t, and he continued his extended residence in the backseat of the coupe, he might have to head south.

...an angel should not be at the mercy, at the whim, of climate...I should not be vulnerable to cold or heat, to wind or rain or—

...just shut up already. I am what I am, and I need what I need. Nothing comes before my mission. I’ve allowed pride in my nature and a sense of superiority compared to mere mortals to cloud my judgment. Perhaps that is why the Lord has ceased to guide me. I must be humble, generous in spirit, understanding of the needs and limitations of even one such as James Novak.

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Extending mercy, even unto one such as this vessel, is an act of charity that cannot be overlooked. I am not being punished for James Novak’s actions. It is within myself I much seek for the failures that have displeased my Lord and master. I must abase myself, search my grace and my soul unafraid of what I might find, confess, atone, and seek revelation - seek a sign of His hand, ever guiding me.

...a sign...

A marquee on his left snagged Castiel’s attention: “Vigo County Public Library.” He slammed on the brakes and flicked on his turn signal to enter the parking lot, earning an angry honk and rude gesture from a truck that barely dodged him. Two turns later, he was parked.
...it's certainly a sign...a large, clear, well-designed sign...

The library would certainly forbid food, but Castiel reached to his shopping bags, withdrew an apple, and cleaned it on his sleeve as he emerged from his car and locked the vehicle. Quick steps and quick chewing of sweet, smooth flesh brought him to the entrance in time to deposit the core in a convenient receptacle. His stomach...Novak’s stomach?...twisted and ached and craved.

Delicious.

Perhaps...perhaps it was never the Lord’s will that I be denied this simple, mortal pleasure.

The interior of the library was of a kind with many Castiel had visited, lending desk by the door, reference a circle in the center of the main floor. Arrayed to his right, banks of computers seated a dozen people, tables and comfortable chairs arranged in neat, welcoming configurations. A sign indicating the location of the restrooms arrested Castiel, and after a quick stop that proved utterly un-prophetic – not the sign I was looking for, but helpful nonetheless – Castiel emerged and looked around.

...I seek a sign...

“May I help you?” A cheerful young woman beamed an open smile at him.

With an uncertain half-shrug, Castiel searched the room. None of the books caught his eye, none of the stacks, none of the computers. Several people sat in armchairs reading newspapers, but Castiel couldn’t see where the dailies were kept. It was, he supposed, as good a place as any to start.

“Sir?”

I’ve found no guidance in black and white ink for weeks, why think it will provide me inspiration now?

“Are you alright?”

Because I have trust and faith that I am where I’m supposed to be, when I’m supposed to be there, and I must begin somewhere...

Because there is no good reason not to, and only a feeling to suggest I should, and in these small moments, I know from long experience - the Lord will guide my steps, so long as I am open and allow him to do so.

“I’m fine,” he said, harsh enough that she startled back from him. Grimacing, he modulated his tone. “Thank you. Could you please tell me where the newspapers are...” His gaze flicked to her name tag and back to her uncertain expression. “...Sarah?”

“Of course!” Her smile was more forced, but she moved easily, openly, as she started across the room. “Follow me!”

Her guidance took them across the lobby, past a notice board papered with signs advertising local events, past another more neatly organized with official notices and...

Dean.

Castiel froze.
A police artist’s sketch of Dean smirked down at Castiel, front and center on a sign that proclaimed “FBI’S TEN MOST WANTED FUGITIVES.”

**NAME UNKNOWN: PSEUDONYM “THE MAN MANGLER”**

Unlawful Flight to Avoid Prosecution, First Degree Murder - Multiple, Second Degree Murder - Multiple, First Degree Assault - Multiple, Use of a Dangerous Weapon with Intent to Kill - Multiple, Arson of an Occupied Structure, Violence and Drug Trafficking, Kidnapping, Human Trafficking

“The newspapers are right over…”

Aliases: Ted Nugent, Samuel Cole, James Hetfield, Nigel Tufnel, John Bonham, Gene Simmons, Gregory Washington, Kris Warren, Alan Stanwick, William Gibbons, Dean Mahogoff, John Landis, Siegfried Houdini, Robert Plant, Bruce Campbell, Samuel Hagar, Angus Young, Joseph Perry, Geddy Lee, Lars Ulrich, David Lee Roth, Todd Stiles, Dennis DeYoung, Alonzo Mosley, Robert Marley

“Oh – yeah, isn’t that a funny one?”

Astonished, Castiel turned. Sarah stood behind him, also looking at the wanted poster. She startled when Castiel glared at her and gave him a guilty shrug.

“I mean – not funny, he’s a serial killer, that’s, like, the opposite of funny, I feel so bad for all those people – but the aliases!” she explained sheepishly.

“What about them?” Some of the names were strange, but other than Siegfried Houdini none struck Castiel as particularly outlandish.

“You don’t…? They’re all actors, or rock stars, or movie characters. Ted Nugent is a singer, James Hetfield is in Metallica, Nigel Tufnel is the guitarist in the movie Spinal Tap, Bruce Campbell does B horror movies – almost all of them are famous people!”

Castiel shook his head. He’d heard of none of the people or groups she mentioned, but that wasn’t unusual. He found it unlikely Siegfried Houdini was a celebrity, but then…well, it was far from his area of expertise.

Estimated Age: Between 25 and 30.

Hair: Blond or Brown

Height: 6’ 1”

Build: Medium

Gender: Male

Occupation: Unknown

Place of Birth: Unknown

Eyes: Green

Weight: 170 to 180 pounds

Complexion: Light
Race: White

Nationality: Unknown, Presumed American

“We only get the notices for people who are suspected of being in the area,” she continued. “Don’t worry, though!” she added hastily as Castiel turned to her sharply. “We haven’t seen him here. I think someone spotted him in Illinois. If someone that handsome came in, we’d all remember!” Castiel quirked an eyebrow. She flushed. “I mean…not…not handsome…he’s a killer, and—”

Inside and out, the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen. That picture does him little justice. The artist only captured Dean’s mask. Beneath that…

“He’s very handsome,” said Castiel.

No - I’m glad the artist failed. How Dean appears when that mask falls away, that’s mine. Only mine. All mine.

Sarah’s mouth fell open and her embarrassment reddened her from forehead to neck. “The, um, the papers are right over…” She gestured behind her, to a bookcase composed of sloped shelves lined with periodicals. “Let us know if there’s anything else we can help you with!”

“Thank—”

She scampered away.

...oh, Lord, send me a sign...

REWARD: The FBI is offering a reward of up to $250,000 for information leading directly to the arrest of this individual.

REMARKS: The serial killer known as ‘the Man Mangler’ is wanted in connection with 73 open investigations in 34 states. Known connections include to a human trafficking ring operating in Kansas. Victim profile is males, aged twenty to sixty five, whom he solicits for sex and lures to isolated areas before killing them or freeing them without explanation. Believed to travel by hitchhiking. Only known interests are film and rock-and-roll music.

This individual may be in possession of a knife, tire iron, and Ruger LCP handgun.

CAUTION: DO NOT APPROACH.

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS.

If you have any information concerning this individual, please contact the FBI’s Toll Free Tipline at 1-800-555-FBIS, your local FBI office, or the nearest American Embassy or Consulate.

...any sign...

Dean grinned down at him.

...like that sign...bearing Dean’s likeness...

I have to find Dean.

Hasty steps took Castiel to the racked newspapers. Unsure what he sought, Castiel took up the first paper that caught his eye.
...another sign...I know I ask a lot, I ask too much...any sign...

Flipping through the pages, Castiel scanned but nothing drew his attention. He tossed the ruffled pages back onto the shelf and took up another...

...and another...

...and another...

...and then...

Eureka!

“Man Mangler” Victim Identified

The body of an unknown man found in Chatauqua Park on Sunday, April 1st, has been identified as belonging to Professor Richard Shiban, 62, of Springfield, Ohio. Dr. Shiban is a Professor of Philosophy at Springfield University and noted author of Ethics and Morality: A Primer for Beginners, and other works.

Dr. Shiban is the second victim of the infamous so-called Man Mangler, well known serial killer, found in the area in the past two weeks. An FBI task force under the direction of Agent Victor Henriksen has assembled at the Mill Street Police Station, but they have refused repeated requests for comment, citing the complexities of an ongoing investigation.

Locals are reminded that the Man Mangler’s victims are men, aged 20 to 65, whom the killer lures from bars and similar establishments with lewd promises. He is approximately 6 feet tall and 180 pounds, and uses a wide range of pseudonyms. His real name is unknown.

A grainy sketch of Dean, the same one as accompanied his wanted poster, smirked from the newsprint.

But where is he?

Castiel’s gaze skimmed to the top of the page.

The Pontiac Daily Leader

The newsprint crumbled in Castiel’s hands as he balled them into fists, his thoughts blanking to emotionless static.

No...no, that’s blind terror. And fury.

Impossible.

I have nothing to be afraid of.

I have nothing to be furious about.


“Sir!”

Castiel froze. He hadn’t realized he was in motion, broad strides taking him to the library exit. He turned to see Sarah standing behind the circulating desk, pale, and she flinched and took a step backward when Castiel turned to her.
“Newspapers aren’t part of our circulating collection,” she whispered.

With a snarl, Castiel tossed the destroyed pages to the ground and stalked to his car.

*I have no right to be upset.*

*Turnabout is fair play.*

*I went to Dean’s home and he…*

The car was running, humming and vibrating beneath him.

*…he had no right to investigate me…*

*…not me. My vessel. I am from Heaven. James Novak is from Pontiac, Illinois. And there is no way Dean could know that.*

*Why is Dean in Pontiac?*

*Why, other than to learn more of...me...would Dean be in such a place?*

There was only one way to learn the truth.

Stomping on the gas pedal hard enough that the car screeched into reverse, Castiel set his sights west, set his sights toward Dean, toward Illinois.

*…set his sights toward home.*

*No…not my home…Novak’s home…but either way…neither of us can truly go home. That solace was lost long ago.*

*Now, I must find solace where I can…*

Dean’s face sprang to his mind’s eye, and with it a tense knot of hope formed in his chest. He knew it was wrong, knew he should force his thoughts elsewise, knew that going to Pontiac at all, much less when there was a FBI Task Force present, was a terrible idea.

But God had shown him multiple signs, had made it clear: he should seek Dean, he should seek Dean in *Pontiac.*

*I prayed, and this was the answer. I must heed the call to action.*

*To whatever end…*

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**Chapter End Notes**

This and the next chapter will come out quickly, because these are words I had written last year before I stopped being able to write. Things will slow down after that; I'm hoping to get one to two chapters out a week.

Follow me on Tumblr and pillowfort at username unforth! :)
Dean was surprisingly easy to locate. Pontiac was a small town, only a handful of bars. Castiel knew where Dean haunted, knew his victim profile, knew his appearance. That the FBI had yet to find Dean was nigh-miraculous, a credit to Dean’s latent angelic nature and God’s sheltering hand, given expression in Dean’s ingenuity, cunning, and savviness. Castiel relied on similar divine intervention; not only must he avoid drawing the attention of the FBI, he also kept a wary eye for those who had known his vessel. There were several such in the roadhouse where Castiel had found Dean, most too deep in their cups to notice their own shadows, much less Castiel, but he kept to the perimeter of the room anyway, waiting and observing.

Dean’s approach to his work was awe-inspiring. With two local murders under his belt, the residents of Pontiac must be wary, his image must be circulating, yet he stood tall and confident, undaunted. He moved amidst the crowd like he was a regular, schmoozing and making small talk with the locals. There was ever a drink in his hand, and most would assume him growing progressively more drunk, but Dean nursed a glass of beer, drinking maybe half the contents, then covertly refilling it with ice and water until it filled his tankard, diluted, deceptive, brilliant. He hustled pool, shared flirty winks with men and women, ingratiated himself to one and all as he laughed effortlessly at jokes, nodded sage commiseration to those who were sad, and worked the crowd like a professional.

Envy expressed itself as tension that balled Castiel’s hands into fists, but the object of his envy was harder to discern. He wanted to converse as easily with strangers, to be as comfortable in this disturbing environment as Dean was. He wanted Dean’s gift for setting people at their ease, his ability to inspire their confidence.

He wanted Dean’s good natured jibes and smiles and suggestive winks directed toward him.

He wanted…

…he wanted Dean.

*God’s portents brought me to this place. If it’s His will that I be here, His will that I reunite with Dean, might it be His will that I speak of my desires?*

*But jealousy is a sin.*

*I believe, as I’ve always believed, that Dean and I would operate better together than apart, but the disquiet he stirs in my grace and in my vessel troubles me.*

*Perhaps that is the impulse I’m to examine and control? When I truly consider the reasons I abandoned Dean on the roadside all those months ago, can I credit the decision to anything save cowardice? It is craven that I fear to be at his side, gutless that I use my vessel’s lecherous desires as an excuse, blasphemous that I resist the many signs that our alliance is God’s command. This morning’s omens are merely the latest of a growing body of evidence that Dean and I are connected in ways that cannot be accredited to mere coincidence.*

Castiel’s thoughts spun as the evening wore on and he nursed a glass of lemon water until there was nothing but seeds and pulp and rind barely immersed at the bottom. According to the Pontiac
Daily Reader, Dean had last murdered five days before; based on Castiel’s past experience monitoring Dean’s behavior, Dean likely had a target selected and would make his move in the next night or two. He knew Dean’s modus operandi, knew in a general sense who Dean targeted, yet watching him now, Castiel struggled to determine which man present Dean intended to seduce.

Then again, I failed to observe when I became his intended target, the night we met. The nuances of human courtship behavior continue to elude me.

If Castiel had arrived in Pontiac sooner, perhaps several days of covert operations would have given him a better sense of Dean’s intentions. There was no time, though, and Castiel had no desire to linger in the forsaken town a minute longer than necessary. If not for Dean’s presence there, Castiel would never have returned.

Perhaps instead of pretending I’m the cat monitoring the mouse’s abode, I should confront him now and get it over with…

But watching Dean in his element, at ease and comfortable and confident, was…

…I hate the way it... feels ...to be in Pontiac once more. I haven’t been here since that very first night I claimed this meat as my own.

…observing Dean was pleasant.

The hour grew later. The regulars settled on bar stools or secluded themselves in booths. The waitstaff and bartenders moved through the familiar dance of an evening’s service. Groups arrived, grew boisterous, because subdued with fatigue, and left. The clatter of billiard balls breaking before the cue ball echoed rat-a-tat like the patter of gunfire. Familiar faces came and went and Castiel’s tension increased. Those individuals names came to him, wafting up miasmic from James Novak’s memories, and he repressed them, ignored them, deliberately forgot. Remembering empowered Novak, as Castiel’s yearning for Dean empowered Novak.

Waiting was abysmal.

If but a single person who knew Novak saw him…the broad-shouldered man nursing his third dark ale was Novak’s neighbor. The scantily-clad woman draping herself over a pool table to flirt with another woman in studded leather motorcyclist gear had been a coworker of Novak’s wife, and would lose her job if they learned of her licentious behavior. The drunk passed out in a corner booth, inappropriate behavior quietly indulged by the staff, had served with Novak in Afghanistan. The waitress rolling her eyes at a young man who’d surreptitiously groped her bore a striking resemblance to one of Novak’s daughter’s classmates, and was about the right age.

...dear God...that’s right...with the years that have passed, Claire would have been—

Dean moved purposefully toward the Novaks’ neighbor…Robert? Richard? Something like that… and Castiel could have kissed him, he was so relieved to have something to distract him from James Novak’s intrusions into his awareness.

I…I could kiss him? Maybe?

“Hey there, hot stuff. I’m John,” said Dean, offering a handshake and a leer.

No. Likely not.

“Roger,” replied his vessel’s former neighbor, the name stirring reminiscences of a panoply barbecues, block parties, and garage sales.
The hubbub of noise, rattle of pool, and hum of the jukebox made discerning more of their conversation nigh impossible, and Castiel interpreted as best he could by their facial expressions. Dean’s was guileless and open, though his eyes were hooded and dark, twisted enough to remind Castiel why he’d mistaken Dean for a demon. Roger was initially resistant, then troubled, then resigned as he rose and followed Dean out of the bar, staring at Dean’s swaggering backside all the while.

Jealousy and disgust at Roger’s lewd behavior twisted Castiel’s stomach. He slapped a twenty dollar bill onto his table beside his glass of water and stalked after them. Not until a young waitress jumped out of his way, frightened, did he realize his teeth were bared in a snarl. He slammed the door open before him, startling a couple who’d been reaching for the handle, and picked up his pace as he headed for his car, eyes on Dean and Roger.

_How dare Roger, he’s a married man, a family man for all the town to see, and yet here he is fraternizing, seducing, daring to think he can lay hands on my Dean…_

Despite their head start, Castiel was in his car, motor running, before Roger managed to socket his key into the lock.

…and Dean is letting him, encouraging him. What if Roger hurts Dean? What then of his morality, his ethics, his morals? What then of his family? Because Dean is righteousness and fury and vengeance; if Roger assaults him, the rest of his life counts for naught. Roger will get what is coming to him - what he deserves.

Roger’s movements were jerky and uneven and he swayed badly enough standing still that Castiel wondered how he’d walked any distance without collapsing. Drunk, surely, to make so poor a decision as to follow Dean to seclusion despite his weighty, worldly responsibilities. Intoxication was no excuse for lewd behavior, no mitigating factor should Roger lay hands on Dean’s person.

...because if Roger touches Dean, I will...

