Chromaticity

by consoul

Summary

Sam Winchester was doing just fine until a hyperactive P.I called Gabriel swept him up in a whirlwind of mystery, murder, and mayhem one average Tuesday night. When the murders escalate and secrets are revealed, Sam's manageable life quickly spirals out of control as Lawrence erupts in a long stewing pot of chaos. Can the unlikely duo solve the case before it's too late?

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter One: Another Tuesday

Sam rubbed his eyes as the dense text before him swam slightly. He was tired, so tired, but he had to get through this chapter of reading tonight, or else half of tomorrow would be spent reading this, and he didn't feel like spending his day off on much else besides laundry and listening to a podcast, and maybe working out if he could drag himself out of bed for that.

The waiter groaned as he looked down at his phone screen. Midnight. He had two more hours on his shift, and then he'd be home free.

It wasn't that he didn't like working the late shifts at the Roadhouse. In fact, he quite enjoyed them whenever he was scheduled for one. There was something about the atmosphere that was remarkable soothing in a strange way. Maybe it was the soft buzzing of the lights, or the interesting characters that came out of the woodwork that he drew so much inspiration from. Something about the Roadhouse, and on a bigger scale, the city at night, satisfied him in an odd way.

Tonight though, he couldn't really bring himself to care. He was running on about four hours of sleep, and unlike his soldier-like older brother, Sam wasn't as used to doing that. Yes, he was a college student that worked his butt off, and he wasn't unfamiliar to the aspect of late nights, but when he hadn't had a good night's sleep since the previous Thursday, it tended to add up.

The tell tale jingle of the bell made Sam hang his head a bit before he straightened, stuffing a highlighter behind his ear sleepily. How long had he just been thinking? Five minutes? Well, it didn't really matter now. Someone had just walked in, and since Ellen was doing book work in her office upstairs, he was the sole waiter working the floor and had to handle it.

"Woah, you look like you could use a cup of coffee more than me, kiddo."

Shit.

Sam stiffened, the hand subconsciously reaching for one of the coffee pots behind him freezing. He had heard that voice before, even if the cheerful tones had never been directed at him.

Gabriel was a semi-famous patron of the Roadhouse, one that frequented the establishment every Tuesday without fail. Sam had seen him come in on other nights of the week, but Gabriel always came around midnight on Tuesday, every week. Why Tuesday was a mystery, but Sam didn't mind, because when Gabriel came in, the atmosphere changed.

Sam was particularly sensitive to atmospheres, or auras, or whatever you wanted to call it. He wasn't really sure why, or how, as he didn't dare tell anyone what he was capable of doing, not even his own family. A person's feelings were almost visible to Sam, but not quite. It was a sixth sense that he had that Sam couldn't really describe, except that it was almost like a colorful halo around a person. Certain colors or sensations that Sam felt could be translated into feelings, and those feelings affected the atmosphere of a place. It was hard to describe, as for Sam, it was an instinct, something on the level of breathing. He didn't think about doing it, he just did it.

When Gabriel walked in, the atmosphere lightened exponentially. The quiet, soft grey blue of the Roadhouse at night changed into something close like a pastel sunrise, a gentle contentment that
made everyone in the vicinity brighten just a bit. Sam wasn't sure how the short man did it, but the aura certainly wasn't an issue for Sam. He could feel himself feeling better instantly, even as his heart stuttered with nerves.

The tall man took a breath before turning around, leaving the coffee pot behind as he dared to look at the shorter man on the other side of the counter.

"I'm fine." Sam said with a small smile, taking in the wispy pastel shades that surrounded the edges of Gabriel's person like a faded watercolor painting. Soft and easy on the eyes, just like the man.

*Where did that come from?*

Gabriel arched an eyebrow before sliding into the seat directly across from Sam and the homework spread out on the wooden counter. "You look like death warmed over, no offense of course."

The bluntness of Gabriel's words made Sam snort. "Of course."

Gabriel smiled, a bright thing that made his aura (Sam didn't really like the term, but it was the best he could come up with) flare briefly. "So, Sam, why do you look so tired? Long day here at the Roadhouse?"

Sam shrugged and scratched his neck, his fingers momentarily tangling in the growing hair. "Just a long week."

Gabriel's eyes narrowed, and Sam thought that the hazel irises looked more golden than anything. In fact, Sam could have kicked himself for calling them hazel. They were definitely gold, complementing his sunny aura.

"It's only Tuesday, kid."

Was that concern? Sam's ability let him confirm that, yes, it was, and it made Sam relax a bit, even if it confused him. Why was Gabriel so concerned? Sam decided to chalk it up to the man's personality. He had seen the man joking and taking casually with patrons before, and was obviously a very social creature.

"Technically it's Wednesday." Sam said cheekily before standing and reaching for the coffee pot and a mug.

"Ah, technicalities." Gabriel sighed, waving it off. "It's Tuesday until I go to bed."

Sam poured Gabriel a cup and slid it to him before he leaned against the counter and ran a large hand over his face.

"Wish I could go to bed." Sam sighed wishfully, his eyes trying in vain to focus on the small print before him. Simply saying the word 'bed' made Sam want to find the nearest one and face plant into it with abandon.

"How many hours left on your shift?"

"I get off at 2."

There was a pause, then the clink of a spoon. Somewhere in the background, Sam thought he could hear a rock song playing softly from the kitchen, though he couldn't determine what it was. Dean probably could.
"What are you studying?"

Sam glanced up at Gabriel, who was ripping open an insane amount of sugar packets. He had heard from Jo that the man did like his coffee sickeningly sweet, though he hadn't thought it was this extreme. Maybe something about the insane amounts of sugar affected his aura somehow?

"Law."

Gabriel paused, then grinned, eyes twinkling as he stirred excitedly, his aura flaring again, but this time in orange-peach shades of excitement. It was an enchanting sight, and Sam did his best not to let his breath hitch.

'Really? Guess we're in complementary fields of business then."

Sam tilted his head in confusion, and Gabriel laughed, seeming to find the situation amusing.

"I'm a P.I/consultant for the police." he explained. "I help catch the bad guys, and guys like you take care of the rest in the judicial system."

"You're a P.I?" Sam asked curiously, and Gabriel nodded, pulling out a badge. Sam peered at it, noting that Gabriel's last name was Milton for some strange reason.

"Now why would I ever lie to you, Sam?" Gabriel asked cheekily, and Sam almost asked him how he knew what his name was before he remembered that he was wearing a name tag. Thank God for his intelligence, even if it was considerably tempered by his current tiredness and the late hour.

"People lie all the time." Sam said seriously as he searched around for his highlighter. He really needed to get some of his work done and not get distracted by the pastel aura, golden eyed man sitting before him.

"That they do." Gabriel replied just as solemnly.

Sam made a frustrated noise as he lifted up his textbook, before checking the floor. He could have sworn he just had it.

Fingers brushed across his face, warm and soft. Sam froze, and then the highlighter was in front of him, held by a smirking Gabriel that looked positively mischievous.

"Looking for this?"

Sam stared at the offending object for a second before carefully plucking it from Gabriel's hand, his skin still tingling from where Gabriel touched him. It almost felt like the aura had touched him somehow, moving with the man to stroke against his face in a wave of warmth and caring and kindness. It was enough to give him a jolt; the feeling was so strong. Just how strong was this man's aura?

"Thanks." he muttered, hoping that his face wasn't flushed too much. He needed to keep it together.

Luckily, Sam's phone decided to ring at that moment, and Sam practically leaped for it, excusing himself as he stepped over to the side a bit and responded. He didn't want to think about the implications of what he had just felt.

*The only aura I've ever been able to feel that strongly is Dean's.*

"Hey, Lisa. What's up?" Sam asked, and on the other side, Lisa Braeden sighed.
"Hey, Sam. I know it's really last minute, but can you take Ben for the morning tomorrow? I got offered a shift, and Dean doesn't get off 'till one."

"Sure." Sam said, even though it would interrupt his semi concrete plans to just sleep through most of the day. If Lisa needed him to watch Ben, then he would. "Just let yourself in. I'll probably be passed out in bed, so don't freak out or anything if I look dead."

Lisa paused. "Sam, it's ok if you're too tired. I can always call someone-"

"No, it's fine Lis. It's just the morning, right?" Sam asked, cutting Lisa off. "Ben and I will have some fun."

"Sam..."

Sam hung up before Lisa could get a word in edgewise and made his way back to Gabriel, focusing again with a renewed determination on his reading. Now he really needed to finish this tonight.

"Trouble in paradise?"

Gabriel's aura was different. It was more muted, resembling the more bluer shades of disappointment, and a tinge of...jealousy?

Sam was too tired to interpret what the sudden shift in mood could possibly mean. Sometimes he wished he couldn't see the auras at all, as they sometimes caused more trouble than they were worth. "What?"

"Your girl." Gabriel said, sipping his coffee casually. Too casually. "She's lucky to have you. Kid's lucky to have you as a dad too."

Sam frowned, then began to giggle hysterically as he realized why Gabriel had suddenly clammed up on him. Did he really think that he was with Lisa, and that Ben was his kid?

The waiter quickly succumbed to smothered laughter, clutching his sides as the thought.

"Oh shit, that's hilarious!" Sam said as he slammed a hand down on his textbook, feeling a grin stretch across his face. "Dude, no!"

Gabriel frowned, and Sam struggled to compose himself enough to explain.

"Oh man, I'm telling Bobby that one." Sam said, wiping his eyes. "Lisa's my brother's ex, and Ben is my nephew."

Gabriel blinked, then flushed with embarrassment. Sam laughed some more at that before he turned to the kitchen, sticking his head through the space and smacking Benny's head lightly, jolting the cook awake.

"I'm up!" Benny cried, his trademark cap slipping off his head a bit as he straightened. His aura was slightly fuzzy with sleep and the usual deep, calm royal blue. Sam had hardly ever seen the cook's aura change from the blue, which said a lot about the man's character. Auras, while containing a few core shades that stayed consistent for a person, were constantly fluctuating and shifting with people's emotions.

"Hey, Benny, I need an order for Thing 2." Sam requested. Since he knew two Bens, Benny the cook was Thing 1, and Ben the nephew was Thing 2.
"Breakfast?"

"Yup."

Sam turned to glance back at Gabriel, who was muttering to himself under his breath, but stopped as Sam looked at him. Even with his good hearing, Sam couldn't hear what he had said.

"You want something to eat?" Sam asked lightly, still feeling a bit giggly, and Gabriel shook his head, eyes averted sheepishly.

Sam went around to top off the few cups that were out and cleared one table before he settled back down into his reading. The smell of sizzling bacon filled the air, and Sam found that Gabriel's quiet presence and pastel aura cleared his head enough to help him finish the reading. He shut the textbook with a satisfied thud just as Gabriel finished his coffee.

"I should get going." Gabriel said as he stood, pulling out his wallet. "Busy day tomorrow."

"Crime never rests." Sam quipped, and Gabriel smirked as he laid a twenty on the counter. The smirk made him look downright devilish, and for a moment, his aura flared with a bright streak of cherry red to match the expression.

"While it does not, cute waiters should. Get some shut eye, Sam." Gabriel said as Sam gaped slightly at the bill.

Then, Gabriel was waltzing out of the door and into the night, leaving Sam behind with a reeling mind and a large tip. The atmosphere shifted noticeably as Gabriel left, turning back to that steely blue that Sam had come to associate with the night life of the Roadhouse, and Sam found himself almost disappointed as he watched the pastel shades bleed out of existence.

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A soft thump woke Sam later that morning. Hazy images of gold eyes and skin and hair and flashy auras tempted Sam back to sleep, but Sam's rational side quickly won out as awareness came to him.

What happened to his alarm, and what was that thump?

"The fuck..." Sam murmured, rolling over to look blearily at his clock before scrambling to shove off the sheets.

"Shit!" he said, leaping out of bed as the glowing green digits burned in his retinas. 10:30? Didn't he have class today?

Wait. What was today?

Sam paused halfway to the door, his brow crinkling as he thought for a second. Today was...Wednesday. His day off from both college and work. No classes, no Roadhouse.

So what was that thump?

Sam groaned, then ran out the door as he remembered suddenly. Ben!

"Ben?" he called out, rounding the corner into the living room, where he was sure he had heard the thump.

The boy was looking at a stack of books that had toppled over, one of his legs tangled in the jeans he was attempting to put on. He had probably kicked the stack over accidentally in his struggle.
"Hi Unca Sam. Sorry." Ben said, letting go of his jeans in defeat. His hair was wet, a comb was on the coffee table, and the box that held all of Ben's things in case he stayed over was open. The kid had obviously taken it upon himself to get himself ready, a sign that he was far more self aware and reliant than any four year old child should be. It reminded him uncomfortably of how Dean and he were as kids.

Sam shook his head to banish the thought. "It's all right Ben. When did you take a shower?"

"Just now." was the quiet reply Sam received, and the tall man yawned, frowning. He must have been really tired if he didn't hear Ben moving around until now.

"Did you eat?" Sam asked as he helped Ben into his jeans. Sam noted that Ben's aura was a kaleidoscope of nauseating colors, as all children's auras tended to be, but that the featured color was a relaxed shade of peach. Ben's aura was a bit more settled than most kids, and peach was quickly becoming a more common color.

"Uh huh."

"You used the microwave?"

"Uh huh. Kevin helped."

Sam blinked. Kevin was over, and he didn't hear any of it?

"You were really tired." Ben commented as if reading his mind, and Sam decided that he wasn't going to mull over it much longer. He felt better than he had all week, and Ben hadn't been harmed seriously while Sam had been dead to the world, though he suspected he had his roommate to thank for much of that. He made a mental note to thank Kevin the next time he saw him.

"I guess I was." Sam said as he helped the four year old into his thick aviator jacket. John had given it to the kid for Christmas a couple months ago, which surprised everyone. The man had been sober enough for the whole day, and had even made a bit of an effort to enjoy the holiday.

"Where we going?" Ben asked, and Sam plopped the kid down on the couch.

"Where do you wanna go?" he asked, and Ben shrugged, clasping his tiny hands together as he peered at Sam with large dark eyes just like his mother's.

"Wherever you wanna go, Unca Sam."

Sam shook his head. Ben was probably the most selfless four year old in existence, and he didn't even realize what he was doing. What the kid lacked in physical appearance from Dean, he certainly made up for it in personality. He wasn't sure yet whether that was a good or bad thing.

"I'm thinking the park." Sam said, watching as Ben's face lit up. The poor kid deserved it really, as he knew Lisa and Dean had been particularly busy as of late.

"And then the clothes washing place?"

Sam's eyes narrowed as Ben gazed up innocently at him. Ben was also a perceptive kid, a fact that made for startling conversations with the kid sometimes. People expected a hellion since he was Dean Winchester's spawn and a toddler to boot, but Ben was about as far as you could get from that.

"The laundromat." Sam said, supplying the term for the inquisitive child. "And I guess we will, since you seem to find a problem with my stinky clothes."
Ben giggled, and Sam ruffled his hair before making his way to the shower.

Ten minutes later and a quickly scarfed down banana, Sam was out the door with an eager four year old running ahead. He had his clothes and all the detergent in a large drawstring bag, his personal bag slung on his shoulder, and all the items to entertain Ben were in the four year old's Iron Man backpack that he insisted he carry himself.

The park that they frequented was about a block away, with a decent sized playground and a few stone benches here and there. Ben usually ran himself ragged for about ten minutes before he collapsed on one of the benches with Sam and read a book (a habit Sam was secretly proud he had inspired), but today, they'd probably have to cut the park trip short since it was so cold outside.

Lawrence was a decent sized city, with mostly decent people. Sam, while a college student with a typical income expected of him, managed to rent an apartment in a safe enough part of the city. Sure, the area got a bit shady once the sun set, but unless you lived in either the suburbs or the classy downtown area, the city was like that. In broad daylight though, Sam didn't have to worry about anything.

There wasn't anyone at the small park, so Ben had full reign over the area. Sam knew he'd probably tire quickly, as it was that cold, and Ben had been looking a little peaky. Lisa was sure it was just a basic cold, so Sam just went with it and made sure he had tissues on hand.

Sure enough, Ben quickly grew tired with the park and a bit grumpy, so Sam propped him on his hip and whisked him off to the laundromat down the street, where it was much warmer. Sam was familiar with the place and quickly claimed a few seats in the inner part of the business. He wiped Ben's running nose and gave him an apple juice before loading his clothes, letting Ben put in the quarters before he settled down on one of the rickety plastic chairs and simply relaxed.

"Hey Unca Sam."

Sam snapped out of doze, sure that Ben was about to tell him that the first load was done, but the washing machine was still running.

"What's up, kid?" he asked, turning to face Ben, who was sitting in the chair next to him with a coloring book and a set of crayons, the 64 set that Sam had made sure he had so he could be that kid. His aura was swirling with the usual variety of colors like a dizzying rainbow, though the peach from earlier was gone, replaced by a more yellow orange hue that Sam instinctively placed as nervousness.

Ben sniffed and rubbed his pink nose before continuing. "Why aren't you my dad?"

Oh shit.

Sam shifted uncomfortably, trying to find the right words. How do you respond to something like that? He knew that Lisa always joked about how good at parenting he was, and he certainly ended up watching Ben a lot. Sometimes he even felt like Ben's dad at times, but Ben certainly didn't think that, did he? Dean was around enough for Ben to know that he was Ben's dad, and their relationship seemed good enough.