...no. It’s not my place…Dean will...

But that Roger would dare touch my Dean ...

I’m being absurd. Dean’s initiation of a liaison is no surprise. This is his modus operandi, has been his modus operandi, and he’s snared a dozen, a hundred, men just the same as he is entrapping Roger. The only difference between now and those times is that I am watching, and I care, and I know them both. When Dean was out of my sight, I could pretend that no hand sullied him despite his scars, but now…

Dean was grace under pressure, an angel beside a demon, smiling, a secretive smirk twisting one corner of his mouth.

And why should I pretend that Dean isn’t having sex with others? I have no relationship with him, no right to expect favors, sexual or otherwise. I have no expectation of chastity. What intimacy we shared was despite my explicit objection.

… my Dean?

Shuddering, Castiel waited and watched as Roger fumbled into the driver seat and started his pick up truck. Dean slid into the passenger seat.

_Do not lie, Castiel. I am naked in the eyes of God, exposed; I cannot delude my Lord, and it is absurd, and beneath my dignity, to engage in self-deception._
Roger didn’t budge.

...and Dean...Dean is mine...

Following the other vehicle covertly would be difficult, traffic light so late on a weeknight, no random other drivers to cloak Castiel’s pursuit, but he’d manage. Making note of the details of Roger’s car – Chevrolet Silverado, dusty, rusted red, Illinois plate K04 6576 – Castiel started out of the lot. The lights of the town glittered to his left. To his right, the way was dark and silent.

Roger was still parked. Roger’s domicile... beside my, Novak’s former residence ...was to the left.

Longing lodged heavy in Castiel’s chest, Novak’s desire for a glimpse of where he’d once called home, for a taste of the warm welcome that had once waited there but was gone forever, and Castiel gritted his teeth.

He should feel nothing, should be cold and distant and angelic, but his emotions were undeniable.

He hated being in Pontiac.

Fortunately, Roger would never take Dean left, towards town, toward home.

Castiel turned right.

Occasional businesses, dark and closed, dotted the road, but none suited Castiel’s needs. He feared he’d have a long drive to find an appropriate cross street – he couldn’t recall what lay in this direction, didn’t dare examine Novak’s memories closely enough to reconstruct a map of Pontiac and its surroundings – but fortunately, an unmarked road shortly came into view. Castiel took the turn, did a hasty K-turn, pulled up to the stop sign, and shut his car off. Though the town was near, the night was pitch black. With no lights on and dust and age obscuring the sheen of paint and metal on his vehicle, Castiel’s car was invisible. When Dean and Roger drove by, Castiel would know and could follow them while maintaining the appearance that he’d merged onto the road from a side street. It wasn’t a flawless plan but Castiel hadn’t the time to concoct a better, hadn’t the time to scout and observe and map and devise, and so he would make do.

I must tell myself the truth, own the truth, embrace the signs sent by God. I have named Dean angel, told him his nature, yet by thought and deed I have denied him.

My grace calls to him, my essence to his, at my Lord’s bidding.

I care for Dean.

I respect Dean.

I, at times, envy Dean.

I miss Dean.

I want Dean.

A car wove down the road and Castiel started his vehicle, engine rumbling. He could only make out headlights as it approached, but the driver was obviously intoxicated and Castiel hadn’t the least doubt that the pickup belonged to Roger, with Dean yet at his side.

Castiel had faith.

The red Chevy passed by the intersection, Castiel’s headlights glaring off the side. He made the
turn and followed.

The road was long and winding, uninterrupted by further side streets, hardly even a driveway to suggest human habitation within a hundred miles. Cultivated fields, bare in spring, stretched out to his right and left, windbreaks making black shadows against the deep blue sky. Drunk, Roger was a wretched driver, speeding up and slowing down at random intervals, weaving into the narrow shoulder and over the center dividing line. There wasn’t another car to be seen, and Castiel played the part of an impatient follower, frustrated enough with the drunken meanderings that he flashed his headlights to hasten them – to no avail – but wary enough that he kept his distance. The crested a small hill that passed for a prominent rise in the flatlands around the town and a flood-lit fence line dazzled Castiel’s vision. A sign announced they passed the Livingston County Landfill. Roger came to a dead stop in the center of the road; Castiel stopped behind him, honking faux impatience, until Roger belatedly activated his turn signal and – eventually – made the turn into the parking lot for the landfill’s administrative office.

As soon as they made the turn, Castiel sped past the lot as if exasperated and relieved.

And as soon as he the building behind him passed from sight, Castiel pulled over, parked, retrieved his angel blade from the trunk of his car, and set off at brisk run back the way he’d come. The mile that had passed in seconds while he drove took long minutes to cover by foot, and Castiel loathed the thoughts that intruded as he struggled to focus on his body, on his breathing, on anything other than his memories of life in Pontiac or his suppositions of what Roger and Dean were doing together.

*If Roger doesn’t assault Dean…doesn’t try to force himself on Dean…will they still engage in coitus?*

*Will Dean enjoy their physical intimacy?*

*Will he think of me?*

*Why do I care? Why am I doing this? I could wait, bide my time, speak to him after. But how else was I to find him, track him, and confront him? If I stand aside now, will I be able to locate him again?*

Determined to quash his useless thoughts, Castiel pushed his pace faster. For all his faults, Novak was an able vessel, in excellent physical condition, and though Castiel loathed the too-mortal training required to maintain that aptitude, he put in the necessary work because he could no longer rely on his angelic nature to maintain adequate strength, lung capacity, and alacrity. The cool night air buoyed him and the exertion heated him until his trench coat and jacket felt constricting. His blade was a welcome weight in his hand, grip secure even as his palms grew sweaty, the steel as much a part of him as his grace. The lights of the landfill twinkled ever closer, until finally he reached the driveway. By the harsh floodlight illumination, he could discern the truck parked on the far side of the parking lot. He slowed and strode toward them. The night was infinitely quiet, too late at night for birdsong, too early in spring for the hum and buzz of insects, too secluded for the whisper and hum of town life. Castiel kept his eyes forward and wide open until they burned with his vessel’s need to blink.

A soft groan shattered the night stillness and pulled Castiel’s attention to an overgrown drain ditch beyond the lot. Reeds rustled, swayed, tall enough to catch the light from the parking lot, but Castiel couldn’t see—

“Fuckin’…fuckin’ whore …fuckin’ demon ,” growled Roger, what little memory his long-unheard
voice evoked subsumed by the inhumanity of his swearing. A dull thud spoke to two objects impacting each other and Dean huffed out a pained sound that aborted with a second dull thud. There was nothing erotic about the noise and Castiel’s blood ran cold.

...Roger is hurting Dean...

...I have to stop him, I have to protect Dean, I have to—

I must not interfere with the work of another angel as he executes his duty.

Unless Dean is truly in danger. In which case, I should intervene, defend, protect.

The sounds of assault spurred Castiel to greater haste. Roger continued to murmur slurs and insults and rage, too softly for Castiel to make out the specifics, tone unmistakable and monstrous. Dean groaned and whimpered in pain. The reeds surrounding and obscuring them thrashed and flattened and sprang up, soft snap, snap, snap of stalks breaking as loud as gunshots in the night. Counting on the sound of their conflict to mask any he might make, Castiel skirted around, slid down the near side steep ditch, leapt to the other side, and circled back. Roger and Dean were black silhouettes against the pale reeds, outlines of their faces and bodies picked out by the unforgiving light. Dean lay on the ground, arms wrapped protectively around his torso, futilely trying to roll aside as Roger drew his foot back and kicked Dean in the side. The blow was hard enough to make a solid whump and the agony contorting Dean’s face as he grunted was ghastly. Castiel’s sword was a leaden weight in his hand. He itched to act, attack at once, without compassion, without thought, without compunction, to satisfy his training and his orders, to protect Dean and slay the demon hurting him, and…


“Thought you were gonna…thought you were gonna fuck me, huh?” Roger was a demon, through and through, his expression a rictus of sin. “Stupid…son of a bitch…I’ll…” Roger’s breathing was so heavy he could scarce complete a sentence, his movements frenetic and unsteady from adrenaline and alcohol. He leaned down, tangled his fingers in Dean’s hair and hauled him up. Dean’s face went slack with pain, blood leaking from his nose and mouth, and Castiel’s blood alit with the fury of divine retribution.

But—

Dean smiled. “Don’t you talk shit ’bout my mama…”


Roger spat in Dean’s face and threw him to the ground, drawing another low moan from Dean. “Show you…I’ll…I’ll show you…I’m a man, you sick…you fucker…you fag…I’ll…” Roger’s mutterings devolved to indecipherability. He dropped to squat beside Dean, tumbled to his knees as his balance failed, and jerked on Dean’s pants. Dean attempted to squirm away, marshalling elbows to crawl up the side of the ditch, feet kicking at the rocks lining the drainage cut, but he had no traction and Roger pulled him back so roughly that for every foot Dean climbed he slid back two. Pale, scarred flesh was revealed to the night air inch by inch, Dean’s behind as marred, as perfect, as the rest of his body.

But—

Another hard tug pulled Dean’s pants to his knees and Roger froze, panting, overheated exhalés puffing as clouds into the spring night.
“Like what you see?” Dean taunted, wiggling his ass.


“Show…” Roger rose, tottering, and lowered the zipper of his fly, teeth separating with a buzz like a chainsaw. “Show you…” Two savage kicks parted Dean’s legs despite the obstruction of his pants, and Dean pressed his forehead to the ground, face lost in shadow though Castiel imagined him in agony, imagined every gorgeous line of Dean’s pained expression. “Bitch…make you a…” Roger dropped to his knees between Dean’s legs and pulled his penis out. “Should fuckin’ kill you…”

But—!

Roger dropped atop Dean, smothering him against the ground, hiding his actions from Castiel’s view until, with a snarl of triumph, his hips surged forward.

But—!!!

Dean screamed.

Fury washed the night red.

Step.

Roger humped Dean into the ground.

Step.

Dean sobbed, garbled curses, writhed, struggled, unable to push Roger off him.

Step.

The angel blade was heavy, sure, true, in Castiel’s hand.

Step.

Roger was demon, lost to lust and pride and hate, and his time had come.

Step.

Blind to Castiel’s arrival, Roger continued his depraved, repulsive assault. Castiel reached down, wrapped his hand around Roger’s skull and dragged him up, dragged him from Dean. He was heavy but rage amplified Castiel’s strength and the weight was as nothing.

I am an angel, This possessed scum cannot resist my might.

“Wha—”

Castiel drove his blade through Roger’s chest.

Wide-eyed, Roger stared at the sword, stared at Castiel, lifted shaking hands as if his mortal, pathetic grip could remove the blade impaling him.

“Jimmy?”

Blood coursed over the slick metal, coated Castiel’s hand, soaked his trousers, dyed Roger’s shirt,
black. Divine wrath fired through Castiel, so powerful he shook with might and need and triumph as Roger went slack.

“Holy shit…” Dean whispered.

Castiel withdrew his blade and threw Roger’s corpse aside. Trash. Garbage. Let his blood soak into the ditch, join with the waters that nourished the land, let him do one useful damn thing in his entire worthless life.

...Jimmy...

“Cas?”

The wonder and pain and surprise in Dean’s voice tore Castiel’s attention from his righteous deed. Dean had rolled onto his back, revealing his bruised and battered face, revealing his erection. Blood saturated his clothing, coated his skin, made black speckles over his cock, his thighs, his butt.

...I am not Jimmy!

And Castiel wanted.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Did you…did you kill him?” Dean demanded, flabbergasted.

The angel blade gleamed red, catching the light and twinkling like a forsaken star. Arousal and anger and adrenaline surged through Castiel until he vibrated with suppressed energy. His hands tingled, his penis bulged uncomfortably against his underwear, and he could have drowned in Dean’s wide eyes.

“He hurt you.”

No one gets to hurt you except me.

“Uh…dude…buddy…that’s kinda my whole schtick?”

You’re mine.

“He. Hurt. You.”

“Pssh, I’m fine,” said Dean. Rolling onto his back, then up to sit cross-legged on the sloping ground, he did appear fine, behavior a contrast to his earlier apparent helplessness and pitiful ‘plaints. “All part of the act.”

“You’re bleeding.” A dull roar filled Castiel’s head, made Dean sound distant, made Castiel sound disembodied and inhuman to his vessel’s ears.

...because I’m not human…I don’t desire the things humans want, don’t require the things humans need...

But I want Dean.

I need Dean.

“Duh, he split my lip and broke my nose and didn’t use lube.” Dean rolled his eyes. “Nothin’ I can’t handle. Cas, man, you totally stole my thunder. I was havin’ a nice evening – best date I’ve
had in weeks.”

Castiel’s vision flashed red again, suffused with the blood coating his sword, the blood soaking Dean’s clothing, as he remembered Roger smothering Dean against the ground and thrusting into his body.

“I will not apologize for killing—”

“You’d better make it up to me.” Dean’s smirk silenced Castiel, his mouth yet open around his shocked exclamation.

With a languid stretch, Dean rolled onto his back, caught his calves in his hands, and exposed butt. Blood leaked from his anus, beaded down his crack, coated his perineum and testicles. Dean’s erection thrust up obscenely, contrasting black and pale where blood streaked the flesh. Even the most sensitive places of Dean’s body hadn’t be spared the agonies that were writ over his body; pale ridges puckered the flesh of his thighs and bulbs of scar tissue bulged around his wrinkled rim.

Castiel’s throat went dry. Dean spread his legs wider, as wide as he could with his pants yet caught around his knees. Dean’s penis twitched, thin liquid seeping down his length, and his hole clenched and eased around nothing.

I shouldn’t.

“You know you want to.”

I mustn’t.

Hands shaking, Castiel gripped the blade of his sword and ran his palm up the length, cleaning the blood from the metal.

I can’t.

“Don’t wuss out on me now, angel.”

I’m an angel.

Dean wiggled his behind, an enticing invitation, and Castiel stared, unable to suppress a growl, as another flow of blood crested Dean’s rim and trickled to the rimed ground beneath him.

...he’s a...he’s a...

“Dean…”

Dean called me Cas. Dean called me angel. He doesn’t want Jimmy, doesn’t see Jimmy when he looks at me. He wants me. And I...

...I...

“You gonna fuck this hole or what? God knows, ain’t gonna fuck itself.”

Snap.

Dean groaned beneath him. A hand rubbed slick over Castiel’s penis – my hand, coated in Roger’s blood, on my penis, my body, not James Novak’s, never again. He couldn’t remember dropping to his knees, couldn’t remember withdrawing his erection from his pants, and he didn’t fucking care.
because Dean was open and willing and whispering “do it, do it, do it” and Castiel needed, craved, required the satisfaction that only Dean could give him.

This.

Is.

Wrong.

Castiel froze, breathing as hard as he had after running a mile to reach the parking lot. His penis throbbed hot in his grip, his body rigid.

Not my body. I am not James Novak! This is a vessel, and I...

“Cas…” murmured Dean.

…and I...

Lost, helpless, forsaken, Castiel looked up and met Dean’s eyes.

…I...I do not want...do not need...do not...yearn...

Blood made trails over his forehead, down his cheeks, reddened his lips, but there was no pained tightness in his expression.

...oh, I do want, I do need, I do yearn, for my demon, my angel, my Dean.

Dean smiled gently, met Castiel’s eyes, and Castiel saw…

…and if Dean wants this as badly as I do...

“Please, Cas…”

…Castiel saw…

“You’ve got no fricken clue how many times I’ve fucked myself raw tracing that symbol you cut in my chest. Only scar that’s mine, only scar I want…you’re the only one I…you’re the one, Cas…you’re not a mark. You’re not another dick bag I gotta gank. You’re not a demon, and when I’m with you, this shithole world don’t feel so much like hell. I…I need…”

…Castiel saw…

“…please…”

…salvation.

Disconnected, dreaming, scarce aware how he moved or what he did, Castiel leaned forward, used a thumb to spread Dean’s hole, and line himself up.

With one hard thrust, he gave Dean what Dean needed.

Plummeting back into himself, into his vessel, Castiel groaned as euphoric bliss spread outward from where they were joined, glorious pressure and friction encompassing his penis, Dean’s awed ooooh encompassing, demolishing, Castiel’s troubled thoughts.

“Fuck me, Castiel.”
Castiel had never heard a more fervent prayer, and he’d never answered any supplication more willingly. His hips drew back, thrust forward, again, again, again and again. Dean was soft and open and slick beneath him, eyes wide, mouth ajar as he panted, legs and tangled pants a barrier preventing Castiel from smothering Dean against the ground, kissing him, nipping at his neck, as he longed to do.

...next time...

Dean’s hands had dropped to his sides, clenching at the reeds shattered beneath them, his knees hooked over Castiel’s elbows. The scars along Castiel’s neck burned him with awareness of how much Dean owed him, how badly Dean needed to be put in his place. Growling gutturally, Castiel pressed against Dean harder, pressed into Dean harder, dizzy with pleasure and the sick squelch of the blood smoothing their joining and the slack expression on Dean’s face. Every breath from Dean was rich with desire and puffed sultry into Castiel’s face and he wanted—

...to draw a knife over Dean’s cheeks, his throat, down his torso...

Thrust.

...to kiss the scars I left on his chest...

Thrust.

...to erase the stain of whoever hurt him before...

Thrust.

...to replace, renew, demolish every touch to his body save my own...

Thrust.

...to shut his smart mouth with my blood-soaked dick and make him swallow everything I deign to give him...

Thrust.