"Why do you ask?" Sam asked finally, deciding that he might as well get a little clarification before he fucked things up.

Ben simply shrugged, a disturbingly calm expression on his chubby face considering the subject they were discussing. "Well, cause sometimes you feel more like my dad than Daddy. Daddy's fun, but
you're funner."

Fun? How was he more fun than Dean? Dean was the one that took Ben on rides in the Impala and carnivals, while the most Sam could do was take the kid to the park or the library if he had time. Dean always said he turned into a middle aged frumpy dad with Ben, but Sam was just watching over Ben in the best way he could without breaking the bank.

"How am I funner?" Sam asked, disregarding the improper grammar in the search for the truth.

"Cause you read with me, and I like reading. Daddy says reading is boring."

Sam frowned, sensing that the morsel he had just been given was just the tip of the iceberg of the situation, but his clothes were done, and he had to switch the load.

The rest of the time spent in the laundromat passed in less tense conversation, as it seemed the whole debacle slipped Ben's mind. Sam still mulled over it as they walked back to his apartment, Ben balanced on his hip.

Dean and Lisa had been high school sweethearts, though that hadn't lasted for long. Their personalities were too different, and they had split shortly after Ben was born. They were just too young, and Dean didn't want to be tied down like that, what with all his commitment issues and shit. He didn't abandon Ben though, and he raised him as best he could from his position and made monthly payments without missing a beat. Ben, in many ways, liked to mimic Dean, from the clothes he wore to the head banging music they both liked to listen to, but perhaps Ben's personality was shifting. Little kids did that as they grew and developed, and maybe Ben's differences were finally showing. Ben, while a charmer like Dean, wasn't nearly as open with conversation, and tended to hide behind legs when meeting new people. Unlike Dean, he preferred reading and coloring than the outdoors, and he definitely wasn't interested in cars like Dean. Whether or not that came from Sam's involvement with Ben was unclear, but maybe it was.

Sam unlocked his apartment almost fearfully. What if Ben was mimicking him now? The thought was terrifying, as while Sam was certainly mature for the young age of nineteen, he certainly wasn't the role model everyone thought he was. His sleeping habits were shitty, his diet just barely a step above, and he lost himself in the grind of life, emerging as a hollow shell by either the end of his shift or the end of his last class. Stress and depression were heavy weights on his shoulders, and he didn't even want to think about the whole Jess debacle.

The broad man cringed. God, Jess. He was glad Ben had stopped asking about her a few months ago. Sam was sure Lisa had said something, and maybe even Dean, about why Jess was suddenly a taboo subject. Even Ellen winced hearing the she-devil's name, and she had hardly known the vivacious blonde that had so thoroughly stomped on Sam's heart.

"Hey, Ben!"

Oh, Dean was here already. Sam instinctively let Ben go, dropping his bags down as Ben ran over to the green eyed man with a shriek of excitement. All Sam could think was that Dean was here early, and who had let him in if Kevin wasn't here? He hadn't gotten around to giving Dean a key yet.

"Hey man."

Surprise number two. His introverted roommate was out and about, sipping on a mug of tea while sitting on the kitchen counter. Kevin was hardly ever around, between his time spent in his room and on campus, but here he was, looking rather worse for the wear.
"Kevin? What are you doing here, dude?" Sam asked, ignoring Ben and Dean's joyous reunion and their bright auras. Kevin's aura was off, almost sickly in color.

Kevin shook his head, his face pale and drawn. "I was at class, but...man, you know Professor Reynolds?"

Sam nodded, his attention now fully focused on the shorter man. Kevin was seventeen and smart as hell, having already graduated from high school and now taking college courses like they were nothing. If something serious had happened on campus, Sam wanted to know.

"Yeah, what about him?" Sam asked, sitting on the spare stool.

Kevin screwed up his face. "His class...ugh, it was disgusting."

Sam blinked, then arched an eyebrow. What about Mr. Reynolds's class?

Kevin took a large gulp of his tea, dark eyes flitting to the corner where Dean was entertaining Ben with something he had bought for him, before he leaned in and continued.

"His classroom was a mess." Kevin said quietly, small hands clenched around his mug in a white knuckled death grip. "Sam, it was awful. I was in the front of the crowd since I had gotten there early that morning, and-and... God, there was blood everywhere, like...like some kind of horror movie! And there was a m-message written in blood..."

Kevin's eyes were almost feverish now, and Sam gulped as a grisly image appeared in his mind of the scene his roommate had laid out.

"Are you OK?" Sam asked, deciding to push the event out of his mind for now. Kevin didn't look so good, and Sam was pretty sure he had caught some sort of bug. The events of the day probably hadn't helped. "Why don't you get some sleep, and some Tylenol? You look a little peaky."

Kevin shivered, and Sam stood up to grab some Tylenol, shooting Dean a look that said 'give me a few minutes', before he helped the Asian boy.

After he got Kevin settled in his room, Sam shut the door softly and turned to Dean, who was waiting patiently as Ben played with what looked like a new toy truck on the floor. Dean's typical supernova, apple green and teal aura was almost too much to bear after the news Sam had heard, but Dean's large aura had the calming effect it usually did.

"Everything cool?" Dean asked, voice gruff, and Sam inclined his head towards the small kitchen, which was separated from the living room by a small breakfast bar thing. Dean followed, and Sam began to recount what Kevin had told him.

"This happened today?" Dean asked, crossing his arms over his chest as his aura darkened visibly, like it always did when he got determined, or stubborn. "On your campus?"

"I guess. I don't have class today, so I wasn't anywhere near there." Sam said, sighing. "I'm assuming they cancelled classes for the day, but probably not tomorrow-"

"You're not going back there tomorrow." Dean interrupted firmly in that no-nonsense, 'I'm the older brother and I know better' voice. "Not when there's a psychotic maniac on the loose!"

Sam stared at him. "Dean, really? There's thousands of people on the campus. I'll be fine."

Dean's nostrils flared and his jaw tightened, but he didn't argue the point, much to Sam's relief.
Overprotective was Dean's middle name, and Sam knew that Dean would walk with him all over campus if he could.

Sam shuddered at the thought. How embarrassing. He had had more than his fair share of Dean's worry wart ways back when he was still a kid.

"Watch your back." Dean said grudgingly after a minute of thinking and a tumultuous aura that, near the end, lightened to its previous, soothing apple green and teal undertones. "You use what I taught you, what Dad taught us. Don't take any chances."

Sam winced, thinking of what exactly he had been taught, before nodding reluctantly. Arguing with Dean over it would only end in a screaming match, and Ben did not need to hear that.

"Are we goin' now, Daddy?"

The brothers both looked down at Ben, who was waiting patiently with his toy in hand.

Dean's eyes softened visibly, his aura flashing with a color that Sam had learned to associate with pride, fatherly pride in particular. John's aura had turned like that a handful of times, mostly to Dean, as Sam couldn't remember the last time John's aura had turned like that for him.

"Yeah, let's go buddy." Dean said, taking his son's hand. "Say goodbye to Uncle Sam."

Ben echoed his father's words, flashing a cheeky smile complete with dimples that Sam was sure Lisa hadn't taught him. Dean gave him one last loaded look that carried a whole silent conversation before they were gone, the door clicking shut behind them.

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Chapter End Notes

This is my first time posting anything I've written, so I hope you've enjoyed it so far and will continue to read. I plan on updating this, I swear.
Chapter Two: The Language of Angels

Thursday morning dawned early at 6:30 for Sam, who woke up feeling the most refreshed he had felt all week. He was still tired, and definitely wasn't feeling great enough for an early morning jog liked he used to be able to do, but the heavy numbness of exhaustion was gone.

After taking a hot shower and dressing in a typical casual weekday outfit (outer jacket, flannel, and some well-worn jeans), Sam grabbed his backpack and banged on Kevin's door as he walked down the hall, hearing a telltale groan from inside just as his roommate's alarm went off.

"I didn't need that!" Kevin yelled, and Sam snorted. Kevin, unlike him, wasn't capable of running very well on minimum amounts of sleep, and definitely wasn't a morning person.

"Sure you didn't," Sam replied, taking the time to toss a discarded jacket over the sofa. "Don't forget your mom's coming by today. She called yesterday and I told her you were sick."

There was a quiet pause, and then the sounds of Kevin scrambling out of bed and hitting the floor with a thump as he registered what Sam said.

"Dammit! Sam, why would you do that?"

"I did it for your own good," Sam called out with a faint smile as he left the apartment. Mrs. Tran was a force to be reckoned with, with a fiery aura that brought to mind July heat waves. Oddly enough, while her aura contained the vivid shades of red and orange Sam interpreted as anger most of the time, she was one of the kindest people he'd met.