“Cas… Cas …!”

Dean’s hand fumbled over his side, rumpling his clothing, movements limp and awkward and weak, drifting toward where they were joined. Pivoting back, Castiel forced his gaze from Dean’s face, skimmed over Dean’s sodden clothing, took in a delicious view of Dean’s pre-release dampened penis, and admired Dean’s exposed hole as Castiel’s penis sank into Dean over and over, blackened by shadow and blood and sin.

Not sin. Is it sin for one angel to join with another? Is it sin to follow the multitudinous signals the Lord has sent me that this is His will? Is it sin to grant Dean the pleasure he has begged of me time and again, the bliss he has pleaded for implicitly and explicitly since the day we met?

Even if this be sin, I was damned anyway. Let me be damned for—

“Please!” Dean whined.

—make him submit, make him take what I give him—

“Oh, Cas !”
—he’s already submissive, already willing—

Dean’s hand intruded on Castiel’s gorgeous view, Castiel’s penis... say cock, Castiel, you know you want to... drawing in and out of Dean’s body, Dean’s...cock...bouncing and smacking against his exposed, scarred belly.

“No."

Letting Dean’s legs go, letting them splay awkwardly to the sides, Castiel seized Dean’s hand and slammed it to the ground. Dean moaned pitifully, beautifully – yes, good, don’t fight me, you had this coming a million times over, you filthy incubus – and his other hand tentatively groped toward his crotch. Snarling, Castiel grabbed that hand, too, pressed both to the cold ground, leaned forward to trap Dean’s legs once more and fuck into Dean’s body as vigorously, forcefully, hard as he could. Each thrust brought rapture so sublime that Castiel gasped, struggling to keep his eyes open and fixed on the exquisite vision of Dean trapped, Dean willing, Dean taking and taking and—

“Touch me!” moaned Dean. “Dear fucking God, Cas, pl—”

“Blasphemy.”

Fury and unadulterated desire blanked Castiel’s vision; he released one of Dean’s hands, thrust out, grabbed Dean’s throat, and forced his head back. Dean choked on a protest, a plea, whatever beautiful, sinful filth had been about to escape him, and Castiel forced Dean’s head farther back. His flesh was hot in Castiel’s grip, his jugular quivering with racing blood, taut beneath Castiel’s thumb. Air rasped through Dean’s straining throat, his body trembling beneath Castiel, fluttering and clenching around Castiel.

...come, you little bitch, you fucking whore...come, you disgusting parasite, you mewling cum bucket...come on my cock, come with me choking the life out of you, come dreaming of my knife buried in your stomach, just like I buried it in—

James. Novak. You do not control me, and you do not possess Dean.

I am Castiel, angel of the Lord.

And Dean is mine.

Dean’s fingers grasped weakly at Castiel’s wrist, aborted strained sounds all Dean could manage by way of breathing. Castiel’s grip went stiff, clenched, his palm constricting Dean’s airways.

Release me, Novak. This is my body now. I know who is the demon here. I know the demon is within me.

It was never Dean I needed to submit. It was Novak.

No.

I need both of them puppeted to my will.

Fire and ice, rage and bliss, coursed through Castiel’s body, Castiel’s body, and he forced open eyes he couldn’t recall closing. Dean’s nails had scoured red lines over the back of Castiel’s hand, Dean’s skin flushed. His lips were white lines in the stark light, his neck corded as he strained to breathe.
And I can make them both obey me.

That is God’s will.

The certainty of the thought was Revelation, was rapture. Serenity swept through Castiel, embraced him, encompassed him, released him from the prison his vessel had become. His hips yet worked forward, his being yet strained toward orgasm, and he faced Dean, faced himself, faced a future of many more such liaisons.

He was prepared.

He was unafraid.

He was empowered.

He was Castiel, angel of the Lord, divine messenger, demon slayer, and Dean Winchester…

…Dean Winchester…

Castiel released his grip.

Dean’s head slammed backward, his body arched, a huge inhale swelled his chest and his body went rigid and tight, stymying Castiel’s thrusts. Falling back on to his knees, Castiel grabbed Dean’s ankles, forced his legs back as he forced his penis into Dean’s clenched channel. Semen spurted from Dean, painting white lines over his pale, scarred navel, and profound satisfaction washed over Castiel.

“Good,” Castiel murmured. “So good.”

“Cas…” Dean croaked.

At ease, body, soul and grace, Castiel leaned back into Dean, pressed back into Dean’s body, reveled in the tightness fading around him. Dean was limp, open, and Castiel rocked into his willing anus, penis fitting in Dean’s hole as though Dean had been created in the Lord’s image solely to accommodate Castiel.

Perhaps he was. Perhaps Dean’s vessel, this entire scenario, was engineered for me…I can’t fathom why, but if it were God’s will, it would certainly be within His power.

“Cas…!” whimpered Dean.

Smiling, Castiel pressed their bodies as close as he could, folded Dean’s legs farther, forced Dean’s butt to curl against Castiel’s straining hips, slid one hand beneath Dean’s head and the other along Dean’s side.

“Shh,” Castiel whispered reassuringly. His thrusts were unhurried, easy, his penis sliding in and out of Dean’s body and bathing Castiel – bathing both of them – in pleasure. Dean twitched and strained beneath him, wrapped his arms around Castiel and pulled him closer, pulled their heads together so that each breathed hot in the other’s ear.

“It feels…angel, you feel…”

“I know,” breathed Castiel. “Don’t be afraid. You’re safe. This is divine, Dean. You are divine.”

A groan ripped from Dean, tensed him once more, and Dean’s clenched anus constricted, perfect pressure along every sensitive place on Castiel’s shaft. Shuddering, struggle to breathe, Castiel
sank into Dean’s body…and released.

…white semen mixed with red, red blood…

…my grace mixed with Dean’s…

…perfect…

Winded, exhausted, replete, Castiel collapsed atop Dean. They lay entwined, arms and legs tangled, bodies joined, as cool night air swept around them and recalled to mind all the perils of the body so easily forgotten in the throes of passion: the chill of sweat, the clamminess of clinging, soaked clothing, the copper-sweet scent of blood, the buzz of overhead lights, the whispering rustle of the reeds around them. Castiel was loathe to move, loathe to allow reality to intrude upon the awe of their joining, but no moment was eternal, even in the perfect sight of God, and growing discomfort – and growing concern for Dean’s discomfort – finally spurred Castiel to shift, to move, to trail reassuring hands over Dean’s heated, damp skin as he drew back.

Dean stared at Castiel, eyes wide, cheeks flushed, hair a disheveled mess.

Castiel smiled.

“Hello, Dean.”

“Holy shit, Cas.”

Yes. Holy. Dean is holy.

Dean makes me holy.

“Thank you, Dean. Thank you for everything.”

Dean’s answering sputtering laughter was more beautiful than the entire choir of Heaven singing in harmony.

Chapter End Notes

…and that's everything I had written before I stopped working on this story early last year.

Further chapters will be added as I write and edit them, so if you've been enjoying this...ya know...subscribe.

And as a general note, the lack of comments on this story has been universally disheartening and is part of why it took me so long to get back to it. Those few of you who have consistently spoken up with your support, I appreciate you so so much. For everyone else...if you are reading and enjoying this story, I would appreciate hearing that? But it's okay if you can't.

(and, as a general warning, I'm not really able to answer most comments right now - I either have time to write or reply to comments, not both - but I read every one, usually repeatedly, and they keep me going.)
Thanks, everyone. <3
Chapter Notes

Ugh, we had a hell of a week - sick kids, sick me, no sleep, bad weather, the works - and I struggled cause, like, I knew I needed a bridge chapter or two but couldn't quite figure out how to get from point A to point B...but here we are. I'm vaguely optimistic I can get chapters out more quickly after this, because I have an increasingly clear idea of how the rest of the story goes.

“So, where do ya think’d be a good place to hide a body 'round here?” Dean mused.

Castiel frowned at a stain on the bench seat of Roger’s car, under where Dean had been sitting, attempting in the stark lighting to determine if the oily smudges were recent. The advanced planning Castiel invested in demon hunting - the planning, stalking, scene preparation, graver digging, spell casting - meant he rarely concerned himself with clean up, but for Dean, removing evidence was essential. Dean’s work reflected Dean’s personality, random, impulsive, determined, implacable. They’d left a mess at the landfill’s office parking lot, and cleaning that mess was essential to protecting Dean from the mortal repercussions of his divinely ordered actions. Dean insisted Castiel needed protection as well...

...a jolt of heat trailed through him, fulminated in his groin, and Castiel sighed.

Dean was probably correct.

Dean was often correct, about many things, but especially about Castiel, and what Castiel wanted, and what Castiel needed.

...I need Dean...

And so, Castiel cleaned Roger’s car, his tie modified to hold his hair back so he wouldn’t shed errant strands, wearing gloves that Dean had pulled as if by magic from his jeans pocket.

Perhaps Dean was not so unprepared, so impulsive, after all.

Of course he’s not. He spends days lurking in the bar, looking for targets, choosing whom to accompany. He studies his prospective marks as I do, and he’s usually correct.

He recognizes demons when he sees them.

And of all the people in the bar that first night, he chose me...

Leaning close, Castiel sniffed the car seat blotch and grimaced. The cushion smelled loathsome and the aroma was uninformative. With a sigh, he took the cleaning supplies he’d discovered in the back of the truck and sprayed the area down.

Better safe than sorry.

“Cas?” Dean’s voice, close at his back, startled him. He spun around, spray bottle held at the
defensive. “Hey, don’t spritz!” laughed Dean, holding up his hands in mock surrender. He was flushed, chest heaving; behind him, the trunk of Cas’ car was yet open, Roger’s arm dangling limply out, flesh pale save where dried blood had settled into each knuckle and wrinkle. “Asked you a question. The body. Where?”

“My apologies,” replied Castiel, lowering the bottle and patting at the dampened seat with a rag. “I thought your question rhetorical.”

“Right, right.” Dean chuckled. “Rhetorical. The completely hypothetical consideration of what we oughta do with a dead body, if, ya know, we ever got cast in a remake of Weekend at Bernie’s.”

“I’m unfamiliar with this Bernard you speak of…”

“I figured you would be,” said Dean. “Wouldn’t work anyway, I ain’t in to role playing with my rapists. You, on the other hand…”

...role playing? Does he mean…?

“Your previous dump site was in a park...something with an Iroquois name, I believe…?” Castiel suggested. Dean blinked, providing no confirmation, a smile barely curling the corner of Dean’s mouth. How Dean reacted when he felt Castiel had something ridiculous was growing familiar, and endearing, though it remained as impenetrably baffling as so much of Dean’s behavior did. “Was that location in some way disagreeable?”

“You’ve been reading up on me,” Dean preened, coyly glancing up and over his shoulder. The parking lot lights enhaledo him, shone through his disheveled hair, brightened his eyes to an incredible shade of green, leant hyperreality to every freckle and dried blood drop spotting his tanned cheeks. He was beautiful, an angel of vengeance, as idealized and impossible and divine as a Renaissance icon.

...celestial intent channeled through mortal hands...ideal, transcendent beauty rendered mortal and transitory by the masterful hands of a Raphael, a Leonardo, a Donatello, a Michelangelo...

...one of those Mutated Karate Teenage Turtles...

Smiling, Castiel chuckled.

“...something stuck in my teeth?” Dean asked, drawing his lips back, lifting a hand, extending a pinky, and picking at whatever he imagined present. Castiel could only shake his head and admire. “Anyway.” Dean spit and shook his head. “Quit changing the topic.”

“...I said nothing, Dean.”

“You’re leering. It’s...” Dean made a lewd gesture. “Distracting.” Swallowing, Castiel tried to work moisture into his suddenly dry mouth. He hadn’t been distracted before, but he was now. With his clothing grimy with blood, his nose and cheeks smeared, his eyes twinkling, Dean was... scrumptious. “None of that! I finally cleaned up my ass and that mess we made in the ditch, I ain’t cleaning up again just ‘cause you’re a horndog.”

...I am not horned...

“I’m not a dog. I’m an angel.”

...I am not a demon. I am an angel. Dean’s holiness, Dean’s assent, Dean’s belief, Dean’s worship, proves that.
“Ayup. A perfect, sweet little angel. Good attitude. So, angel, where should we hide Roger boy?”

“Does the Iroquois park not suit?”

“No, it don’t suit,” Dean mocked, drawing himself up and assuming a strange accent. He nudged Roger’s arm into the trunk of Castiel’s car. “The FBI found that douche bag pretty quick, but I guess that was the point. Just thought you might know a better dump site.”

...I am...I’m an...
...I’m not a...

Dean knows.

“Why should I?” Castiel tried and failed to repress his irritation.

A mere hour after I allowed myself to believe that Dean saw me, and not my vessel...
slammed the trunk shut, and jerked the driver’s door open with a tortured squeal of rusty hinges.

…it was naive - foolish - ridiculous - it was insane of me believe Dean had experienced a change of heart.

He pulled the tie from his head, allowing his hair to fall to his forehead and tickle at his eyes.

I should have known better.

“What are you--”

No wonder my Lord has forsaken me.

The transformation of Dean’s expression to confused distress was...satisfying.

He still believes my essence, my divinity, synonymous with this repulsive vessel.

The engine started with a roar.

I cannot risk spending more time with him, as he is now.

“...aww, come on, James…

I cannot risk spending more time with him, ever.

“... Jimmy ...don’t be like that!”

Yeah, Cassie boy, don’t be like this! Haven’t we been having fun?

By rote, Castiel checked that no other vehicles moved in the lot, flicked his turn signal on, and navigated from his parking spot. Dean paced him at a walk, then at a jog, smacking the side of the vehicle.

This is my fault.

“At least leave me the truck keys! It’s cold as balls out here!”

I empowered James Novak by allowing Dean to get under my skin…

“...Jim...Manny...whatever the fuck your name is...Cas…”

...don’t you mean you got under his skin? Loved all that blood, didn’t you? The color it made when it mixed with our come? Just...perfection. Next time we should make him eat it. Swallow every drop.

Castiel sped toward the exit. Dean ran ponderously after him, his face twisted with pain, his gait awkward.

My laxness, my disregard, my overconfidence, gave James Novak the opportunity to hurt Dean.

“Castiel!”

How dare he call me that, here and now, after so conclusively proving he believed me James Novak?

Pausing at the entrance, turn signal clicking, Castiel checked for on-coming traffic.
I have allowed Novak took much control of this vessel.

“Son of a bitch!”

I have given Dean too much power over me, too much knowledge of me.

“Shoulda ganked you when I had the chance!”

I will not be led astray.

Castiel turned onto the road.

I will not err.

“Fuck!”

I will not fall farther than I already have.

Castiel sped away, toward the town, the reflection of Dean in his rearview mirror shrinking to insignificance with distance. Watching until Dean disappeared, Castiel turned his gaze once more to the road, only to find he’d nearly overtaken a stop sign. Slamming on the brakes, Castiel barely stopped in time. Something clunked, heavy, in the trunk.

Roger’s corpse.

Castiel had to do something with that.

I could pull over, deposit the body here, let the the vultures feast on him as he deserves.

He made the turn toward Pontiac.

But leaving Roger here, leaving him so close to the landfill, defeats the point of cleaning the scene, of scrubbing his car, of removing the body. The idea was to misdirect, not to provide the authorities with a roadmap to Dean. This case is already significantly different. It will not take any leaps of brilliance for the FBI to recognize that Dean’s modus operandi has changed, to perhaps recognize the wound to Roger’s chest as that which my blade makes, though sans the cauterization of heat.

Memory guided Castiel down the same road that brought him to the landfill, back toward the roadhouse where Dean had chosen Roger as a target.

And Roger can still see me, still name me Jimmy.

I am not James Novak!

Was that always Dean’s intention? Did he target my former neighbor as a means of...targeting me?

But why?

The road was a dark abstraction before him, occasionally broken by lights mounted on power lines or homes or barns. Wind whipped dust over the fallow fields, swirling motes like a fog over the clear, cold night.

Why did Dean come here?

Any empty field would do as Roger’s final resting place. Any irrigation channel could inter him.
There was no need to choose an obscure location. The Lord and Castiel both knew, Dean normally made little effort to conceal his crimes.

*The only way to know would be to ask him. And I cannot risk seduction by his sly tongue once more, not until he’s awoken to his true nature.*

Dean was proud of his work, as he should be. Though he did not remember himself, he did God’s work with every sexual sadist he exposed and destroyed.

*...as he’s exposing and destroying me?*

The lights of the town glowed in the distance, the fields receding behind Castiel.

*No. As foolish as I’ve been, I haven’t deluded myself into the belief that Dean perceives me differently than he perceives his victims. Whether he looks at me and sees Castiel, or looks at me and sees Staff Sergeant James Novak in all his tarnished glory, Dean has had ample opportunity to kill me, if he believed me a demon, as I have had ample opportunity to kill him.*

The small business district streaked by him, the chains and restaurants dark and shuttered.

*That I am alive, that he did not murder me mid-coitus as he intended to murder Roger, is proof that Dean does not seek my death.*

Suburban homes lined the street, quiet and dark, peaceful and innocent, ensnared by endless midnight.

*And perhaps…*

Castiel had no destination in mind, only a vague sense of direction, a mission, a purpose.

*...perhaps this was a reckoning that was always coming. Perhaps this was a reckoning I required to truly be at peace.*

A niggling sense of familiarity, or sanguine comfort, followed Castiel has he made aimless turn upon aimless turn.