Lawrence in the early hours before the morning rush at 8 was probably the most peaceful the city could get. All the night owls have retired a few hours before when the nightclubs closed, and the few that were out tended to have places to be and kept to themselves. Even people's auras were easier to bear at this hour, the lavenders and periwinkles of sleepiness joining harmoniously with the butter yellow of purpose and the occasional pale pink flash of inner peace.

Today, Sam enjoyed the semi-long walk to the Roadhouse, long legs eating up the sidewalk and breath misting in the frigid air. For some reason, he felt like he would have an interesting day today, and decided to trust in the feeling as he walked to work. He had had a long streak of not so great days lately and wanted today to go well, or at least somewhat decently.

The Roadhouse was already open up ahead, standing out with its buzzing neon signs and large glass windows showing the interior of the restaurant. The restaurant was on the fringes of Lawrence, where the tall corporate buildings gave way to suburban neighborhoods, and while it was a bit of a hike from his apartment in East Center, Sam still enjoyed the work experience. Being a waiter was as shitty as it sounded, but Ellen paid him well, and he'd been working there ever since his junior year, so it was practically ingrained in him at this point.

"Don't you have a night shift today, Samuel?"
Sam looked down the side of the building and promptly rolled his eyes at who had called out to him.

Meg Masters smirked back as he approached, a veil of hazy cigarette smoke casting a bluish tint over her surprisingly vivid purple aura. For such a dark and seemingly tormented girl, she had a very pure aura, at least when it came to color. Pure color didn't necessarily mean "good", but it did correlate to having a strong character, and in Meg's case, it meant she was decent underneath her bite.

"I'm here for my paycheck and a good ol' cup of Roadhouse joe," Sam explained, shoving his hands into his pockets as a particularly strong gust of wind blew past.

Meg shivered slightly but otherwise didn't react, even as her unzipped leather jacket flapped in protest. The frequency with which she wore it reminded Sam strongly of Dean with John's leather jacket, the one he inherited on his 16th birthday.

I wonder what's with tortured souls and leather jackets.

"Nothing like Roadhouse coffee." Meg drawled sarcastically as she took a drag. Her dark lipstick was faded, and her equally dark hair was slowly escaping the messy ponytail. In essence, she looked like she had come off a long night shift, and Sam wondered what she was doing lingering at the Roadhouse when the night shift typically ended at 2.

"I didn't feel like going home." she said suddenly as she exhaled, her shoulders slumping temporarily as she spoke like a weight was coming off of them. "That's why I'm still here at this shithole."

Her aura became blue-violet with sadness, and Sam stared at her for a second. She looked almost...defeated.

What's going on with Meg?

"Understandable." Sam said gently instead of mildly reproaching her for calling the Roadhouse a shithole. "Just don't spend too long looking off sulkily into the distance in the cold, yeah?"

Meg’s aura lightened in amusement, though she snorted derisively and shot him a disgruntled look while turning away.

"Whatever." she mumbled, tossing the butt of her cigarette to the ground and grinding it forcefully underneath the heel of her boot.

The loud blare of a car horn made them both look up to see a rusty truck pull up sloppily against the curb. The window was rolled down, and a guy with a scruffy beard stuck his head out and slammed his hand down against the side of the door.

"Come on, Meg!" he yelled. His aura was muddy and very unwelcoming, causing Sam to glance over at Meg.

Her aura had dimmed, resembling the cigarette smoke she had been exhaling a minute ago: hazy and bluish gray, her shades of violets and amethysts barely flickering at the edge of her body.

Sam had seen people change their auras like that. They usually did it when they were putting up a front, or trying to act differently than what they were. He had seen it occur before, though it wasn't very common. It took effort and a lot of willpower to become something you weren't, and for it to affect your aura so dramatically.

Meg looks like a completely different person now.
"Well, see you later, Sammy," she said with a cruel smirk, even as her aura turned pale with fear as the guy in the truck beeped the horn again. "It was just great chatting with you."

Before Sam could say anything, she strode off to the truck and seemed to exchange a few heated words with the driver, who's aura really set Sam on edge. They drove off a few seconds after that, tail pipe spewing dark exhaust into the air, leaving Sam with an uneasy feeling in his stomach.

*Hopefully, Meg knows what she's doing.*

He remained doubtful, however, as his gut feelings tended to be right. What could he do though? He and Meg didn't really talk, save for the jibes they exchanged occasionally, or work-related conversation. Meg stuck to herself, and she had made it quite clear to the rest of the staff that she liked it that way.

The tall waiter shook his head before pushing the matter away. Meg was abrasive and cheeky, but not stupid. If anyone could worm her way out of a sticky situation, it was her.

Warm air enveloped Sam as he stepped into the Roadhouse, banishing away the February chill effectively. It was rather full for a Thursday morning, contrasting auras filling booths and edging along the long counter that ended at a bar set up on the right side of the restaurant. However, there was one distinct aura closer to the left side of the Roadhouse that had Sam pausing where he stood.

"Morning Sam. Need a pick me up?" Ellen asked as she looked up from the register, and Sam managed to tear his eyes long enough away from the familiar pastel aura to flash Ellen an answering smile and nod.

"The usual, Ellen." he said, moving in a burst of boldness to sit next to the P.I that liked to come in on Tuesdays.

*What a coincidence that he's here at the same time as me.*

"You look like death warmed over." Sam said, the line from Tuesday night(or Wednesday morning really), coming to him in a flash of inspiration.

Gabrel jolted, looking up from the glossy array of gory photos in the folder he was flipping through, and Sam offered the man a tentative smile as Gabriel's aura pulsed with recognition.

"No offense, of course."

"Morning to you too, Sammy." Gabriel said, flashing back a blinding smile of his own that made Sam's face feel a bit warmer, even as he wrinkled his nose at the nickname.

"Ugh, only my brother bothers to call me Sammy." he said, and Gabriel shrugged, shutting the folder with a casual hand. Sam noticed before he did, however, that the photos seemed to be of Mr. Reynold's lecture hall.

*Was Gabriel assisting on that case?*

"It's interesting seeing you on this side of the counter." Gabe remarked, swiveling his stool around so that he was facing the college student completely, and Sam leaned an elbow on the laminated counter in response.

"I could say the same for you." he replied, struggling to feel as casual as he sounded. Gabriel's aura was powerful, and at this proximity, he could see the edges of it brushing his knees in warm waves of lemon yellow and mint green. "Working a case?"
Gabriel sighed, rapping his fingers against the cover of his folder, which was emblazoned with the words "Lawrence Police Department" along the front above a police shield.

"Unfortunately. Some sicko decided to paint up a lecture hall on campus yesterday."

"Mr. Reynold's class?" Sam asked before he could stop himself.

*Shit. So much for not trying to butt in.*

Golden eyes narrowed slightly as Gabriel's fingers paused in their drumming.

"Yes, actually. Did you know him?" he asked, leaning forward slightly as his aura shifted to the canary yellow of curiosity.

"I had him freshman year." Sam responded slowly, tugging at the sleeve of his jacket nervously. Gabriel had an intense look on his face, all the mischief and teasing gone, and in its place, a more serious look the tall student couldn't quite mesh with the image he had seen of Gabriel so far.

Luckily, Ellen decided to interrupt then, sliding a tall coffee cup towards him along with an envelope.

"Your coffee and paycheck, dear." she said, doe eyes flitting to Gabriel as her motherly aura swirled pink and white around her. "Do you need anything, Gabe?"

Ellen came across as perfectly normal in the phrasing of her question, but judging by the darker shade of pinks currently flooding her aura, she was feeling a tad protective of him today. Did she think Gabriel was bothering him?

"No, ma'am." the consultant responded politely, though judging by his aura, he had noticed Ellen's double meaning.

Ellen lingered for a moment before looking at Sam, who nodded discreetly.

"Just holler if you need anything." she said before walking away, aura returning to her usual marble swirls of color.

"You had him freshman year?"

Sam looked back at Gabriel, and after determining that he didn't seem to want to let the subject go(*of course he wouldn't, he's supposed to work the case for Christ's sake Sam*), he relented.

"Yeah," he sighed, running a hand through his floppy fringe, "What do you want to know?"

Gabriel perked up immediately. "What was he like? Can you think of anyone that might have wanted to harm him?"

*He's so...enthusiastic.*

Sam snorted wryly. "That's an understatement. Reynold was a hardass, and that's putting it in the most polite way. You can ask anyone about him and get some sort of horror story involving him, and half the campus will probably say they'd kill him if they had the chance."

"So thousands of possible suspects." Gabriel surmised, tugging out a leather journal from the inside of his olive green jacket. Sam noticed with amusement that the sleeves were a little long and flopped over his hands.
"Was the message actually written in blood, or rather, Reynold's blood?" Sam asked.

"Yup." Gabriel responded, popping the 'p' as he wrote. "And judging by the amount, we're looking for a body, possibly two. Who told you?"