*James Novak has always troubled me, always sought to divert me from my assigned duty on this mortal plane. I could not continue on, forever divided in myself - forever torn between my divine purpose and my vessel’s demonic impulses.*

Known landmarks passed as Castiel drove. He’d only been to Pontiac once, when his disembodied grace sought an appropriate mortal shell and instead found accursed James Novak, hands yet crimson with the blood of the crime that damned for eternity.

*Dean offers me peace, offers me oneness.*

In a strange way, Castiel had saved Novak, spared him the fate he richly deserved. Had Castiel not arrived, Novak would have been seized, damned on earth by his actions, as surely as he would be consigned to the deepest pits of hell in the after life.

*...and I offer Dean...*

Novak hadn’t deserved to be saved.

*... I offer Dean...*
Castiel didn’t deserve to be saved, either.

...I offer...

Castiel blinked.

And he was home.

_No - no, home is in heaven. Home is kneeling before God’s throne. Home is a place to which I can never return._

The exterior looked precisely as Castiel recalled, white and pale blue, archetypically suburban, square and plain and solid and earthbound. The blinds were drawn, no glimmer of light within, no decoration or lawn ornament to suggest the personality of the current residents. The grass was brown, the bushes winter bare, the street serene, no hint of the violence that had scarred it that long ago night, no hint of the violence that would scar it again tonight, when the residents learned who...what...lay in the trunk of Castiel’s car.

_This isn’t my home!_

Castiel blinked.

And he was _home_.

The once pristine carpet was sodden with blood.

The walls were splattered with arterial spray.

The corpses sprawled on the floor, like Claire’s broken dolls when she played too intensely, but no amount of super glue would repair them; no amount of begging would restore them to life.

Castiel blinked.

He. was. home.

Amelia and Claire stood on the porch, smiling, beaming. The ends of the yellow ribbon tied to the support beam came free as Amelia pulled, laughing and crying with joy, welcoming him back home from his long years of service abroad in the name of the Lord.

_Back?_

Home.

_Oh no. I never left this place. It follows me, a dagger through my heart, an arrow through the plumes of my tattered wings. It is the face of evil that other angels surely see when they behold me._

Amelia and Claire played in the backyard - said grace at the table - wept to see him - loved him - needed him - judged him - damned him - loathed him.

_That. is. not. me. I am not James Novak! It is enough that I damned for my own crimes; I need not bear the guilt of his as well!_

Amelia and Claire stood on the porch, white as death, bloody smiles broad, eyes vacant, accusing, pits, welcoming him back to hell.

_No._
No.

No, no, no, no, no.

Castiel’s stomach... Novak’s stomach... Castiel roiled, his mind spinning, acid burning his throat. He jerked the car door open, squeaks a shriek in the quiet night, and retched bile to pool and steam on the cold asphalt. The car vibrated around him, vibrated through him, evoked too many memories - frozen nights huddled in a Humvee with his squadmates, snow melting beneath exsanguinating victims, tent sides belling with the wind, melt rinsing his knife, singing screams grown more familiar than Claire’s favorite top 40 hits.

Nononononononono!

He’d been sure then, confident, empowered, righteous. He’d been the arm of justice, the voice of God, the vengeance of his people given form and might and purpose.

He’d been right.

He’d done what he was ordered to do.

He’d felt so. fucking. good.

And then...and then he was home.

His insides churned again and he spat, spittle and acid and blood coating his chin, drenching his hands, soaking his clothing, dyeing his soul.

He never did leave that Humvee, that tent, those mountains.

He had never left the blood soaked living room of this house.

He could never go home. Home wasn’t a place. It was a time.

A time forever past.

That isn’t...

Castiel gasped, gagging.

That isn’t me - wasn’t me - I didn’t do those thing. I couldn’t have done those things! I follow my Lord’s commands. I love my neighbors - love my family - love my enemies, even as I love myself. I didn’t...

...but I...but I hate myself...

...and I hate...

...nononononononononononononononononononono...

There was so much blood, an ocean of blood, the Red Sea crashing around Pharaoh’s armies, proving their devotions hollow and unjust no matter their self-justification, drowning them, annihilating them, saving the fleeing innocents.

...not even the innocents were spared...men, women, children...old and young...no one was spared.

There were no survivors.
“Hey, mister!” A knuckle rapped on the glass on the passenger side door. With a spasming inhale that rasped agony over his vomit-burned throat, Castiel’s eyes flashed open. The frigid night was painted red, the gray sidewalk ablaze with hellfire, the peaceful houses oozing blood, windows seared eye sockets that yet saw him precisely as he was.

...this is not my home, that’s not me, none of that was me!

“You okay?” A teenage girl stood outside, small and hunched in an oversized hoodie. Wisps of wind-whipped blonde hair brushed her face, her flesh red as though the skin had been flayed from her smile, her lips a dripping rictus, her eyes inhumanly blue - his eyes, reflected back at him, seeing him, knowing him, judging him, and finding him infinitely wanting.

Claire!

“I’m sorry,” Castiel rasped.

Never again.

Krissy blinked at him.
I’m cut loose from heaven and from hell, damned by Novak’s hand and my own. Doom bears on me heavily. I grow tired. I grow hungry. I grow aroused. I feel.

“’the fuck?” she demanded.

She sounds like Dean.

“What’re you sorry for, creepazoid?”

...Dean...

“Everything,” Castiel confessed. It wasn’t nearly enough to say. It was far too much to say. There weren’t adequate words in the entire Oxford lexicon to convey the depths of Castiel’s depravity. Krissy looked at him like he’d lost his mind.

Maybe I did.

Maybe that’s all this has been since the beginning - Novak’s dangerous delusions worming their way into my being, corrupting me, turning me, dragging me into his depths.

Until…until I faced Novak, subdued him, and felt...

A heavenly vision came to him, an angel in august glory, an annunciation, dazzling and divine. Haloed with rays of gold, as he had been at the parking lot, Dean reached out a hand to him, gripped him, pulled him toward heaven and salvation.

Dean, who slaughtered demons.

Dean, who risked himself to pursue justice.

Dean, who saw what Castiel was, knew what Castiel did - knew what Novak had done - and still treated Castiel as holy.

Dean, who was holiness given form and mortality and life.

“Whoa,” muttered Krissy. “Shoulda listened to mom ‘bout that whole ‘don’t talk to strangers’ thing. You are...something else.”

“I am,” Castiel said, serenity superimposing itself on the chaos within him.

The world came into focus in shades of crisp white and shadowed black, the cloak of blood sluicing away.

“I am other.”

The girl before him wasn’t Claire.

“I am driven.”

The woman on the porch wasn’t Amelia.

“I am divine.”

428 Allan Street wasn’t home.

“I am an angel.”
Even Heaven, gates eternally closed to him, wasn’t home.

“And I have work I must complete.”

Pulling the car door shut, Castiel blinked, put the car in drive, and pulled away from the curb, ignoring Krissy’s astonished shout.

Dean was home.

And Castiel had abandoned him in an isolated parking lot.

Castiel had one chance at salvation, one place he belonged, and he nearly allowed his hatred of James Novak drive him from his true purpose.

*One final revenge from the devil I forever struggle to contain.*

There were more sins in Castiel’s past than he could make up in a lifetime of lifetimes, but this rent he could repair.

He could return to Dean.

He could return *home*.

And they could figure out what came next *together*.

Chapter End Notes

Dean done fucked up.

...I know there have been...a *lot* of questions...about Cas’ backstory.

I hope this resolves most of those?

Cause, well, it ain't gonna get much clearer than this.

Unreliable narrator for the mother fucking win.
Part 4: Friday, April 6th

The headlights of Castiel’s car picked out Dean’s features in ghastly shades of white and red and black. Concern had Castiel itching to accelerate, to reach Dean more quickly, but he resisted. If he sped up, he’d frighten Dean, and likely drive past accidentally. Dean trudged along the side of the road, walking toward Pontiac, toward Castiel’s car, with a disconsolate slump to his shoulders. Castiel had never seen Dean look so demoralized, so troubled, so small. His clothing was disarrayed, the blood that had stained his garments no longer in evidence. Weaving as he walked, unsteady on his feet as a drunkard, Dean stared at the ground, a rivulet of blood leaking from his broken nose, his eyes made black pits by the shadow of his brow.

...gouged out so that he cannot see me...

...but, of all the mortals and demons and angels on this accursed sphere, he’s the one being I wish would see me...

Castiel hit the brakes.

Dean stumbled to a stop, blinking against the bright headlight as if he’d just realized there was a car there.

Reaching across the front seat, Castiel gripped the crank and rolled down the window.

“The fuck you want…” Dean blinked, his eyes coming into focus. “Cas?”

“How, Dean.”

Blinking again, Dean stared at him, mouth ajar, breath puffing out clouds before him. The engine hummed. The car’s brake lights making a lurid glow of the exhaust streaming out the back. The headlights made long triangles down the flat road before him, rendering the barren fields sparse with weeds and broken corn stalks hellishly stark, apocalyptically dead. The landfill was a couple miles off, a hill-like silhouette on the horizon, and fields made a patchwork on both sides of the road, irrigation ditches on either side overgrown with shrubs and dried nettles, indistinguishable from the spot Castiel had finally chosen as Roger’s final abode.

Castiel expected Dean’s bedraggled appearance to fall away. He expected Dean to straighten his back, roll his shoulders back, cock his hips forward, and strut. He expected Dean to slip into a smirk that lit his expression, find some twist of hidden meaning in Castiel’s meager greeting, and lay into him with confident, brilliant, back talk. Castiel knew Dean’s act. He played the part of ingenu, always seeking a new target, always ready to seduce - and tonight, presumably what Dean needed was to impress a passing driver with his vulnerability, con his way into a ride back to Pontiac or on to some other town.

Now that Dean knew that the driver before him was no stranger to be taken in, Castiel expected Dean to be...Dean: cocksure and arrogant and vibrant.

The night stretched on, shadowed, silent, endless, between them.

Dean’s eyes grew wide, shimmering with liquid. His mouth opened, closed, downturned, and Castiel frowned as he tried to read Dean’s expression.

Sadness?
Gratefulness?
Fear?
Each was equally inconceivable, yet Castiel could think of no other interpretation.
“You came back,” whispered Dean.

This isn’t Dean.
“I thought...fuck, I thought I’d really blown it this time,” Dean continued. Hesitant, Dean reached toward the car, drew his hand back, warily watched Castiel. Unsure what Dean intended, Castiel watched impassively until Dean reached through the open window to grasp the metal lock pull.
...he’s...not sure he’s welcome in my vehicle?
Dean unlocked the door, eyes unwavering on Castiel.

Who is this? Where is Dean? What’s happened to him in the past couple hour? Scant time has passed, for him to be so changed. It’s not possible.
“Is, uh...is this okay, Cas?”
It was a genuine question.
And Castiel had no genuine reply to give, for he truly wasn’t sure.
“You gonna say, I dunno...anything?” Dean demanded, a trace of his usual confidence making his voice deep and brusque.

Who are you?
“I said hello,” Castiel said flatly. He dropped the steering wheel, hand creeping to his side where, in battle, his blade would be sheathed.
He couldn’t drive with his angel blade where it belonged; it was on the floor at the backseat. He could reach it in an emergency, but he couldn’t possibly retrieve it without revealing his intentions to Dean.
“Why’d you come back if you were gonna be an asshole?” grumbled Dean.
...there he is.
I shouldn’t have doubted.
With a slow inhale, a slow exhale, Castiel relaxed.

Even Dean can be vulnerable.
Of course Dean wasn’t quite himself.

Even Dean can be human.

Dean had been beaten, gravely injured, attacked. He and Castiel had engaged in vigorous sex. They had spent nearly two hours scrubbing the crime scene. The temperature had steadily dropped. And after Castiel had left, Dean had walked some distance, through the pain of his wounds, through the
frigid night. Such straits could take the bravado from the most arrogant of demons.

And Dean was...

Dean wasn’t …

“Look, I’m sorry.”

Astonished, Castiel jerked his head up and met Dean’s gaze. Dean looked...sad, and young, and heartbreakingly open and exposed. His shy, tentative smile prompted a new stream of blood to leak from one nostril, creeping around the curve of his lip, following the furrow of his laugh line, hitting the corner of his mouth and diffusing bright red over his pale lips.

This could be an act.

“I shouldn’t have jerked your chain.”

He’s proficient at manipulating me - he’s proved that tonight, convincing me that he believed me divine, then owning his knowledge of my vessel.

“I...I shouldn’t have come here at all.”

Dean’s tongue flicked out to lap at the blood pearling in his philtrum.

Castiel’s...Novak’s... no ! Castiel’s heart pounded thud, thud, thud , heavy in his chest. This was his vessel. He was not an intruder in this meat. He owned it, would not relinquish it, and he would consider it his own. No more excuses. No more blaming James Novak. These were his feelings, his physical responses, his hunger and fatigue, and he would own them as he owned each busy cell, each industrious mitochondrion.

And Castiel felt…

“I know...I mean...I don’t know shit,” Dean muttered, gaze fixed submissively on the empty passenger seat.

Deferential...excellent...finally showing me the respect I deserve...

...does that mean…?

“I don’t know if you’re Staff Sergeant Novak gone of the Goddamn deep end, or if you’re his psycho identical evil twin, or if you’re...I mean...there’s, uh, there’s no such thing as angels...I know that ...but…”

...he truly is coming to believe.

My God.

My Lord in Heaven.

Thank you.

“Dammit, talk to me, Cas - can I get in the fucking car or not?” Dean implored.

Castiel lunged across the bucket seat, seized Dean’s cheeks, dragged his head through the open car window, and pulled their faces together. Their noses bumped, their lips brushed, and the warm coppery flavor of Dean’s blood diffused across Castiel’s tongue.
He’d never kissed anyone.

He’d never seen the appeal.

He would never tire of kissing Dean, and he would never kiss any one else.

Dean’s lips were chapped, his chin prickly with stubble, his shock communicated by his stillness. Dean’s mouth was hot, yielding, welcoming. Pleasure seeped outward from where they communed; Castiel shifted, brought them together more forcefully, and teased at the crack of Dean’s lips with his tongue. With a sigh of hot, tangy breath, Dean opened to him, a soft, helpless, precious sound catching in his throat. Castiel drew that noise into himself, cherished it. This was Dean, not a deception, not an illusion. When Dean sought to deflect, he didn’t reveal vulnerability; he doubled down on his confident mask. Dean was allowing Castiel beneath his armor as he never had before - not in the church, not during the burial, not in Lawrence, not even when they’d had sex.

Dean tasted divine, but the true touch of the sublime was his vulnerability.

*Had I known he’d react by growing this open, this honest, this docile, I would have put him in his place months ago.*

*Yet...somehow his submission is sweeter for having been such a struggle to obtain.*

*And this kiss is delicious, satiating, splendid.*

With a pleased smile, Castiel drew back. Dean held his awkward position leaning into the car, eyes wide and guileless, lips yet parted. He looked dazed, lost, utterly lovely.

*All those scars...all that madness writ onto the walls of the Winchester home...underneath his armor, Dean is still the boy stolen from that car wreck, stolen from death, subjected to unspeakable torments - dragged down into hell. Somehow, he escaped that fate and forged his way forward. Somehow, through it all, he is still my lost, forsaken, forgotten angel.*

*And now...now he’s mine.*

“Get in the car, Dean.”

“Yeah…” Dean murmured vaguely. With a start and a blink, he leaned back out into the night, expression going familiarly veiled as though a mask lowered over his face, and he grumbled, “‘bout fuckin’ time. It’s cold as balls out here. What’re you playing at?” He jerked the car door open.

“While I recognize the flippancy with which you treat much of life,” said Castiel as Dean settled into the passenger seat, “I assure you that I do not consider any aspect of our relationship akin to a game.”

“Pity,” Dean smirked. “But that explains why it hasn’t been any fun.”

“Really?” Castiel quirked an eyebrow at him. “It hasn’t been any fun whatsoever?”

Dean leered.

Castiel stared.

Dean chuckled.
Castiel stared.

Dean looked away, cheeks flushed, and backhanded the blood from his chin.

*There he is - there’s my peek beneath the mask.*

And Castiel smiled.

*I must be careful. I could grow dangerously fond of this brother-in-arms.*

“Drive the fuckin’ car, Castiel.”

*I mustn’t be careful. I must embrace, protect, and revere him.*

“Yes, Dean.”

*I must…*

Castiel put the car in gear and started on toward the landfill.

...*I do?…*

“The other way, asshole,” Dean snapped.

...*love him.*

“Told you before, I ain’t leavin’ *nowhere* without my stuff. I got a motel room on the outskirts of town. Drive your angel mobile on over there, I’ll pack up, then we can figure out where we’re going.

“Of course, Dean.” *He wants to go with me. He referred to me as angel.* “Direct me which way to go. I await your command.”

*Order me to the ends of the earth. I will follow you, as I follow my Lord, for you are akin unto Him in your divinity.*

“Hang a uey, and when we get to the light like six miles away, turn left. Motel 8. You can’t miss it.”

*You are my comrade, my fellow lost soul, my brethren, my squadmate, my Garrison on this cold, lonely planet.*

“As you say, Dean.”

*And I…*

“Dude. Every time I think I get a bead on what kinda whack job you are, you find some new form of nutso. What is up with this whole android ‘yes, sir,’ ‘no, sir’ thing.”

...*I am…*

“My apologies, Dean,” Castiel glanced over to offer Dean a smile as he put the car in reverse and looked out the back window for oncoming traffic. “I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable with my insanity. In the future, I will work to confine my ‘whack job-ness’ to forms with which you are more comfortable. Is that acceptable?”
...I am Dean’s angel.

“Yeah, that’s amply fricken acceptable. And for fuck’s sake, don’t take your hands off the wheel to make air quotes!”

God’s will be done.

“I am excellent driver, Dean.”

Dean’s will be done.

“Yeah, right - you got insurance? How the fuck do you get your driver’s license? Do you even have a fricken social security number? I’m willing to be dollars to donuts you ain’t got a birth certificate…”

And…and my will be done.

“I do not concern myself with such worldly things.”

And my will is to be here, on this world, in this town, in this car. With Dean.

“Next time, I’m driving.”

Next time.

“Alright, Dean.”

I love the sound of that.
Part 4: Friday, April 6th

Chapter Notes

Oh god sorry this chapter took forever for me to post. On the plus side...it's stupidly long...none of these boys knows how to approach any fricken topic of conversation directly or succinctly, sigh.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The glowing Motel 8 sign mounted above the street was the only light among the long, low, dark commercial plots surrounding the highway exit. Even the reception office appeared closed as Castiel drove by. Dean directed Castiel to the far back corner of the motel parking lot, to a black room which would have had a view of the embankment leading up to the Route 55 exit ramp if the curtains weren’t drawn. The town might have been abandoned, it was so quiet when the motor shut off. Dean climbed from the passenger seat, waving at Castiel to stay put; Castiel rolled his eyes and followed, pressure in his bladder a reminder of the necessities of embracing his vessel as his own.

To claim James Novak as myself, I must even accept, nay, welcome, such human requirements as urination and defecation.

Fumbling in his pocket, Dean retrieved his key card; the lock opened with a click, and Dean pushed the motel room door open.

“Wait here,” Dean ordered. “I’ll just be a couple minutes.”

“May I use the restr--”

“Fuck,” muttered Dean, stopping in the doorway so abruptly that Castiel barely stopped short of colliding with him. A soft click, click, click suggested a switch being flipped, but nothing happened. “Just fricken stay put, okay, Cas? I gotta…” The room was dark as pitch, black enough to make the Pontiac night without seem bright. Dean stumbled forward, invisible but audible as his boots stomped and he grumbled. The only light was the aura that spread pale from the door and reflected obsidian off a mirror mounted on the opposite end of the small room, showing the gray shadows of the outside, the bright LEDs mounted on passing trucks, and Castiel’s black silhouette reflected.

A lamp flashed on.

Brightness seared Castiel’s vision.

“Fucking he --”

“Hello, Dean.”

Castiel dodged to the outside, blinking to clear his sight as he using the flimsy motel wall to shield him should the ambushing party open fire. Amorphous blobs of color made the night sinister, and he staggered toward the outline of his car to retrieve his angel blade.

Have to arm myself. Have to defend Dean. Have to.
“Welcome home,” said with a twist to the deep voice that suggested the man speaking knew precisely how painful a concept home must be for Dean. “I’m Special Agent Victor Henriksen.”

*Special Agent...NSA? CIA? Has to be CIA...*

“And I’m leaving,” snapped Dean

...no. I’m in the United States. No CIA operations on native soil. Must be...

“Maybe don’t.” Henriksen was gruff, flippant yet no-nonsense. “We can talk here, or we can talk with you in maximum security solitary confinement complete with straight jacket, or we can talk with you chained to a hospital bed while some doc treats your gunshot wounds. It’s all the same to me.”

... can’t be FBI. No FBI Agent would say something like that.

The dazzled spots faded from Castiel’s vision and he hesitated on the sidewalk. The presence of the authorities meant trouble. Dean was in danger. Castiel could retrieve his sword, storm the room, and deal with the threat. Henriksen must know there was a second man present, but he couldn’t anticipate Castiel’s sword to his chest.

“You can’t shoot me, I ain’t resisting arrest.”

If Castiel killed a Federal agent...

“For you? I can make the mother of all exceptions.” Each word was bit out, vicious and angry. “I could riddle you with holes and no one would say ‘boo.’ Not a ‘boo, hoo, hoo’ to be heard. We’ve got a whole different rule book when dealing with serial killers, Dean. But, if I shoot you, that means paperwork, and it’ll be hours or days before we can talk. If it were up to me? We’d chat now. You and me. Mano-a-mano. But you better sit your ass down and stop trying to get that knife outta your boot. Filling out forms? A mild inconvenience to me. The lead I’ll pump into your chest? Extremely satisfying.”

...if Agent Henrisken died, the FBI would come after Dean and Castiel with all the just rage of the United States Government.

They’d be more than entitled to do so. As unconventional, as unprofessional, as Henriksen sounded, he was doing his job. Dean was a murderer. Further, Castiel knew no evil of Henriksen. If Castiel impaled him, Castiel would deserve the retribution that would seek him out, as surely as he deserved the retribution to be exacted on his grace when his mission upon Earth was finally concluded.

...but, the way he’s talking...what if Henriksen is possessed? What better vessel for a demon than one vested with the authority of the US Government?

“So...wait...did you seriously stage this whole motel confrontation for dramatic effect?” Dean laughed, a tense, tight sound that set Castiel’s hackles up. *Dean believes himself in danger. I must act.* “That is bad ass, dude! You are my kind of mother fucker.”

*I do not kill the righteous, no matter how misguided they are. If he’s among the righteous...*

“Don’t you talk about my mama like that.” Henriksen sounded like a predator. “Your friend might as well get his ass in here too.” Henriksen sounded like Dean. “It’s his lucky day. You wanna tell him about your plans for the evening, or should I?”
He thinks I am one of Dean’s intended victims.

There was a squeal of metal - someone settling on a poorly made chair, or an inexpensive bed, perhaps - and Dean said, “And you’re gonna ruin my fun? That poor loser I picked up ain’t got nothing to do with this. He should just fuck right off.” I must look on him. “Ya hear me out there?” If I perceive a demonic visage, I will act. “Get the fuck outta here.” I will defend Dean. “Neither of us is getting laid tonight.” And if I don’t…if Henriksen isn’t evil… “Unless you wanna go, Vic…”

Castiel sidestepped into the doorway, pushing the door open wide. Within, a man leaned with faux-casualness against the wall which presumably divided the bedroom from the bathroom, light gleaming off his bald pate. His cheeks were clean-shaven save for a neatly trimmed goatee, and his dark eyes glittered with strength.

Brown eyes, not black.

Agent Henriksen was not a demon.

“Howdy, buddy,” said Henriksen with a wide grin. “Welcome to the party.”

Thank the Heavens I didn’t attack. So long as he be merely a mortal man, I’m sure we can bring him to understand that we are not his enemies.

“Seriously, Cas?” Dean grumbled. “Why the fuck didn’t you get in your car and drive the hell out of this shitstorm?” He was flopped on one of the two twin beds clogging the small room, a picture of nonchalance, subtly vibrating with suppressed energy. His nose was bleeding again. “You’ve got, like, zero fucking survival instinct.”

Castiel frowned. “I’m divine,” he said, closing the door behind himself. “I have no need for a survival instinct. If this vessel becomes too severely damaged, I will evacuate and seek another suitable carrier.”

Henriksen blinked at him.

“Vic - I can call you Vic, right? - meet Cas,” grinned Dean. “He’s an angel.”

“Ooooh,” said Henriksen, nodding sly consideration. “Angel. Right.” Condescension and disbelief twisted his lips as he turned his hard gaze on Castiel. “Have a seat, angel, and keep your mouth shut.”

Scowling, Castiel gathered himself and stared down the agent. “If you hurt Dean, I will kill you.”

Dean’s jaw dropped.

“Now I understand.” Henriksen snapped his fingers and turned a flat grin toward Dean. “Trenchcoat is your fanclub. And accomplice, perhaps? Should have expected that; itsy bitsy guy like you, Dean?” A shrug barely shifted the starched collar of his immaculate dress shirt, tugged an inch of the tie tucked into his suit-jacket free. “Couldn’t’a done so much harm just by your lonesome.”

“Dean is at least two inches taller than I, and I’d estimate outweighs me by between five to ten pounds,” Castiel bristled. “Further, Dean is an extremely accomplished…” What is Dean? He’s not an angel - not yet, not fully - and he’s not pursuing demons per se. He’s not a killer. He’s a…a…

“Dean is a highly proficient justiciar.”

“Justiciar,” Henriksen mimicked, rolling his eyes. “You mean his whole ‘lure hapless dudes to
the middle of nowhere so he can rape and murder them’ schtick?”

“Dean is not a rapist, nor a murderer!” snarled Castiel, taking an angry step forward.

This is Agent Henriksen. He is not a demon. He is not to be harmed.

Unless he hurts Dean?

If he injures Dean in the mistaken belief that Dean is a monster, am I justified in exacting revenge?

Is an error from a misguided but well-meaning mortal punishable by bodily harm? By death?

“You do like ‘um crazy,” marveled Henriksen, shaking his head and smirking as he turned back to Dean.

Lacking divine guidance, am I the entity to decide such things?

“Aw, don’t take him seriously,” Dean chuckled. “Cas is harmless. Like a big feathery puppy disguised as whatever the fuck that tie is.”

Grimacing, Castiel adjusted his perfectly serviceable, adequate tie. Novak had nice ties, damn it. Castiel liked his tie. “I am not --”

“Cas. is. Harmless.” Dean pinned Castiel with a merciless stare.

Dean does not command me - does not control me - does not dictate my nature. I will show him the error of his ways, remind him of the respect I am owed...

A spike of heat shot from Castiel’s chest, down his navel.

“Harmless,” Henriksen scoffed. “Right.”

...but perhaps not now.

“And if he can’t sit his harmless ass down and shut up, he’s gonna have to leave,” said Dean sternly, gesturing at a flimsy chair tucked under a desk beside the room’s old, bulky television.

Scowl deepening, furrowing his brow, Castiel obeyed, rolling the chair out, spinning it, and sitting heavily. It bobbed under his weight, support pillar squealing. Castiel’s true form was as tall as a skyscraper, as immense as a behemoth, as diffuse as the stratosphere, trapped in Novak’s puny meat, yet he’d never felt larger nor more awkward than he did sitting in that tiny swivel office chair. His trench coat draped over the sides, brushing the floor, and he adjusted himself, adjusted, adjusted, trying to find a comfortable position, the springs squeaking with every movement, until he finally gave up, heels on the ground, elbows on his knees, back hunched, sides of his posterior hanging over the chair seat on both sides.

Disgruntled, he looked up.

Dean and Henriksen were watching him, Dean with an astounded, brilliant-bright smile, Henriksen agog.

“Can I help you?” asked Castiel, glaring at each in turn.

“Pretty sure you’re past help,” Henriksen said.
“Same hat!” Dean laughed. Henriksen jerked around to stare at him.

“None of us are wearing--”

“I was thinkin’ the exact same thing as Secret Agent Man,” clarified Dean. “Owes me a beer for that jinx. Anyone who’d be a fan of mine? Woo-whee, fricken light years too far gone to be saved. Just like me.”

“Right, right.” Henriksen’s eyes narrowed and he glanced between Dean and Castiel. “You and me, we’ll have a chat later,” he directed toward Castiel.

“I assure you, we will not.”

“We will,” vowed Henriksen, returning his gaze to Dean. “In the meantime…”

“Let’s get down to business to defeat the Huns?” Dean sang.

...that recalls a movie that Claire enjoyed...but while I am finally settling, comfortable, in Novak’s skin, I refuse to embrace his tainted, blood-stained memories. Those are his.

“Always the joker,” Henriksen said.

It is difficult enough to live with my own memories of the eras of man.

Henriksen stepped away from the wall, skirted Castiel, and took a seat on the bed. His smile was lifeless as he watched Dean warily. “Always deflecting. All that sadistic psychosis wrapped up in such a pretty package.”

“Aww...you think I’m pretty?”

“Go screw yourself, that’s what I think,” Henriksen retorted.

“I ain’t gotta fly solo, that’s why I keep Cas around.”

“Always so quick on the uptake,” chuckled Henriksen. “Always ready to turn things around. Best defense is a good offense, right, Dean?”

“Look, you gonna tell me what the fuck you’re on about any time this century?” Dean yawned. “’Cause it’s late, and I’m tired, and no offense...full offense...you’re boring as fuck. I’ve ganked assholes for wasting less of my time than you’re burning through.”

“You have? Is that a confession? Sure you don’t want a lawyer?” Henriksen reached toward a pocket; Castiel half-rose from his chair, grabbing for the weapon he’d foolishly left in the car, before Henriksen’s hand came back into sight bearing a pen and a pad. Henriksen smirked at him. “Whoa, Nelly. Sit. Stay. The grown ups are talking.”

“I am more ancient than you can possibly fathom, and my name isn’t Nelly, it’s--”

“We know, we know.” Dean glared and Castiel snapped his mouth shut. “Cas. Angel. Old as balls. Hung like Nelly’s stallion. Man, you’re annoying. Remind me - why haven’t I killed you yet?”

“You tried,” Castiel grumbled. Dean was frustrating. Henriksen was frustrating. “You stabbed me in the leg.”

This entire conversation was extremely frustrating.
“Besides.” The empty mask of Dean’s jocularity subsumed the hard look he’d directed at Castiel, and he turned a broad, fake grin toward Henriksen. “I got a lawyer.” He made a vague gesture in Castiel’s direction.

“While I appreciate your confidence in me, I have only minimal experience before the Heavenly Tribunal,” said Castiel. “And my time among the Doge’s advisory counts for naught. In the United States, I’ve earned neither my Juris Doctor nor passed the BAR in any jurisdiction, and I--”

“Shut up ,” Henriksen growled. 

Yes, Cassie boy, shut your oh-so-supposedly divine pie hole.

“Aw, give Cas a chance, Vic. He grows on ya. Like a fungus. Or a scar.”

Novak...be quiet.

“Dean!”

We should both be quiet.

“You’d know about scars, wouldn’t you?” said Henriksen thoughtfully. “And just to venture a guess, I don’t think your lawyer can help you out of this jam.”

“...mmm, jam…”

“I’ve already explained, I’m not a law--”

“Baby bro can’t - or won’t? - bail you out,” Henriksen said with a knowing smile. Dean’s expression went deadly distant. “There you are.”

“Don’t know what the fuck you’re talking ‘bout.” Every word was drawled, dangerous, as Dean picked at a nail with false idleness, frightening alertness. “You don’t--”

“Save your breath,” snapped Henriksen. “I know about the string of bodies you’ve left so publicly, taunting, just aching to be found, from Albuquerque to Zanesville. I know about your uncanny knack for…” He gestured, extending his fingers, snatching them back to his side. “… whoosh , right outta trouble. I know about the fire that killed your mom, and the accident that did for dear old dad. I know you faked your death. And I know about your brother.”

“You don’t know fuck all ‘bout my brother,” said Dean. “And you ain’t got shit on me, either.”

“Wanna bet your life on that?” Henriksen smiled coldly. “When the U.S. Government is done with you, you’ll wish you’d never been born.”

“Too late,” Dean snapped back. “And bullshit.”

“Don’t test--”

“Nope, I let you monologue. Time for you to shut up and listen,” said Dean. “You, here, now, alone? You ain’t got shit . Oh, you have suspicions, and you’re damn sure those suspicions are right, but you don’t have a lick of evidence. If you did, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

“Believe whatever you want.” Despite the bold words, some of Henriksen’s bravado faded. Castiel watched him, warily, ready for anything.
Like Dean, he is not to be trusted, not to be taken for granted.


They’re both dangerous.

I must be ready for anything.

“One,” Dean lifted a finger, “whatever you got ain’t enough to keep me in a holding cell for more than twenty-four hours. Two,” another finger, “even if you did have enough to hold me, you’d never take the chance. You know I’m not a rapist, and unless you’re fucktons dumber than you look - which’d be hard, cause I’m already not sure how you get your shoes on the right - correct - feet in the morning - you know I ain’t worth the trouble of jailing, bodies or no bodies. Three,” another finger, “you don’t know shit about my brother, not a damn fucking thing; you’ve heard just enough whispers to wonder, and worry, and chew those manscaped fingernails down to the quick. Four,” another finger, “you’ve figured out I’m a harmless fluffy bunny compared to him. Five,” his thumb, “your higher ups wouldn’t sanction an operation cooperating with me. So, six…fuck, I’m outta fingers.” Dean grinned, lifted both hands, interlaced his fingers, and slipped them under his head to prop him up. “You need me.”

“Are you deluding yourself that you have leverage?” said Henriksen, incredulous.

“Are you deluding yourself that you got jackshit without me?” Dean countered.

“You will never know how much I got unless you stow that attitude,” Henriksen recommended. “Look, come with me, nice and quiet and well-behaved, and spill your guts about Heyerdahl, Lehne, and Sammy boy, and maybe your ass can avoid jail time for the twenty-some-odd cases we’ve linked to you so far. Or, you play hard to get, and you can go to prom all on your lonesome. Your call.”

...so when I wondered why no one else had noticed the patterns in Lawrence...

“Only twenty cases?” Dean laughed. “Wow, you really don’t know shit. And didn’t you do the math? I was dead when prom happened.”

...someone did notice...

“Look pretty alive to me.”

...but unlike me, Henriksen has to worry about US mandates.

“Naw. Like I said - you don’t know shit. Dean Winchester died in that fucking car. Ava saw to that.”