"My roommate Kevin saw the class." Sam explained, and the P.I hummed thoughtfully as he blindly groped for his coffee cup.

"Kevin Tran?"

"Yeah. He's not a suspect, is he?" Sam asked worriedly.

"Not in my books," Gabriel remarked as he took a sip, "but the police are dunderheads and will probably keep an eye on him anyway since they don't have any leads."

"Which is why you're working the case now." Sam stated, finishing the unstated thought. Consultants tended to get harder cases that were more likely to go cold. "Do you have any suspects?"

Gabriel shrugged, clicking his pen rapidly. He seemed to be hyperactive this morning, judging by his bouncing knee and the erratic pulsing of his aura. "I think I should get the writing on the walls translated. It's in some kind of ancient language I don't recognize."

A strange pulse of green cut through Gabriel's aura for a split second as he spoke, and Sam frowned minutely.

A lie? Why would Gabriel lie about that?

"May I see?" Sam asked politely, and Gabriel flipped open the folder in response. "I'm technically not supposed to show you these, but if anyone asks your my partner in training," he said with a cheeky wink, handing him a few glossy photos.

Sam peered at the dripping symbols written all over the whiteboard and the beige wall behind it. They looked vaguely familiar, and it took the college student the third photo to finally place the strange symbols.

"It looks like Enochian." Sam mused. "Though I can't be sure. I took an ancient languages class last semester, and we only covered it for like five minutes."

"Enochian?"

"Only thing I remember about it is that it's supposedly the language of angels. We never got into translating anything, unfortunately." Sam said, handing him the photos back. Kevin had been right about the blood; it was practically everywhere. If all that was Reynold's blood, he had to have been drained dry, along with someone else.

"Interesting." Gabriel murmured. "Do you think there's anyone on campus that can help? Maybe someone that specializes in this sort of stuff?"

"I know someone in the history department that could recommend someone. They've got some wild stuff in their library too." Sam offered, sipping his coffee. "Are you going today?"

"Definitely. This is the first solid anything in the case." Gabriel said as he began to put his stuff away in a messenger bag. Sam took note of the laptop sticking out of it and the similar blue police files.
"The police still think it's just some Satanic scribbling and that someone on bath salts did it."

Sam snorted at that, and Gabriel stood, leaving a ten on the counter.

"I'm assuming you have class today." Gabriel stated, and Sam nodded.

"At 9. I'll probably catch the metro into the city like usual."

"Or you can get a ride with me." Gabriel offered, aura only slightly tinged with nervousness.

Sam gazed at the shorter man for a second, taking in his aura with a critical eye. At times like this, seeing the auras around people was useful, as he could judge people's intentions by the colors. It had gotten him out of situations before, but right now, Sam couldn't see any sort of malicious intent in Gabriel's ethereal aura. Besides, the man was a good half foot shorter than him and obviously genuine, even without Sam reading his aura.

"All right." Sam answered, tucking his paycheck into his jacket pocket. "That would be very helpful actually, so thank you."

Gabriel looked taken aback at how easily he agreed, his aura starbursting with surprise.

"How do you know I'm not some kinda psycho, Samsquatch?" he queried as they left the Roadhouse.

Sam snorted at the nickname(Samsquatch?) before shrugging one shoulder.

"I've encountered psychos, and you're not one."

The P.I looked up at him, eyes turning into whiskey as they caught a ray of light. Clouds had begun to roll in while they had been inside, so the irises only gleamed brightly for a moment, but Sam had seen it.

Who even has gold eyes anyway?They're so pretty.

Sam mentally shook his head to clear it of the daze he'd inadvertently slipped into. What was his problem? And why did he think Gabriel's eyes were pretty?

"What kind of psychos have you come across, Sammy?"

"My ex. Which one's yours?" Sam asked quickly in an attempt to change the subject.

However, Gabriel's face said it wasn't going to be let go anytime soon, his aura adjusting to a more cerulean hue of determination.

"Take a guess." he suggested, standing with his hands in his pockets and a faint smile.

Sam looked around the lot, and it only took him three seconds to locate Gabriel's car. Even if he hadn't seen the faint trace of the consultant's aura lingering on it, he would've been able to guess it anyway.

"Why am I not surprised?" Sam groaned as Gabriel cackled with delight.

The bright yellow Volkswagen Beetle sat invitingly near the end of the lot, suiting Gabriel's sunny aura and eyes perfectly. Sam decided then and there that he would forever associate the color yellow with him, even when he was ninety and rotting away in some nursing home.
Gabriel's the yellow man now. Wonderful.

"Will I even fit in it?" Sam asked incredulously, and Gabriel pursed his lips as he looked the college student up and down. His aura was turning an interesting shade of red, and Sam shifted a bit under his gaze.

*No way. Is that...?*

"I think so." Gabriel said with a roguish smile. "Though it might be a *bit* of a tight squeeze."

"That's an understatement." Sam muttered as he stepped into the interior. It smelled like Gabriel, the pine air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror, and stale coffee.

"Just tuck in those long legs of yours, kiddo." Gabriel suggested helpfully, and Sam grumbled as he did just that, kicking aside a few empty coffee cups from various establishments to make room for his feet.

"Just tuck in your legs." Sam mimicked, pitching his voice in a high falsetto. "I have giant's blood running through my veins if you haven't noticed, Gabriel. Not all of us can be midgets."

Gabriel busted out laughing as Sam frowned, turning on the car with a rumble of the engine.

"Call me Gabe."

Sam looked up from buckling his seatbelt to see a soft smile on the other man's face. Inside the cramped car, Gabe's aura seemed even larger, pulsing outward in warm waves that made Sam automatically smile back.

"Gabe." he echoed before tugging on his seat belt. "Can't you have a bigger car?"

The soft moment was broken, and Gabe's almost tender look was replaced with his usual mischievous expression quickly enough that Sam figured he imagined it.

"This one has character." he declared proudly. "Plus, I've taken down an escaping suspect with it, so I can't just get rid of it at this point."

"You *hit* someone with this car?" Sam asked, shocked, and Gabe smirked devilishly as they pulled out of the parking lot.

"Oh yeah. Let me tell you about Wyatt Vickson..."

... Gabe didn't broach the psycho subject until they were caught in a snarl of traffic about halfway to campus. His aura had been cerulean for a while, so Sam wasn't too caught off guard when Gabe broke the temporary silence that had fallen.

"So how is your ex-psycho, exactly?"

Sam watched Gabe's hands tighten just a bit on the steering wheel, and wondered why he seemed to care so much. They had only started talking seriously yesterday, after all.

*I need to be careful with this guy.*

Still, Sam felt compelled to tell the other man as much as he could. There was just something easy about Gabe, something that made Sam want to tell him whatever he wanted to hear and more. If
Gabe made everyone feel like this, then he had certainly gone into the right profession.

"Her name's Jess." Sam started, tearing his eyes away from Gabe. "We started dating my junior year in high school, and she was a complete sweetheart, you know? Just really wholesome, and pretty too."

"Things were good until we hit college."

"She wasn't psycho to begin with?" Gabe interjected.

"Not really." Sam said, thinking back. "A little possessive, but it wasn't anything bad. I thought it was just her being a little insecure."

"But?" Gabe prompted.

Sam took a long drink of coffee before responding.

Jess's aura had changed significantly during college, enough for him to realize earlier than he had let on to his friends and family that she hadn't been loyal, but Sam couldn't tell Gabe that.

"I still don't know really. I think the party lifestyle sucked her in. She was always more into parties than I was, even in high school. At first, it was just us drifting apart. Different schedules, different majors, that sort of thing. I figured I needed to put a little more work into the relationship, and we'd be fine.

Then people started telling me that she was up to shady stuff. I had made some friends on campus, more friends than I did in high school actually, and I knew they wouldn't lie to me about something like that. Even so, I didn't really want to believe them, and it took a lot of screenshots and actually seeing Jess sticking her tongue down some random dude's throat for me to really comprehend just how little I meant to her."

Sam chuckled darkly. "She was wild. Back then, I was in a dorm, and my roommate told me he had seen Jess and some other dude walking out of it while I was out. Apparently, she had stolen my key earlier that day just so she could have sex with some random dude in my bed, and later slipped my key back to me without me even noticing."

Gabe's aura was progressing with red-orange anger as Sam spoke, so the college student decided to wrap up the story quickly before Gabe exploded or something.

"I broke up with her in March of freshman year." he said. "I was going to do it earlier, like before winter break, but stuff just kept popping up. First, it was my family, and then it was finals, so it just ended being March."

She was super pissed. Like, crazy psycho pissed. I had screenshots of just about everything because I didn't want her trying to deny any of it, but she did anyway. Threw a fit, threw stuff in my dorm room, and basically called me a liar and tried to say that I was the one that cheated and did all this horrible stuff. The cops ended up getting called-

"The cops?" Gabe exclaimed, and Sam nodded.

"And then Jess tried to get me arrested by flipping the story, but-

"What?"

Gabe's aura was almost vermilion at this point, and Sam hurried to calm him down, fearful of getting
him any more riled up.

"Practically half my dorm building knew what was going on and spoke on my behalf, so she ended up getting detained. I got a restraining order against her that summer, so it's all good now."

"Still, what a bitch!" Gabe hissed, hands gesticulating wildly as he spoke. "You're literally the walking incarnation of the term 'gentle giant', and she does all that? She'll rot in hell for treating you like that."

"I've heard." Sam remarked dryly, thinking of the various reactions he'd received back when the break up was still fresh and he had to explain what happened. Dean's had been particularly violent.

The P.I took a visibly deep breath before whipping the Beetle through the last remnants of the traffic jam.

"All right, so we've established your ex Jess is a complete bitch. You haven't heard from her, right?"

"Not since last summer." Sam reassured. "She used to text me, but I never replied, and then I got my number changed. I see her sometimes on campus, but she never approaches me."

"Good."

They lapsed into silence for the rest of the drive, with Sam watching as the other man's aura calmed down somewhat. His anger had been an impressive display of color, but the waiter was definitely glad to see the usual mint and ivory hues.

"Where do I go, Sammy boy?" Gabe asked once his aura was back to normal, and Sam directed him through the vast expanse of buildings that made up Lawrence University. Since it was a city campus, things were set up differently from a stereotypical college campus, but the history department and its library was helpfully located in the core of the campus.

"You're not a local, are you?" Sam asked with some amusement as Gabe missed a turn and swore colorfully (son of a whore!).

"Nope. I actually only came here about a year ago." Gabe admitted. "I'm not really the type to stick around places."

"Makes sense." Sam said as he glanced around the car. While it was more or less tidy, there were telltale signs of it being lived out of at some point, like the random toiletries stuck in the compartments on the inside of the door and the unzipped bag of clothes in the back. "But you don't live out of your car anymore, right?"

Gabriel glanced at him. "Impressive deduction, my dear Watson. I have an apartment in an area you guys call North Heights?"

Sam nodded, mildly impressed. North Heights was a decent area to live in, with nice studio apartments and a more art-centered vibe. Definitely nicer than his apartment in East Center.

After Gabe finally managed to park somewhat near the history department (Sam decided he did his best), they walked to the history department, which was housed in a two-story brick building towards the back of the area, separated from the administrative building by a copse of trees.

The interior was quiet, their footsteps echoing on the tile floor as they approached the round receptionist desk. Skylights set in the ceiling allowed light in, illuminating the main set of stairs behind the front desk that led up to the second floor. A few students were utilizing the various tables,
plush chairs, and benches scattered strategically on the first floor, but for the most part, it was empty.

A girl with dark hair and an earth-toned aura was working the desk, and Sam smiled as he realized he had found just the person he was looking for.

"Hey, Hannah." he greeted, causing the girl to look up from the thick book she was reading.

"Oh, hello Sam." she said, bookmarking her page with a smile as her aura changed to a warm amber. "I haven't seen you in a while. How may I assist you today?"

Sam leaned against the front desk and flashed her a charming smile. Hannah was a decent girl, a little on the shy and awkward side, but kind and helpful regardless. She had started school this year and was planning to major in history from what he'd learned, and if anyone could help with the Enochian, it would be her.

"What do you know about Enochian?" he asked, and Hannah tilted her head, blinking her blue eyes owlishly.

"Not too much, actually." she admitted as she ran a finger up and down the spine of her book. "An interesting language, but ancient languages aren't my forte. They are, however, my brother's."

"Brother?" Gabe asked, tapping his police folder on the desk, and Hannah nodded, smiling proudly.

"He transferred here this semester, and he knows Enochian quite well." she responded, before glancing around and lowering her voice.

"Is this about what happened yesterday? With Mr. Reynold?" she whispered. "Because there was a rumor going around that someone had written a message..."

Gabe nodded seriously. "Any assistance with this case would be appreciated. Is your brother here right now?"

"Oh, yes of course." Hannah said, smiling apologetically. "He'll be in the back doing inventory. I'll lead you there, as there's an impressive maze of hallways in this building."

Hannah led them through a tucked away set of double doors, the heels of her boots clicking on the floor as she took the lead.

"I'm going to have to go to class after this, Gabe." Sam remarked as they made their way through a series of narrow cinderblock hallways. "I have a 9 A.M on the other side of campus."

"I'll give you a ride." the P.I responded casually. "Do you have any plans for lunch?"

Sam blinked before looking down at Gabe. His aura was nervous looking, though judging by the streak of bright confidence, Gabe thought his chances were good, but then, Gabe tended to be confident a lot, so Sam couldn't really rely on that.

*I'm reading too much into it. We just met properly yesterday for Christ's sake. He probably just wants to get to know me a bit better, since I'm helping him out with his case and all. A thanks for helping me out lunch.*

"I tend to eat on campus." Sam admitted, shoving his hands into his pockets.

Gabe's face fell a bit, his aura dimming slightly as the confident streak waned.

"But I'm working later." Sam said tentatively, watching Gabe's aura carefully. "So if you want to
drop by sometime..."

The responding pulse of color told Sam what he needed to know, and he met Gabe's pleased smile with his own grin.

"Here we are." Hannah said, stopping at a door marked "INVENTORY CLOSET #3" and knocking briskly. "Castiel is a little hard to converse with, but he'll help."

She pushed open the door, showing a room filled with tall metal shelves stacked with boxes labeled in various handwritings. At the very back, there was a cleared out space big enough to fit a folding table, where a man with dark hair and rolled up dress sleeves was bent over an open file, bobbing his head to whatever music he was listening to. Sam wasn't really paying attention to that though, as he was more entranced with the man's aura.

It was the bluest aura he'd ever seen, with every shade imaginable flowing and shimmering off the man like water. Icy Arctic blue cut through the shades of azure and navy like lightning bolts, lapis lazuli and azure curling around his shoulders and rippling like silk. It immediately brought to mind Dean's aura, which was just as large and impressive.

Who is this guy?

"Oh dear." Hannah sighed before stepping up and tapping her brother on the shoulder. "Cas?"

Castiel looked up sharply, tugging off his headphones. His eyes were just as blue as his aura, and Sam couldn't help but stare.

"Hannah," he greeted, letting his headphones sit around his neck. "Who have you brought?"

The man's voice was gravelly and deep, much like what Sam imagined a rocky ocean shore would sound like.

He's officially the ocean man. There's no other option.

"My name's Gabriel Milton, and I'm a consultant for Lawrence P.D." Gabe said, sticking out a hand to shake. "I'm working the Reynold case. This here is Sammy, who helped lead me here."

Sam rolled his eyes as Castiel hesitantly shook Gabe's hand.

"Sam Winchester." he corrected, shaking Castiel's hand. As he did, the man's aura wrapped around his hand, cool and soothing. It felt almost...familiar in a way, and it wasn't until he let go that he realized that the shape of Castiel's aura was much like Gabe's.

He subtly glanced back and forth between the two as Gabe began to show Castiel the crime scene photos. Aura shapes didn't differ as much from person to person as their color did. Some people's were more centralized around a certain body part, like their head or heart, and some took certain shapes, like a crisp oval around a person, a more diamond shape, or even wrapping around a person to a degree. Some people had a more abstract aura that liked to shift constantly, like Dean's, or one that barely moved at all.

Gabe and Castiel's auras, however, were more centralized on their back. Sam hadn't noticed it in Gabe before since he had been so caught up in the sheer size and fluidity of it, but now that he had something to compare it too, he saw it. Both of the auras liked to move, but the colors seemed to prefer flowing from or over their back, like it was the hub of activity. Castiel's did it more than Gabe's, but the shared trait was there.
Weird, but cool. It's obviously not a characteristic of large auras, since Dean's doesn't do it, so what's the commonality between them?

"Well, Sam did identify it correctly." Cas said, voice cutting through his thoughts. "This is indeed Enochian, though the sheer amount of writing will take a bit of time to translate. Whoever did this wrote out a lengthy paragraph, though that's just a rough estimate. You say this was written in someone's blood?"

Castiel didn't look too perturbed at the idea, a quality Sam found humorous. The man was obviously an academic, as he seemed more concerned with the writing rather than the fact that at least one person died in the creation of said writing.

A blunt, socially awkward academic and a hyperactive jokester of a P.I, so the auras can't be based on personality.

"Police are assuming it's Reynolds, though I can't discuss much more beyond that." Gabe responded.

Castiel tilted his head and furrowed his brow, holding up the photo. "This is far too much blood for one person." he pointed out bluntly. "Either the perpetrator diluted it in some way, which I find highly unlikely, or..."