He’s concerned with warrants and subpeonas and just cause and illegal search and seizure.

“Ava?”

He can’t act without government sanction.

Dean shook his head, eyes rolled toward the low, stuccoed ceiling. “Don’t know half so much as you think you do.”

Because of my oath, I can’t act without Dean’s blessing

“And your brother - he die in the car accident, too?”
and so, it comes down to Dean, to repair what Heyerdahl and his accomplices have broken.

“Sam? No, not him.” Dean’s smile was a rictus. “Never him. Can’t kill the devil.”

But despite our conversation, so many months ago, when he vowed to act...

“Haven’t met anything that doesn’t die with enough lead in their chest.” Henriksen’s smile was equally grin.

I have trouble believing Dean will ever move against Sam Winchester.

“Actually, I--” Both men turned flat stares on Castiel and he sighed. “Nevermind. I’ll ‘shut up.’”

“You do that,” Henriksen and Dean snapped simultaneously, but this time, there was no joking about donning similar headgear. Dean’s expression remained a mask, a rictus, a parody of himself. “Planning to kill my brother, Vic? ‘Cause if so, we’re done here. You’re done here.”

“I’ll kill him if I have to,” admitted Henriksen, reluctant, as if the confession pained him. “Just as I’ll kill you, and your girl Friday here, if I have to. But I’d rather not. See, I’ve heard you Winchester boys are...malleable. Amenable. Usable, if you will. Heyerdahl? Lehne? Nothing I can legall do will ever compel them to talk. They’re gone. If anyone is the devil gone down to Georgia with his backup band in this scenario, it’s Heyerdahl with his lackies. But Sam? If I approach him just right? Call me a dreamer but I’m hoping he’ll spill the beans on where every single stolen girl and boy has gone. Maybe we can finally get some of this kids home.”

So Henriksen does know something.

“Yeah? And how you planning to approach him ‘just right?’” Dean turned the echoed words mocking.

And Dean isn’t even slightly surprised, so he knew too.

“I’m not - I won’t,” Henriksen grinned and met Dean’s eyes. “You will.”

Of course Dean knew.

“The fuck you say,” snorted Dean

Dean is one of those stolen boys - so is Sam, I believe, though instead of being sold, Sam was groomed and kept - they both were groomed and retained, until Dean somehow escaped.

“Clean slate,” Henriksen said, the gruff Federal Agent equivalent of weedling. “Fresh start. A get out of jail free card for my least favorite serial killer. And all I ask in exchange…”

During a lifetime of criminal activity starting long before Dean was born and continuing to this day, what made Dean different in Heyerdahl and Lehne eyes?

“Is Sam.”

What made Sam different?

“Is charming, urbain, attractive Sam Winchester, handed in to the authorities on a silver platter.”

I may yet get to learn the answer to that.

“You seen how tall he is? Don’t think I can find a silver platter big enough.” Something eased in
Dean’s expression; he was back to joking, back to shrugging off Henriksen’s taunts.

*He’s made a decision.*

“I’ll accept stainless steel handcuffs in lieu.”

*He’s going to help.*

“You’ll *accept* whatever the fuck I feel like giving you.”

*I’m so proud of him.*

“Or I can still arrest you. Or shoot you.”

*I want to help too.*

“‘Course you will. Just keep telling yourself that.”

*But I should probably continue to bide my time, wait and watch.*

“Is that a no?”

*As it concerns Sam Winchester, I will not intervene without Dean’s express say so.*

“It’s not a yes.”

*My word is my bond, immaculate, untouchable, perfect.*

“Pity,” said Henriksen, voice, expression, body language, all pitiless.

“...unless Dean is in danger.”

Grasping at his belt, Henriksen started to rise. Castiel was on his feet and between the two beds in an instant despite an inconvenient swivel by the crappy chair. Hands raised, legs squared in a fighting stance, Castiel’s eyes narrowed as he called to mind the wrestling techniques of Heaven, the boxing of Novak’s youth, the kanas and jitsus he’d learned in the MCMAP. Henriksen’s smile never relaxed, but Castiel could swear he saw the human calculating assessing, preparing.

“Call your mutt to heel, Winchester,” Henriksen demanded, talking *around* Castiel.

“What about any of our interactions this evening...morning?...look, what about anything that’s happened in the last hour makes you think Cas’ll do as I say?” Dean said, untroubled, nonchalant, foolishly flippant

“I am not a dog.” Castiel’s voice was dead, flat, emotionless, and Henriksen finally looked at him, focused on him. “I am not ‘his girl Friday.’” Henriksen moved with faux casualness, wary, prepared - he was *finally* taking Castiel seriously. “I am not a child.” Too little, too late - the Agent couldn’t possibly be adequately prepared enough for the peril he was in, for the threat Castiel represented. “I am not your buddy.” Castiel had been a warrior for millenia. “I am not his mount.” Novak had been a warrior for the thirty one years before his possession. “I am not his *fanclub.*” Whatever training Henriksen had, however competent he believed himself, Castiel knew a dozen ways to kill him, even without his angel blade. “I am Castiel, angel of the Lord. And you *will* stand down.”

“Angel of the Lord, huh,” murmured Henriksen, shaking his head as if supremely indifferent to the danger he was in. “You ready to go to Federal ‘pound me in the ass” Prison because you assaulted
a United States Federal Agent, angel?”

Henriksen has no faith. I will teach him, as I’ve taught Dean.

“An Office Space reference?” chimed in Dean, as light-hearted as ever. And he claimed Castiel had no survival instinct? “On top of that beautiful Die Hard reference that Captain Dull-ass Oblivious here missed earlier? Man, you’re awesome.”

Is this...a flirtation?

“I didn’t think you’d noticed,” Henriksen said...coyly?

Between Dean and the Federal Agent?

“Cas isn’t so hip to pop culture - apparently being an immortal angel precludes having time to watch a fricken movie, God but eternity sounds fricken boring - but me? How could I miss those gems? Vic...I like you.”

I have spent centuries traveling among mankind, seen what I believed to be every iteration, every variation, every possible nuance of human behavior.

“I’m flattered.”

Dean is as incomprehensible as a cipher, as inscrutable as Solomon, as devious as Iago, as unnavigable as the Minotaur's Labyrinth, as changing as Cleopatra in her whims.

“You should be. I don’t like anyone.”

“...Dean…”

‘cept Cas. Believe it or not, I actually do kinda...tolerate...feathers.”

“I find your frequent reference to my wings baffling, considering you have never beheld them.”

“...whoa, hold on, is beholdin’ an option? Cause that I gotta see…”

“Excuse me?” interjected Henriksen. “You two can go back to whatever the fuck you were up to after I’m gone. I’ve got business to take care of. So, Cas or whatever the fuck your actual name is, if you’d care to, I don’t know, stand the hell down?”

“Oh.” Castiel smiled. He...rather liked Henriksen as well, come to think of it. He is so very much like Dean. I enjoy watching their interactions. They understand each other, as I can never truly understand any transient creature dwelling in my Lord’s most beautiful creation. “My apologies. You do not intend to injure or incarcerate Dean?”

Dean is my Lord’s most beautiful creation.

“Don’t know,” said Henriksen, leaning to his left to look again at Dean around Castiel’s shoulder. “That’s up to him. What’s the game plan, Dean?”

“Sleep. Maybe some more sex with our favorite angel jackass. Breakfast at the diner across the street. Then...maybe we can talk.”

Relaxing his stance, Castiel stepped aside, shifting down the narrow aisle between the two beds. Henriksen remained on his feet, harsh look directed down at Dean in all his sprawling, apparently nonchalant indifference.
“Askin’ for a lot of leeway there…I’m just a smidge reluctant to let you out of my sight.”

“Don’t blame you - I’m a might-y fine sight,” Dean winked. “But you came to me for help, so consider me Quarterback for this Superbowl. And I have a condition.”

“I set the rules here.”

“ ‘Course you do, big boy,” Dean grinned. “You’re a big bad dom of a man, but your BDSM etiquette is shit. Don’t you know the sub sets the boundaries and makes the rules? And the way you’re not interrupting to ask me what the fuck I’m on about makes me think you know exactly what I mean, and that’s...ooo, that is damn hot.” He winked and leered. Maybe we shouldn’t waste the handcuffs on Sammy, if you know what I mean.”

“I’m just waiting to hear the point behind all the prattle,” grumbled Henriksen half-heartedly.

“Pssh, can’t fool me, I know you’re staring at the package.” Dean uncurled one arm from behind his head, reached down, and adjusted his penis through his jeans. In the dim light of the lamp, black spots against the dark fabric were the only evidence of the violence of Dean’s evening. Castiel tore his own gaze from Dean’s crotch long enough to establish that Henriksen was, in fact, also staring.

His expression and Roger’s earlier are disturbingly akin.

“What’s. Your. Point.”

Henriksen is extremely fortunate that I’ve not got my angel blade on me.

“Shoot me if you want,” Dean shrugged. “Either it’ll hurt less than half the shit Alastair carved into me - love me some sweet, tender foreplay - or I’ll be dead, and either way, I can’t say I give a shit. And we both know - send me to prison and one of Alastair’s demon buddies will gank me within days. They know better’n you what secrets I could tell and they won’t take any chances.”

“Alastair?”

“You don’t even know that much, and you think you can bring them down? Vic, you are in way over your head.”

“Alastair is Mr. A. Heyerdahl’s pseudonym,” Castiel supplied.

“Cas, man, quit stealin’ my thunder,” complained Dean.


“ That’s where you took that one? You’re usually spot on but...that was a reach.”

Castiel shrugged. “I apologize that I cannot perfectly riposte every time. It’s been a long day.”

“You talk and act like this on purpose ?” Henriksen demanded. “Like, intentionally take us seriously? Why ?”

“Unlike yourself and Dean, I prefer to approach people as though they are speaking literally and truthfully, and reply in kind.”

“Ignore him,” Dean suggested. “He totally lies - caught him a bunch of times - and he fricken revels in using that ‘taking things literally’ bullcrap to yank my chain.”
“Unlike yourself,” said Castiel with a smile. “You prefer to treat every attempt at conversation as an opening for a misdirecting attempt at jocularity, or as an opportunity to reference to obscure media as though such memetic content is a language we share.”

“Why do I hang out with someone who can’t appreciate my references?” Dean surged to a seated position and threw his hands up in mock despair. “‘Obscure’ my ass! You heathen!”

“No, your ass is quite clear, and shapely, especially in those jeans. And, as you are so fond of harping on, I am the precise opposite of a heathen, as are you.”

“I’m beginning to see why you like him,” Henriksen said as if the admission was painful.

Dean pinned Castiel with a stern look. “Only one who strums a harp ‘round here is you, Cas. I’m no angel.” He turned and pointed at Henriksen. “And don’t get any ideas, he’s my groupie, not yours.”

“I’m not a--”

“One condition,” Dean interrupted, look growing inscrutable. “Agree to it, or I’m out, Vic.”

“I’m offering full immunity in exchange for information. The deal isn’t getting any sweeter than that. When--”

“You do whatever the fuck you want to Alastair and Azazel,” said Dean. “I guarantee, whatever you come up with, they got it coming literally a hundred - a thousand - times over. They’re...prolific. You barely know the tip of this fucking whale of an iceberg.”

“Terrible mixed metaphor. Your fatigue is showing.”

“But if you, or any of your other Harvard FBI task force puppies harm one hair on Sam’s head, I am out, and I will hunt each and every one of you fuckers down and you use every single thing Alastair ever taught me to make sure each of you sons of bitches regrets the day you were born.”

“Damn, sexist much? Some of my agent puppies are women, Dean.”

“Every. Single. One. of you sons and daughters of bitches will beg me for mercy if Sam bleeds one single fucking drop,” said Dean, all smiles, all aplomb. “And, spoilers? I am merciless.”

“I’ve noticed. Your handiwork speaks for itself. Which is why I’m agreeing to nothing. No conditions.” Henriksen matched Dean in presenting steel will cloaked in the thinnest layer of fine velvet.

“You ain’t noticed jack shit about me. You think I’m a rapist for fuck’s sake - if I needed proof you suck at your job, bam, there it is. You got things totally ass backwards, ’bout me, ’bout a lot of things. You need me. And I don’t need you. So either Sam comes out unscathed, or I’m outie. Capiche?”

“But--”

“My way or the highway, Vicki.”

“No.”

“Fine.” With a languid stretch, Dean rolled to his feet beside the bed. “Be seein’ ya.” He ambled toward the door, laid a hand on the knob, stopped and rolled his shoulders. “You comin’, Cas?” He
yawned, projecting every sign of indifference, but his shadowed gaze was alert, awake, as dangerous and clever as ever.

...my Lord, he is brilliant, skilled, a majestic tactician.

“Of course, Dean. I always come when you call.”

Watching him work is like unto serving with my brethren on so many forgotten fields of battle.

Henriksen stood, glowering, eyes narrowed with anger.

“Do ya, now?” Dean leered. “That is an interesting proposition. Think we’re gonna have to test that. Over and over. For science.”

Following Dean’s example, Castiel took slow steps across the short distance separating him from the door. “For our activities to be suitable for scientific analysis, we’d have to propose a testable hypothesis and keep detailed records. Perhaps we should arrange to take video for subsequent review.”

“Whoa, gettin’ kinky on me now,” Dean oozed easy sexuality. Castiel had the wild urge to spank him into obedience and rectitude. “I like it.”

“I’m fairly sure literally every aspect of our earlier encounter qualified as ‘kinky,’” said Castiel. “But my point is, approaching our coitus as an experimental endeavor sounds like a great deal of unnecessary work.”

...it feels good to simply...accept this, to allow this, to discuss further coitus as something we will do, as though our futures could ever truly be assured.

Dean laughed. “Amen, Cas.”

Why did I resist his allure so hard, for so long?

“That makes no sense.”

Because I wasn’t ready before.

Pulling the door open, Dean side-eyed Castiel over his shoulder. “Dude, I’m agreeing with you.”

Even when I believed myself prepared to allow Dean into my life, to allow Dean into my person, such as it is, I wasn’t truly.

“Amen means ‘so be it,’” Castiel explained, stepping toward the darkness beyond the open door. “Consider, in context, how inappropriate your word selection was.”

Now, I am ready, and he fits into my life as neatly and perfectly as if there were space in my being designed for him to socket into - as if his soul is the key to a lock I didn’t know I carried within my grace.

“You boys ain’t fooling anybody,” Henriksen called from his position by the bed. “I’d say, ‘don’t let the door hit your ass on the way out,’ but let’s be real: you need me.”

“Yeah, ‘bout that--”

“And, I hate to admit it, you’re not wrong,” Henriksen said. Dean turned to look past Castiel, and Castiel followed suit. Henriksen remained where he’d stood, impassive, at ease, an impressive
picture of self-control. “I do need you.” I wonder if he’s an angel as well. “These kind of operations are unpredictable enough that I can’t promise anything, but I can say - we’ll do our best. Anything I can do to protect Sam, I’ll do. If he gets hurt anyway...won’t be because I didn’t try to keep his delicate skin smooth as a baby’s bottom.”

“Not good enough.”

“It’ll have to be good enough, ’cause it’s the best I’ve got.” Henriksen shrugged. “Ain’t no promises for safety while we infiltrate Heyerdahl’s organization - too many variables, too many people outside my control, too many unexpected situations that can’t be planned for. Ain’t no promises for safety behind bars - especially if he’s convicted of selling teenagers into sex trafficking, a lot of folks in prison don’t look kindly on people who hurt kids, or at least they’re happy to have an easy target that the guards don’t give a shit about protecting. But I’ll do my best for him, and for you - full immunity for your crimes to date if you help bring Heyerdahl’s organization down, and as a free bonus prize, I’ll go ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ on your buddy here.”

“That policy was heinous,” Castiel scowled, “and inapplicable in this instance.”

“What, ’cause you straight as an arrow?” asked Henriksen with a knowing smirk.

“Because human definitions of gender and sexuality do not apply to me,” clarified Castiel.

“Sorry, forgot, angel,” Henriksen said sagely. “Definitely counts as ‘queer’ in every sense of the word.”

“Actually--”

“Point is - pretty sure you got a rap sheet as long as Dean’s. As a special bonus thank you for playing softball with me and my boys, I won’t try to figure out who you actually are, Cas.”

“I’m unfamiliar with the rules of any mortal sports, but I’m willing to learn. Alternatively, there are several team sports that angels are partial to. Most require wings, but I’m sure--”

“Shut up,” Henriksen suggested.

“But--”

“No, seriously, shut up, or I’ll rescind the offer.”

“As if the threat of earthly consequences for my deeds concerns me,” Castiel grumbled.

“What, angels get a free pass, straight up to Heaven?” Henriksen scoffed.

“Absolutely not. As Dean and I have discussed more than once, I am assuredly Hellbound. Compared with eternal damnation, how can any threat you’d levy compare?”

Quirking an eyebrow, Henriksen looked between Dean and Castiel. “Think I’m starting to see why you two get along.”

“Congratulations,” Castiel offered flatly.

Henriksen and Dean exchanged a look and chuckled, a lovely symphony.

I can’t believe I thought Agent Henriksen a demon.

“So, deal or no deal?” asked Henriksen.
“Gee, dunno, Howie,” Dean said.

“His name is Victor Henriksen.”

“What is it with you and nicknames, Cas?” Dean shook his head. “Vic, my man, you make a pretty good case - but what if there’s something better behind door number 2?”