"Someone else is dead right now." Gabe finished grimly. "I told the police they might find more than one person's blood in their testing. Anything stands out right now that I can work with?"

"Well..." Castiel started, flipping through the photos. "The rune combination for 'angel' is repeated a lot, along with other basics such as 'man' and symbols used to connect phrases, like conjunctions and such. There are more complex phrases in here, though. I can have this done tomorrow, if that would suffice."

"Works for me." Gabe said, reaching into his jacket pocket and pulling out a business card. "Call me when you've got something."

After leaving photocopies with Castiel, Hannah led them back to the front desk, where they left her with another business card at her request("It will slip his mind completely, so I should probably have an extra).

"We're getting somewhere Sammy, I can feel it!" Gabe crowed as they made their way back to his car. "That writing is the key to this case, I know it. I mean, how many people know Enochian? This narrows the suspect pool down considerably."

That odd pulse of green from before appeared in the man's aura again, confirming that Sam indeed didn't imagine it.

He's lying about the Enochian for some reason, but why? Does he know the language? But why would he go through all the trouble of getting it translated?

Sam decided that he wouldn't call the man out on it though. The flash of green could be anything pertaining to Enochian and wasn't specific on what exactly the P.I was lying about regarding it. It could just be that the man knew of Enochian and some symbols, but couldn't translate enough of it. Sam could make good inferences based on auras, but he had learned that keeping an open mind while interpreting them was key.

"So when do you start work tonight, Sammy?"
The college student sighed at his nickname.

*Gabe and his nicknames.*

"5. Should I have a fresh pot of coffee waiting?" he quipped, and Gabe smirked.

"That would be simply splendid, kiddo."

Sam rolled his eyes and gave him a classic, patented Sam Winchester bitch face as they got into the car.

"Whatever." he muttered as Gabe's aura washed over him, instantly making him feel warm and soothing his irritation at the man's liberal use of 'Sammy'. "If you show up, update me on the case if you can."

"Of course I'll show up, Watson." Gabe replied as he pulled away from the curb. "Since you're so interested in the case, does that make us partners now?"

Sam snorted and quirked a lip up in response before looking out the window, mood sombering as he mused on what they had gone through so far.

"This case just gives me bad vibes." he remarked. It was, had been ever since Kevin came home yesterday and Gabriel had shown him the photos of Enochian. Something was off about the whole thing, leaving Sam with an odd feeling of anticipation.

"Off?" Gabriel asked.

"Yeah, like...I don't know, like it's the *beginning* of something." he responded.

"I'm sure it'll be fine, kiddo." Gabe reassured confidently, flashing him a crooked smile.

His aura was tinted sickly green with unease, however, and his smile didn't quite reach his eyes, leaving Sam wondering just how accurate his dreadful gut feeling was going to be, and if the mysterious P.I knew more than he was letting on.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Just a little bit of food for thought at the very end to keep things interesting. I have the next couple chapters planned out for those who are interested, but since I have an extremely busy week up ahead, expect to see Chapter 3 by Thursday or Friday.

I'm still getting the hang of writing, posting, and interacting with everyone, but if you have any questions pertaining to Chromaticity, drop a comment and I'll answer it in the Author's Note.
"How much do you work out, Sam?"

The man in question looked up to see Anna, one of the waitresses that worked part-time, standing a little too close to him. Her lurid pink aura resembled something like overripe strawberries, and Sam immediately felt long unused alarms go off.

*It can't be. Is she really...*

"Excuse me?" he asked, tugging off his headphones. He had gotten quite deep into his Criminal Law paper while on his half-hour break and was still caught up on how to end his paragraph on correctly reading and interpreting statutes. He didn't really have time to deal with Anna.

The waitress propped a manicured hand on her hip and repeated herself. The look on her face didn't help alleviate his suspicions at all.

"How much do you work out?"

From the dim back corner, Sam saw Meg snort quietly and roll her eyes, and couldn't help but relate. He and Anna never really spoke much, so for her to speak to him so bluntly now could only mean so many things, and he was very uninterested.

However, Sam was polite first and foremost, so he decided to humor her. Perhaps if he did, she'd give up and go away, or he could maneuver himself out of the unwanted conversation.

"Uh, not as much as I used to." he responded, saving his work as he replied. His laptop was near and dear to his heart, but it had a nasty habit of shutting down randomly in the Roadhouse break room for some strange reason. Maybe it didn't like the occasional flickering fluorescent light or the physical cloud of perfume that hung over Anna's locker.

"Oh," the redhead remarked, flipping her curtain of hair over her shoulder. "It's just, you have such broad shoulders."

The waitress's aura turned a shade of magenta Sam really didn't want to acknowledge, and he scooted his laptop away as he began to search for some kind of way out of the uncomfortable conversation. He was learning to be a lawyer for God's sake, he should be able to come up with something.

*I'm way too rusty at this. How long has it been since Jess?*

"Dear God." Meg muttered. "How horny can you get, Anna?"

Anna flicked blue eyes in irritation over at Meg, who Sam noticed was sitting up now and seemed ready for a fight. Her aura was flickering angrily, and her brow was furrowed.

*Thank you, Meg.* Sam thought fervently as Anna turned her full attention to the other girl.

The animosity between Meg and Anna was almost infamous in the Roadhouse. Both girls mutually disliked the other and went to great lengths to express it, with spats and catfights erupting often if one sensed the other had offended them in any sort of way. Sam figured it was because they were polar
opposites; Anna was a pretty basic sorority girl that was really into campus life, while Meg listened to head banging music and stomped around in combat boots. It was like throwing water on a grease fire and expecting a good outcome.

Fights between them were so bad that Ellen had actually fired both of them on one occasion, but ended up rehiring them because Anna threw a fit of epic proportions, and Meg was actually a very efficient waitress underneath her snark. Not even Jo could handle them, and she was usually good at taming raging individuals.

Usually, Sam was the one that split the two of them up, but right now, he needed to make his escape. So he grabbed his laptop and his bag before sneaking out of the break room as quickly as he could, leaving the girls to argue over who exactly was the horny one today.

Luckily, the Roadhouse wasn't too crowded tonight, so Sam snagged a booth near the less crowded bar end of the establishment and opened his laptop again. He still had 15 minutes on his break, so he might as well try to put them to use.

He definitely wasn't thinking about how it was almost 11, and Gabe hadn't shown up yet.

*Gabe usually shows up late anyway. He'll probably do that tonight.*

Sam gnawed on his lip. He finished his shift at midnight tonight though, and if Gabe showed up after he left, what would the P.I think?

*Why does it even matter anyway?*

The youngest Winchester paused, frowning at his computer screen.

Logically, it didn't make sense. He had only met Gabriel less than 48 hours ago and barely knew the man. The P.I was obviously a bit older than him, and was much different personality wise, so why was Sam so caught up with him? Sure, he had a showy aura, and gold eyes like whiskey, but those weren't good enough reasons to help the guy solve a case when he didn't even have his number.

"You don't even have his number," Sam scoffed under his breath. He must have been more sleep deprived than he initially thought if he was running around Lawrence playing detective with a practical stranger whose number he didn't even have.

*You're so caught up on his number. Do you want it?*

"You're up, Sam!" Ellen called out from the register, and Sam sighed, admitting defeat on the "Gabriel" issue as he shut his laptop. No matter how much he thought about how much he really shouldn't be talking to Gabe, he knew he wouldn't be able to actually bring himself to end the weird relationship.

After tucking his laptop underneath the counter and tying his apron with deft hands, Sam threw himself into what little remained of his shift. At this hour, he usually just cleared tables and wiped them down, as customer turn out tended to slow between 11 and 12.

Anna clocked out shortly after Sam began to work again, her aura stormy with anger. Meg came out of the break room a few minutes after her, looking rather smug. Sam noted with some amusement that Meg seemed to have won the battle this time around, though how was unclear. The fight had been pretty tame this time around considering the fact he hadn't heard it. Unfortunately, the girls tended to get pretty into it, and there had been a few times when they'd filled the whole establishment with their shrieks and catty remarks.
"That's some impressive stacking, my dear Watson."

Anyone else would have jumped at the sudden voice, but Sam had sensed the P.I's aura a second before he actually spoke, and therefore avoided dropping his slightly precarious stack of dirty dishware.

Still, he had been caught off guard a little.

"I could've dropped these, Gabe." he huffed, tossing his head to flip his fringe out of his eyes as he turned.

The golden-eyed man in question was behind him, hands shoved in his jacket pockets and a playful gleam in his eyes.

"But you didn't."

Sam sighed. "Not the point. You want some coffee?"

"Always."

While Sam went to put the dirty dishes in the kitchen, Gabe got settled at the counter, and within five minutes, the waiter was serving up a hot cup of coffee to the other man, who, now that Sam was really looking, looked as if he needed it.