Henriksen smiled, white teeth gleaming in the faint light. “Sweetheart, there is no door number 2.”

Dean’s eyes narrowed, pensive, weighing. A cold wind gusted through the door, stirring Dean’s hair, causing Castiel’s trench coat to flap. The whoosh of cars and trucks rushing down the interstate was loud, headlights reflecting off the enamel paint of the open door.

“Deal,” Dean said at length. “But one more condition. Only Cas gets to call me sweetheart.”

“Dean, I never would--” “Deal.”

“Now get the fuck out of my room,” Dean grumbled, gesturing Henriksen exit. “This physique don’t preserve itself. I need my beauty rest.”

“No amount of sleep cures fugly, Dean,” said Henriksen, but he was in motion, walking toward the door, arms swinging with deceptive casualness. He stopped before Dean, staring him in the eye. “I want both of you in my office first thing in the morning, or the deal is off.”

“As long as I don’t have to do that ‘spitting on my palm and shaking to seal the deal’ thing,” Dean said. “Cause dude. Germs.”

“9 AM,” Henriksen said, “Sharp.”


And he slammed the door so soon after Henriksen stepping out that the Agent yelped as it hit his posterior.

“Well,” murmured Castiel. “That was interesting.”

Castiel expected Dean to smirk and agree. He expected Dean to laugh and shrug and offer a witty reply, naw, that was boring as fuck, Castiel could imagine Dean saying.

He expected literally anything other than for Dean to heave a world-weary sigh, shoulders slumping, bang his head against the door and mutter, “Fuck.”

Considering his behavior earlier this evening and now...I have got to stop thinking I have the least aptitude for predicting, anticipating, or being in anyway prepared for Dean’s response to any situation.

“Dean?” Castiel reached toward him, hesitant. The real Dean had been replaced by a mirage, an illusion, a doppelganger. There was no way...

An engine roared to life outside, and gravelly crunches spoke to a vehicle moving off.

“Fuck!” Dean snarled, slamming a fist into the wall so hard the drywall dented. He hissed and snatched his hand back, shaking his fingers, tears rimming his eyes, and huffed a couple breaths
through the pain. Another sigh, tinged with an erotic groan, and Dean eased, still working the pain from his knuckles. “Why the fuck’re you still here?”

“Did you expect me to depart?” asked Castiel. Dean shook his head. “Good, because I’d prefer to stay.”

“Why?”

“I thought I’d amply explained the sentiments that bind me to you, more than once, since our initial encounter.”

“What...that bullshit ‘bout my being an angel?” Dean jeered. A tear rolled down his cheek.

Extending his reaching arm, Castiel brushed the tear away. It beaded on the side of his finger, caught the light from the lamp and twinkled like a star, shone like the uncorrupted essence of divinity that dwelled, quiescent yet unquenchable, within Dean.

“You actually believe that garbage?” There was a twang of desperate hope, of need, of faith in Dean’s voice that made Castiel’s heart and grace ache.

“I do,” intoned Castiel solemnly. The tear was a jewel upon his hand, a drop of sanctity he wished he could preserve for eternity, a promise of a shared approach to future theological enigmas surely awaiting them in the future.

*Now is when he cracks a grin, shrugs it off, laughs in my face, accuses me once again of insanity.*

Dean stared at Castiel, unblinking, fresh tears streaming down his wondrous face.

*But I can tolerate his jibes.*

“You really…” Dean shook his head violently, scattering tears like liquid sunlight.

*I know the truth of Dean’s essential nature. And...*

“Crazy bastard,” muttered Dean, but there was no punch to the insult.

*... I think he’s beginning to accept the truth as well.*

“Applying human standards of matrimony to my holy birth is misguided,” Castiel offered, voice laced with amusement.

Dean blinked and shook his head again, half a smile spreading his chapped pink lips. Taking a step forward, another, another, Dean crowded Castiel until Castiel reluctantly gave ground. With a wordless sound of disapproval, Dean grabbed Castiel’s shoulders to hold him in place, took another step forward to bring their bodies together, and dropped his head onto Castiel’s shoulder. The heat of Dean’s body suffused Castiel’s vessel, eased the tightness of concern within him. Dean was so solid, so real, so present, that, however outside of Castiel’s understanding of character his behavior was, this *had* to be Dean. The vulnerable catch in Dean’s every breath harkened back to Dean’s earlier shock that Castiel had returned for him. His grace resting awkward within his vessel, Castiel lifted an arm and wrapped it around Dean’s waist. Dean shuddered, bit off a needy sound, and slumped against him.

“Can you do something for me, angel?” Dean whispered.

“Anything, Dean.” *Oh Dean, yes, truly anything, save only violating my Lord’s explicit command.*
“Hurt me.”

The bottom fell out of Castiel’s stomach, the weight settling as heat in his crotch.

“Dean…”

…and then he asks something that I want, that I shouldn’t want, offers it to me as if I’m doing him a favor.

“Please…” Dean’s voice caught on a sob, as though asking, begging, cut him to him to the quick.

“Please, Cas… I deserve… I need to hurt.”

Oh, angel, how are you real? How, in this sordid life, on this befouled, forsaken planet, have I been blessed to meet you?

“Please.”

You’re so beautiful when you beg.

“Of course, Dean.” Castiel’s voice rumbled, deep with longing. “Of course. Anything.”

I can’t wait to make you beg so, so, so much more.

“Thank you,” Dean breathed.

I can’t wait to make you bleed, to see your pale skin dripping crimson, to replace the scars Alastair left on your body with marks of celestial intent, protection spells, and holy inscriptions carved into your flesh, seared into your bones.


I will teach you faith, Dean.

“How are you real?” Dean mouthed into his shoulder, but he didn’t move, didn’t flee, didn’t twist the words into a joke. They were rank with disbelief, reedy with the desperate need to believe.

I will be your angel, Dean.

And you will be mine.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter in this part... :D
Teeth catching his lip, Castiel stared unblinking at the beneficent offering before him. Dean lay on the motel bed, head propped on a pillow, exquisite body bared to his hips. Mottled bruises, the result of Roger’s abuse, blossomed like sinister flowers across his torso, purple and blue and black shifting with every shallow, quick breath. Crisscrossing scars made a maze of his skin, no patch of more than an inch left intact, no entryway nor exit from the history of agony. Beholding Dean’s body was like standing before the attic wall, seeing madness and pain scoured into every vulnerable surface.

Desire shivered down Castiel’s spine.

Dean subtly arched his back, his eyes shut, relaxed as though in sleep. His chest was raised, muscles straining, belly concave, heart pounding. The Solomon’s Seal Castiel had carved at the center of Dean’s chest had healed nicely, a perfect ring and star around the gouge that Castiel’s sword had seared over his heart.

“Cas?” breathed Dean, a catch in his voice.

“You’re beautiful,” Castiel managed hoarsely.

“Aw, come on, no sweet talk,” Dean muttered. “We’ve already fucked and you’ve already got me naked, so skip the romancing.” The words were harsh, but Castiel was more affected by the flutter of Dean’s chest as he panted, the needy press of Dean’s fingers as they caught at the pristine white towels on which he lay, the strangely innocent way Dean squirmed as if ashamed of his desires and desperation.

Dean was incomparable, his body a legacy of strength and courage and survival; that Castiel was permitted to gaze upon him, much less touch him, suffused him with feelings beyond his ability to express.

And so he stared.

Dean’s eyes opened, dark until he lifted his head and the green caught the light and shone like tigers eye, like aventurine, like tourmaline, like shallow waters lapping at the beach, like--

“Please.”

Like Heaven.

Slowly closing his eyes, slowly opening them, Castiel released a long breath. Deliberate, confident, he removed his trench coat and draped it over the office chair. He shrugged his jacket off and folded it onto the chair, loosened his tie, tugged it over his head, and tossed it atop the other two. He unbuttoned his left sleeve and rolled it carefully up to his elbow.

“Come on, Cas, you’re killin’ me…” Dean complained as Castiel moved to unbutton his other cuff. Castiel pinned him with a look and folded the other sleeve over once, twice, thrice, four times, neat, flat, prim, unwrinkled. Dean’s eyes widened as he watched, black pupils growing as though a demon stirred within him at the sight of Castiel’s...forearms?
Castiel couldn’t fathom how his actions were alluring.

He only had one outfit, he no longer had grace enough to cleanse it, and blood stains were unmistakable. His precautions to protect his garments were sensible.

Perhaps the change in Dean reflected fear. After all, Dean had said…

...*Cas, you’re killing me...*

“Don’t worry, Dean; I’m proficient in multiple non-lethal interrogation techniques,” Castiel explained soothingly, stepping forward and settling onto the edge of the bed. Dean’s expression grew yet more astounded. “No lasting harm will come to you.”

“Cas...”

“Though I can’t promise...” Hissing out a breath, Castiel reached out, the pad of his pointer settling where the apex of the star met the circle he’d carved.

*Like the supernova calling the wise men to Bethlehem.*

“...I can’t promise it won’t be painful,” he whispered.

*You are my Messiah, Dean.*

*Is that blasphemy?*

“Aw, fuck,” Dean groaned, squeezing his eyes shut. “It better hurt like the fricken *devil*, Cas. Please...”

*I’m not sure, but I am sure...I’m past caring. Dean is holiness incarnate, and thus, in worshipping him, I worship my Lord.*

Castiel reverently traced the circle, then the star.

*And if that is blasphemy...I cannot be more damned than I already am.*

“I know,” murmured Castiel, petting soothingly down Dean’s chest and abdomen. “I’ll take care of you.” Smooth scar tissue cut across rougher skin, sparsely grown with short, dark hairs, hot beneath his fingers. “You will beg me to stop, as vehemently and desperately as you’re currently begging me to begin, before I’m done with you.” Dean bit back an eager sound, flesh rising and falling and rippling at Castiel’s touch. “Are you ready?”

*I want this so badly that it’s frightening.*

Dean nodded frantically.

*I want to cut him.*

*I want to hear him scream.*

*I want to smell his sweat.*

*I want to taste his tears.*

*I want to see him bleed.*
I want to feel his desperation.

I need to...

Castiel removed his hands; Dean choked out deprivation, rising up from the bed in pursuit. “Use your words, Dean,” he chided.

I need. And the best part is...

“Fuck you, Cas,” Dean gasped, seizing Castiel’s hand and putting it back on his chest. Dean sucked in a breath and collapsed back to the bad, setting the springs to screeching.

...he wants and needs this too.

“Don’t you fuckin’ dare make me beg.”

Oh, Dean...

Castiel smiled.

...even having known you for months, it is inconceivable to me that someone of your immaculate, sullied perfection exists.

Dean’s tanned cheeks flushed red, his fingers rucking up the blankets.

If only Amelia had...

Lifting himself onto the bed, Castiel straddled Dean’s hips. His trousers pulled tight, his belt buckle digging into his belly.

...nothing. There’s nothing Novak’s wife could have done, and nothing she can do. James Novak’s life is as dead as the people who once inhabited it.

“...please…” Dean whispered.

She could never have been this to him.

One hand settled on Deans’ belly, thumb kneading comfort into the rough skin and the soft flesh beneath. Twisting, Castiel reached back with the other hand, running it along the curve of Dean’s jeans-clad inner thigh, pausing to encircle and massage his knee, skimming down his calf until he felt the solid material of Dean’s right boot. He tugged the fabric up and aside, rubbed around Dean’s lower leg until he found the hilt of Dean’s knife, and withdrew it. Dean’s hissed out breath echoed the shick of the blade leaving the sheath. The weight of the dagger was familiar and balanced in Castiel’s grip; he deftly twirled it against his palm and brought it to before his face, admiring the gleam of light off the razor-fine edge and pinprick tip.

“Thought you’d…” Dean swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing. “…thought you’d use your knife.”

Castiel set the blade down carefully on his thigh, silver metal bright against black fabric, and focused on Dean’s chest, studying.

“The Angel sword is an instrument best suited to impalement,” Castiel said slowly. His brushed up Dean’s abdomen, using firm touches to map the spread of Dean’s ribs, the divots of his scars, the shallows between his muscles.

“I do like a good impalement,” Dean leered.
Raising an eyebrow, Castiel looked up to meet Dean’s gaze, hands going still.

*Remember your place - docile, submissive, a carcass to be carved and molded to a new shape, a new form, by my hand.*

Eye contact pinned Dean and Castiel held Dean’s stare, held his attention, until tears thickened liquid over Dean’s irises, until Dean’s licentious smirk fell away, until, finally, Dean squeezed his eyes shut and grimaced.

*Excellent. Where was I?*

Only then did Castiel resume his diligent attention to Dean’s exquisite torso.

*pectoralis major…*

The key to proper torture, to true pain, was a precise knowledge of human anatomy.

*manubrium…*

James Novak and Castiel both had extensive experience extracting agony from vulnerable flesh and bone.

*costal cartilage of the 1st rib…*

Pressure built in Castiel’s crotch, against his crotch, his penis thickening, Dean’s erection jutting up against him.

*xiphisternal joint…*

Dean’s deepest breaths sucked in his intercostal muscles enough that his ribs stood out, a prominent reflection of the mental diagram Castiel was developing.

*transverse abdominis…*

“Come on, Cas,” whined Dean. “You’re killing me! I wanna be hurt, not become the object of your bizarre-ass Swedish masseuse fantasies.”

*vena cava…*

“I assure you,” Castiel repeated, lost in thought, “that nothing I do will kill you.”

*serratus anterior…*

“…Cas…”

*heart…*

“No matter how much you beg for the end.”

*seal of Solomon.*

Retrieving the knife, Castiel moved with practiced celerity, incising lines over Dean’s first left rib. The blade cut so finely that the slice was invisible, and Dean barely reacted, tensing infinitesimally then relaxing. His breathing slowed, his flesh steadied, and peace such as Castiel had never imagined on Dean’s troubled face, such as Castiel had never beheld upon the face of even the most serene of victims, overcame Dean. The second cut was more difficult, curved like the number
three, overlaying a prominent scar where some jagged edge had bit deeply into Dean’s body. A third slice, a fourth, and Castiel lost himself in the work. Each subsequent incision tugged at the previous, causing the torn flesh to gap, teasing forth beads of blood like jewels strung on a necklace. Castiel’s eyes flicked to Dean’s neck, imagining the corded muscle crossed by scars like those Dean had left on Castiel’s neck, imagining the trust Dean would extend him if Castiel were to take a knife to his throbbing jugular and cut oh. so. carefully.

Not now. Not today. I have a purpose today, and I must fill it.

Dean must be marked.

“What are you…” Dean broke off with a gasp as, with a twist, Castiel finished the last letter over the top left rib.

Dean must be saved.

Pausing, Castiel wiped the blade on the towel, leaving a line of deep red behind. The knife shone, dire and lethal, delicate and beautiful and effective. Shifting his balance to the right, Castiel began the next word, written over Dean’s right top rib.

“What are you doing?” managed Dean, around huffed breaths. His voice was tight, strained, but he held still, took the pain like he’d been designed on high as a canvas for Castiel to adorn with ruby drops and white scars.

“Abrang,” Castiel murmured, eyes flicking to the first word he’d cut. Each letter was traced in maroon, the rubies strung on the delicate lines drying and flattening, cracking and flaking away. A single line of blood followed the curve of Dean’s rib, the curve of his side, disappearing beneath his back, reappearing as a bright red splotch soaked into the white terry cloth.

“Gesundheit.”

“My health is excellent,” snapped Castiel, hooking the knife in to add a flourish to the next letter.

“Lemme guess,” Dean choked, then spat out, “Angels are walking, talking hand sanitizers?”

That Dean could still joke while under such duress was…

Astonishing.

Infuriating.

Gorgeous.

Miraculous.

A warmth stirred in Castiel’s heart that had nothing to do with the arousal thickening his penis, nothing to do with the adrenaline that surged through him to see a bleeding victim pinned and helpless. He froze, his hand shaking, the knife poised above where he had one last line to inscribe to complete the word adoian.

Castiel stared.

“What?” Dean demanded, lifting his head. His cheeks were pale, pupils huge and black, lips thin and bloodless. His teeth were stained red - he must have bit through his lip or nipped his tongue. Wan skin gave way to an unhealthy flush around his neck, darkening down his chest to an abused
puffy redness around the cuts Castiel had made. Dean’s gaze followed Castiel’s, raking down his own chest; the movement aggravated the injuries, reopened the cuts, and fresh rivulets of blood oozed forth and streamed down his sides.

“Are those words?” snapped Dean.

“Abrang adoian,” confirmed Castiel, making the last cut and settling back on his haunches to admire his handiwork. Dean’s erect penis ground against Castiel’s perineum and Dean arched back against the bed with a guttural groan.

“The fuck...the fuck does that mean?” There was a splendid desperation to Dean’s words, as though he burst them out as an alternative to screaming.

...oh, he will scream before I’m done. Such a lovely, singing sound...

“I have prepared this flesh,” Castiel said.

“Good for you,” Dean retorted. “What does abracadabra mean, Castiel?”

“It’s a bastardization of an Aramaic phrase that means ‘it will be created in my words,’” said Castiel, rolling his eyes, “but is not what I have written. Abrang adoian means ‘I have prepared this flesh.’”

“Oh, fucking fantastic.” Dean squirmed, twisting to one side then the other, teasing more pain, more sanguination, from his wounds. “It’s gibberish. If I wanted bullshit, I’d have gotten a goddamn--” His breath hitched, his penis thrust up, thrust up, then stilled, and tears leaked out as he squeezed his eyes shut. “--a fricken tramp stamp in Japanglish or something.”

Castiel had planned to stop after one set of ribs - save future carvings for subsequent times together.

“The pain will lessen if you keep still.”

But Dean’s behavior was...offensive.

“This is Enochian.”

His disrespect was expected, normal, ordinary.

“What I’ve translated for you is only the first line of a longer inscription I intend to adorn you with.”

Utterly inappropriate from such an extra ordinary creature.

“If you don’t like it…”

He must be taught.

...if you don’t like it, I will tie you down and force you to take every cut.

The warmth that had gathered in Castiel’s chest snapped, burgeoned outward like an explosion, evaporated like water under unforgiving Middle Eastern sunlight.

No!

Rocking backwards, Castiel scrambled from Dean, knife dropping beside Dean’s prone body. The
bed squealed protest at his rapid movements, and he barely stopped short of tumbling over the edge. He squeezed his eyes shut, a rising wave of unnameable emotion drowning him in an undertow of memories and self-reproof.

*Dean consented to these cuts. If he revokes that consent, I will respect that!*

It felt like chaos and fear and battle heat.

*If I scar him when he doesn’t wish me to, I am no better than the demons who tortured him - no better than Alastair and the grigori.*

It felt like cold calculation, judgement, detachment.

*If I scar him when he doesn’t wish it, I am no better than James Novak.*

It felt like hate.

“Cas?”

It felt like the past.

...another victim, a woman this time, bawls and protests that she knows nothing. I believe her; after so many years here, if I couldn’t recognize truths and lies, I’d be useless as an interrogator...

...but my orders are clear.

It felt like James Novak.

*And I will follow my orders.*

*I will cut her until she confesses.*

*She’ll be beautiful smeared in blood, sound lovely screaming.*

*Ruining her will feel like...*

It felt like panic.

...no, no, that was the past, and not my past - Novak’s past, Novak’s crimes, I didn’t - I wouldn’t - I couldn’t, I never could...

“Cas, you okay?” The vulnerable, frightened catch in Dean’s voice snapped Castiel back to his vessel, back to the present. The heat of the desert faded from his skin. The ring of pleading cries faded from his ears. The dazzling brightness of a cruel, merciless, heavenly, unreachable sun ceased to sear his eyes.

...I couldn’t, shouldn’t have, yet I did anyway...

*I knew right from wrong, and I did wrong.*

*Over and over and over again, I did evil.*

Panting, chest heaving, Castiel caught his balance and looked, wide-eyed, to Dean. Half-risen from the bed, Dean’s eyes were also wide, soft, tender, alarmed. Moving spread his cut flesh wide, letters prominent and beautiful, limned in red that forged sinuous paths over and around his muscles, veiled pale flesh in diaphanous waves of crimson, followed the course of old scars like
they were past stream beds primed for the fresh flows of spring.

*I did that to him.*

“Dean, I--”

*How could I?*

“Breathe, Cas.”

*He’s my brother in arms, my angel, my lover, my first and only comrade in so many lonely centuries.*

“...Dean…”

*My Dean.*

Curling in on himself, Castiel struggled to get control of his spiraling thoughts, of his and Novak’s reminiscences stirring, combining, replaying a panoply of awful instants evocative of day upon day spent gripping a knife, cutting flesh like butter, exacting pain as tribute, seeking truth without mercy, crushing the heart from his victims and from himself. His hands shook, stained black with blood and bloody deeds. He should wash them, wash himself, cleanse himself. He could sooner flay his own skin inch by excruciating inch.

“Look at me.”

*I am so broken, so fallen, so forsaken, that all I can think to do is it mark him, to revel in his agony, to delight in his rich, dripping blood.*

“Castiel.”

Authority.

“Look.”

Control.

“At.”

Power.

“Me.”

*Dean.*

Castiel’s eyes flashed open. His gaze jerked up. Dean was before him, around him, subsuming him. A hand wrapped around Castiel’s shoulders to cradle his head; another encircled his waist. With a tensing of powerful muscles, Dean brought their bodies together.

*So warm. So solid. So welcoming, accepting…*

...*loving…*

“Dean?” Castiel whispered.

*This can’t be real.*
“I’m here, Castiel.”

Is any of this real?

“I’m alright.”

Novak’s memories?

“I’m sorry I teased you.”

My memories?

“I’m enjoying myself. Immensely.”

Who am I?

“This, here and now, the two of us - this is real, this is okay.”

This is real?

“I want this.”

...this is okay.

“What else were you gonna write?” Dean’s voice was warm and rich and powerful in Castiel’s ear.

“Abrang adoi anadha amgedphan t adre cnila conisbra adgmach apila lml oecrimi o enae geid polip praf pdzasr g pamphicas grigori pele prap prge pugo p piad paimoe puim qaa q t qting Castiel amgedphan t adre.” Admitting the words he’d meant to inscribe was shameful - that he’d dare to put such words on a fellow angel, on a compatriot, on anyone. Dean would rightfully mock him, rebuke him, repudiate him. Dean would…

“What’s it mean?” asked Dean, awed.

Awed.

“It’s Enochian,” Castiel explained hoarsely. Of course Dean wasn’t upset - he didn’t know what Castiel had said. When he knew… “I have prepared this flesh, begun anew in blood and glory by this Angel of Fire. Let praise be sung from the stars for this treasure, bequeathed by our Lord and master to dwell undiminished upon his most sacred creation. Fire and damnation rain upon unto any grigori who dares sully him, who dares bring harm unto my God’s creation. Let heaven most holy smile on this beautiful form, and know that whosoever challenge him will face the wrath of Castiel, Angel of Fire.”

...Castiel couldn’t watch Dean’s reaction.

But he could feel it.

Dean’s weight shifted back from him. His supportive embrace loosened and fell away. The welcoming, inclusive heat of his body dissipated. The bed squeaked as Dean left - escaped - jostling Castiel with every movement. Castiel waited, tense, for the sound of the door opening and closing to prove that he’d finally found Dean’s limit.

The sound never came.

I was wrong to think that these sadistic impulses were acceptable in any context, were containable,
were controllable.

I was wrong for yearning to hurt Dean, for recalling the injuries I’d already caused him with
fondness, for craving to do more harm.

I was wrong to surrender to Novak’s base, broken instincts, to conflate my angelic divinity with his
corrupted meat, to permit myself to want what he wanted - what I dared think we both wanted.

Castiel’s head dropped, chin to his chest, shame like ice in his vessel’s...in his...veins.

I was wrong to want Dean.

I was wrong to surrender to this flesh.

I was wrong to desire.

“Finish it.”

Astonished, Castiel opened his eyes, his gaze on his own lap. His shirt was dyed red, clear lines of
Enochian transferred bloody from Dean’s chest when they leaned in close.

Dean has marked me.

Dean lay back on the bed, towels neatly rearranged beneath him, head raised. Blood smeared over
his chest, pooled in his old scars, overlay them, replaced them. The button and fly on Dean’s jeans
were open, the swell of his erection pushing the plaid of his boxer shorts through the opening.

And I have marked Dean.

“Finish the inscription, Cas,” he snarled.

He is divine.

“Yes, sir,” whispered Castiel.

Hand trembling, he took up the knife. The blade yet shone and Castiel’s chest tightened, aching,
his fingers numb and awkward around the hilt.

“Hey, Cas?”

Castiel looked up. Dean had an elbow underneath himself, propping him up from the bed. His eyes
were dark green, almost as beautiful as his smile, gentle, open, easy, calm, sincere.

“Only if you want to,” Dean offered tenderly.

“It’s...it’s too much,” breathed Castiel. If he carved so many lines into Dean’s chest...if he cut
Dean again, ever, even once...if he allowed Dean to grant him this...if he let Dean further into his
vessel, further into his heart, further into himself...

It was all too much.

“Only. if you want to.”

“I do.” Castiel’s eyes skimmed Dean’s chest, his imagination drawing in every Enochian letter,
perfect and aglow.
...from this day forward, for better or worse...

“Well, hey - whaddaya know - I do too,” said Dean with a shrug that dislodged viscous, mostly-dried blood drops. ...in sickness and in health... He grinned slyly. “So, what’s the problem?”

What’s the problem?

The pressure in Castiel’s chest vanished. His trembling stilled. His troubled thoughts went silent.

“There isn’t one,” he said, wondrous.

And so he saves me again.

Dean flopped down onto the bed.

Again and again.

“Well, then - get to it!”

Ad infinitum.

“Yes, sir,” Castiel said again, confident, obedient, dutiful.

And he took up the knife.

And he cut.

Time dilated, the motel a liminal space beyond such mortal concepts as day and night, here and there, real and fake, angel and demon, Dean and Castiel. The knife was alive in Castiel’s hand as the mirage writ in his mind’s eye became solid and tangible and crimson on Dean’s beautiful torso. Enochian blessings, Castiel’s ideal benediction, overlay and replaced what others had dare blemish Dean’s perfection with. Every new line brought Castiel peace, serenity making his grip sure and his cuts true.

“Thank you,” Dean whispered, for sixth, the tenth, the dozenth time, moaning, squirming. “Please, Castiel...please, finish it, please...tell me...what does it mean?”

“Again?” Castiel had translated it more times than he could recall.

“Again!”

And he would repeat his inscription, his claim, his request, his supplication to Dean’s vessel, as many times as Dean wished.

“I have prepared this flesh, begun anew in blood and glory by this Angel of Fire.”

The words were engraved in their souls, in their graces, as surely as he etched the words in Dean’s quivering flesh.

“Let praise be sung from the stars for this treasure, bequeathed by our Lord and master to dwell undiminished upon his most sacred creation.”

“Cas... Cas ...” Dean ground his crotch up, rubbing his erection against Castiel’s butt.

“Fire and damnation rain upon unto any grigori who dares sully him, who dares bring harm unto my God’s creation.”
The scars left by Azazel and Alastair faded as to nothing, replaced, supplanted. Never again would Castiel gaze on Dean and see the wreck of their twisted handiwork. Dean was recreated in Castiel’s likeness - in God’s likeness, channeled through Castiel’s grace - and in remaking Dean, Castiel remade himself.

“Let heaven most holy smile on this beautiful form, and know that whosoever challenge him will face the wrath of Castiel, Angel of Fire.” Castiel bit off the last words, harsh, a promise, a vow, an oath as powerful as the one that kept him from pursuing Sam Winchester.

His knife made the final cut, incising a flourish under Castiel’s name.

“It’s done.” Castiel’s voice was gravel, deep, rough.

*Angel of blood, angel of fire, angel of justice...*

*Angel of Thursday.*

*Angel of Dean.*

“Oh, Cas...” Dean rutted up from the bed, rubbing his penis against Castiel’s thigh, and then with a replete sigh, he collapsed against the bed. A wet spot blossomed over the fabric of his boxers.

Castiel’s penis throbbed.

Blood coursed over Dean’s skin.

Castiel’s *being* throbbed.

“I should...” he swallowed. “I should...towel. Hot water. You require care. Do you carry triple antibiotic cream among your belongings?”

Dean’s head lolled, eyes unfocused, and he squinted a scrunched up expression toward Castiel.

“No,” he snapped petulantly.

“Bactine, perhaps?”

With a pronounced pout which cracked the dried blood haloing his lips, Dean reached out. His arms and hands were pale and shaking, but he moved with certainty as he unzipped Castiel’s trousers, reached within, and pulled Castiel’s flushed penis into the light of the motel room. A strong grip wrapped around the sensitive flesh and Castiel’s eyes slipped shut, the knife dropping from his suddenly limp fist.

“Dean,” he whimpered. He was achingly hard, neglected; he’d been so focused on Dean’s pain, Dean’s pleasure, he’d not spared a thought for himself. Kneading, massaging with the tips of his fingers, Dean stroked down Castiel’s length; Castiel shuddered, his eyes slipping shut, his head falling back.

“Good,” Dean murmured. “You’re so fricken good, angel.”

Sensation burgeoned through Castiel’s body, each wave of bliss exponentially more powerful than the previous - an unsustainable pattern that Castiel feared would subsume him within moments. He wanted it to subsume him, to drown him, to deliver him in essence, in feeling, in grace, unto the Heaven he could never again visit in actuality. With every brush of calloused palm on velvety skin, Castiel was transported. He’d explored the divine through meditation, through biblical study, through prayer, through service, but clutched in Dean’s all-encompassing hands, Castiel
experienced the divine. Every touch was ecstasy; he burned with holy fire, incinerated with rapture, transcended to disembodied bliss.

“Dean…” Castiel’s intoned the name of his teacher, his guide, his lodestone, his Polaris. “Oh... oh ...Dean...”

Castiel opened his eyes.

Dean stared at him, expression reflecting all the reverence Castiel felt. Dean’s chest was crisscrossed by fresh lines of red, coated in blood, and white lines of Castiel’s semen overlay the wounds, mixed with the blood, created something essentially different, essentially new. Reaching out with wonderment, Castiel trailed his fingers through the liquids, smearing and blurring the lines, mixing the gummy come and thin blood. Chunky pink flowed around his touch, seeping into the fresh cuts, soaking into Dean’s body.

They mingled.

They combined.

And they were one.

“Hey, Cas?” said Dean. Castiel looked up; Dean reached out, took Castiel’s hand, brought it to his lips, lapped at the blood and come coating him. Bliss cascaded through Castiel anew, bringing him crashing, gloriously, to earth, to the Motel 8, to Dean. “That was...uh... you’re ...everything is awesome .”

Castiel smiled.

Castiel smiled, genuine, broad, a grin that bared his teeth and scrunched his eyes, an external reflection of the replete satisfaction suffusing every pore of his vessel, every glimmer of his grace.

“You are awesome as well, Dean,” he murmured. “May I clean you up now? We need to rest.”

Dean opened his mouth to speak, swallowed, shut his mouth again. His throat bobbed as he ingested their combined fluids, and Castiel needed...

He needed to…

Drawing his hand from Dean’s loose grip, Castiel coated his fingers once more in semen and blood, reached up, and brought them to his own lips. Coppery blood and salty come dissipated over his tongue, their combined flavors disgusting, as incongruous together as the two of them were in reality.

The mixture was perfect .

Castiel licked his hand clean.

And Dean stared.

“Yeah,” he muttered. “Sleep. Sleep sounds good.”

Still smiling, still happy , Castiel rose to retrieve towels, cleaning supplies, and first aid gear.

Dean was gravely injured.

Castiel would always take care of him.

“I know you will,” Dean murmured, voice vague, dreamy, exhausted, elated. “I know you, Cas.”

*And I know you, Dean.*

*What a glorious thing it is, to be know and be known, to accept and be accepted for who and what we are.*

“And Dean?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

Dean shot him a lopsided grin. “Anytime, Cas. Anytime.”

* 

The dull roar of an engine revving nearby woke Castiel from an unusually deep, unusually peaceful sleep. He lay on a bed for the first time in months, and though his stomach was empty, his heart was full. Light painted his eyelids peach, and he shifted, seeking warmth, seeking solace and camaraderie.

His fingers closed around frigid silver.

*Wrong.*

Alarm swept away his fatigue; he was half-risen, eyes open, weapon in hand, before reality truly processed.

*This is wrong.*

The metal he’d found - the metal he now held at the ready - was his sword.

The rumpled bed was unoccupied.

The roaring engine was driving away.

*Sorry, Cas,* was smeared in awkward, bloody handwriting on the room’s mirror. *Be seeing you, or something.*

The words overlapped Castiel’s reflection but couldn’t hide his disheveled appearance, his underwear grayed with wash upon wash, his worn undershirt speckled with black where Dean’s blood had soaked through Castiel’s ruined dress shirt.

Dean’s belongings were gone.

Dean was gone.

The sound of the car faded to nothing with distance.

*I should have expected this.*

Heaving a sigh, Castiel looked around the desolate room, a painful reflection of the emptiness now stretching his chest where, hours ago, he’d discovered his heart resided.
A leopard cannot change his spots.

With another cleansing exhale, and Castiel released his disappointment.

But together, we did change Dean’s skin, his spots and stripes and lines. He wanted to be changed. He wanted to eclipse his old appearance with a new - the cuts of my design, the etchings he approved of, instead of the agony extracted unwillingly from him time and again.

Knowing Dean?

He’d already been planning to leave, to meet Henriksen alone, to pursue Alastair and Azazel and Sam Winchester without me.

And, even with that plan...he accepted, asked for, my Enochian inscription.

So that he could bring a part of me with him.

He is doing what he feels he must.

And I...

...I could go to Henriksen’s office. It’s 8:55 AM. Even should I walk, I wouldn’t be that late.

But I swore to Dean, on all I hold holy, that I’d not act against Sam Winchester.

And there is so much holiness in my life that I’ve been blessed to encounter - Revelation, Heaven, my Heavenly Father, my angelic grace...

...Dean Winchester...

By the holiness we share , I will keep my word.

I will not pursue him, nor Sam.

I will shower, and clean my clothes, and cleanse the room, and check out of the motel, and find a demon to hunt, and continue the good work for which I was sent to earth.

And if we meet again...

...when we meet again...

...we will resume where we left off.

It will be enough.

It will have to be enough.

Nodding once, decisively, Castiel set to action.

But...

The room was lifeless.

...I should have seen this coming .

Chapter End Notes
The transliteration and translation of the Enochian on Dean's ribs is based on this, though I took some liberties. I wasn't able to find a fully sourced copy, I'm sorry.

Ack also forgot to include in this note initially - this is the end of Part 4.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!