Poor guy. Chasing after murderers must be tiring.

"Long day?" Sam ventured casually as he began to sweep a rag over the counter, and Gabe shrugged a shoulder as he began to rip open sugar packets.

"Yup. After I dropped you off it was pretty dull for the most part; just a lot of paperwork and waiting around for lab results from the crime scene."

"Nothing yet?"

Gabe sipped his coffee experimentally before making an interesting expression of disgust and reaching for more sugar.

"They've managed to determine there's definitely more than one blood type, which we already figured, of course. Not too many forensics from the actual perp though, unfortunately."

"Too bad. Means you'll have to hope the Enochian will be more helpful." Sam said, watching the consultant's aura carefully as he spoke.

That flash of green made a brief appearance as the man made a noncommittal sound. Sam didn't really know why he had mentioned Enochian at all when he knew what he would see. Maybe with every appearance of the proof of the lie, he would be able to talk himself out of becoming friends with Gabe.

Wait, friends with Gabe? We barely know each other. There's nothing to talk myself out of.

"It's how the business works though. A lot of sitting around waiting for test results and very little action." Gabe remarked as he finally stopped adding sugar to his coffee(really, how much did the man need?), "How was your day, Samsquatch?"

"Same as usual, save for this morning." Sam replied distractedly as he automatically swept the empty sugar packets into his hand to throw away(he'd been a waiter for far too long). "I clock out at
midnight though, so I don’t have much longer here in case you were hoping for a personal coffee server."

"What a shame." Gabe pouted. He perked up a bit after a moment though, his aura shifting as if he'd just had a thought.

"If you want, I could give you a ride home?"

Sam straightened quickly out from underneath the counter(there was a trash can beneath it), nearly hitting his head on the edge of it.

Another ride?

"Really?" he asked hopefully. The subway at midnight was an experience he liked to avoid at all costs, and Gabe's Beetle, however cramped it was, was a much better alternative.

The P.I's aura brightened considerably in the face of Sam's eagerness.

"Yeah, of course. Like I'm gonna let my partner in crime make his own way home." Gabe answered self-assuredly.

Sam arched an eyebrow, dutifully ignoring the warm feeling in his chest at being called Gabe's partner. "You mean partner in crime solving."

"That too." Gabe responded flippantly with a wave of his hand and a brash grin.

Sam rolled his eyes, but before he could retort, "Heat of the Moment" by Asia began to play from Gabe's phone.

"Son of a whore." the consultant swore as he fished out his phone before answering. "This better be good," he snapped ominously, looking every bit like he had been interrupted doing something important, even though he had just been talking to Sam. Even his aura was tinged orange with irritation.

His face changed quickly though as he listened to whoever it was on the other end.

"What? When."

A pause as Gabe's aura changed distinctly to his usual colors and sensations, but with a bit more anticipation.

"Right, I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Is this the action part of your job?" Sam guessed, and Gabe ran a hand through his golden hair, ruffling the strands enough to cause a few to fall into his eyes.

"They found Reynold's body." he said bluntly. "So I have to go and check it out, see what I can get."

"Now?"

Gabe began to chug his coffee, an impressive feat considering both how little it had cooled down and the man's stature.

"Hmmm. I can drop you off on the way, Sam-a-lam. Never fear, as I don't go back on my promises."
Sam frowned. "I still have to work for a while though."

The P.I shook his head and nodded at the wall behind Sam. "Check again, kiddo."

The waiter turned to see that the wall clock said it was 11:55, and Sam's eyes widened.

"Well, damn." he said, before untangling his apron. "I'll be right back."

Sam practically ran into the break room and grabbed his stuff from his locker, throwing on his jacket and unplugging his phone, which had been charging ever since he realized it had been dead most of the day. He quickly punched his card and ran a hand through his hair after having caught a quick glimpse of himself in the provided mirror.

"See ya, Meg." he called out to the girl, who was curled up on one of the foldable chairs with a lollipop sticking out of her mouth.

"Uh huh." she mumbled back.

Gabe was waiting by the counter when he came out, aura flared about him in a vividly bright arc. He was clearly ready to go and do the 'action' part of his job, and Sam felt guilty for holding him back.

"You don't have to give me a ride home..." he started as he tucked his laptop away, but Gabe tutted and waved a finger at him.

"Nope, don't even start, Moose." the P.I said. "I'm giving you a ride, and that's that."

Moose?

The man's aura was solid and unwavering with his statement, so Sam decided to drop the subject and just go with it, even if the 'Moose' nickname was somewhat confusing.

Outside, it was frigid, with the wind tugging sharply at Sam's unzipped jacket. His breath misted in the air as he hurried over to the detective's car, slamming the door shut on the cold as he got in.

"It's so fucking cold." Gabe whined as he started the car, keys jingling as he fumbled for the ignition. "I should've stayed in Miami."

Sam looked over at him curiously. "You've been to Miami?"

The P.I smirked. "Been all over, kiddo. Though on second thought, maybe not Miami. I think I sweated five pounds off my first week there."

Gabe steered the quickly warming Beetle out of the parking lot while Sam quickly put his address in the GPS the man had sitting on his dashboard. He remembered the fiasco of trying to navigate campus earlier that morning and didn't want a repeat incident.

"I'm not that bad with directions." Gabe protested, which caused Sam to snort.

"Yeah, you are. Turn here before you miss it."

"Ok, maybe a little." the P.I relented as he almost missed the turn in question. The tires squealed a bit in protest. "But not so bad."

"You keep telling yourself that." Sam said as he shifted in his seat. "Jesus, I really can't fit in this car."
"You are a giant." Gabe pointed out. "How old are you anyway?"

"Nineteen."

The Beetle careened to the right, and Sam yelped as they almost clipped a parked car on its bumper. Coffee cups and empty takeout containers clattered together as the multitude of charms hanging from the driver's rearview mirror jangled wildly.

"Nineteen?"

"Dude, watch it!" Sam said, looking at Gabe incredulously. He hadn't expected such an extreme reaction from him, and his heart was pounding from the sudden movement.

The man was looking right back at him with a shocked look on his face, gold eyes wide.

"You're nineteen?" he repeated.

"Eyes on the road!" the Winchester practically shrieked as they almost rammed into the car in front of them. The detective hadn't gotten his driving under control, and they were closes to crashing.

_I'm going to die in a fucking yellow car._

"Shit!" Gabe exclaimed, stomping on the brakes.

Sam waited for a few minutes (and safely traveled miles) until the P.I had regained his proper driving skills and a more normal colored aura to answer. He _really_ didn't feel like dying tonight.

Note to self: Don't tell Gabriel any shocking news while driving, or he may just drive us into a telephone pole.

The college student took a calming breath. "Yes, I'm 19. I'll be 20 in May. What about you?"

"I'm 24." Gabe responded, his aura still roiling with shock. "I thought you were at least 21, Sammy."

"I know I look older." Sam said. At least he now knew there was a 5-year age difference between them; he had known Gabe was a few years older so he wasn't _too_ surprised.

"It's the height more than anything." Gabe continued thoughtfully. "You have a boyish face to go with that body of yours, so 19 isn't _too_ hard to believe I suppose."

"That body?" the Winchester quoted with an arched eyebrow.

Gabe's aura turned a peculiar shade of peach that reflected the blush Sam could've sworn he saw on the man's face. It was too dark though, with the fleeting strips of street lamps doing little to illuminate the interior of the car.

_I wonder why he's embarrassed._

"Just, you know, you're...er, quite fit." Gabe managed to say in a very uncharacteristic stutter for words. "Extremely fit actually, which doesn't really go with, uh, your face."

"In what way Are you saying I'm ugly?" Sam asked innocently, taking a bit more pleasure in the P.I's discomfort than he probably should.

The older man's eyes grew wide, his aura turning pinker and pinker by the second.
"No! No, that's not what I'm saying." he rushed to add as he shook his head vigorously. "I just-never mind."

"If you say so." Sam said in a sing-song voice and earning himself a playful punch.

Most of the ride passed in playful banter, with the atmosphere slowly getting more and more relaxed as the two men learned more about each other. Sam told Gabe about some of his college friends, specifically the ones that liked to invite him to wild frat parties, and Gabe told him about the various cities across the U.S he'd worked in.

The conversation evolved a bit when they ran into a nasty patch of traffic a few miles from Sam's apartment. Questions grew a bit more personal, and trivial things such as favorite colors and foods began to be incorporated as they found themselves surrounded by a sea of vehicles.

"What about your family?" Gabe asked after a particularly wild discussion on the restorative qualities of coffee (Gabe had been a strong advocate, while Sam had preached moderation except during school).

Sam's smile slipped a bit.

My family.

"There isn't really much to talk about." he responded slowly, the light-hearted mood giving way to something more serious. "I have an older brother, Dean. He's the best brother I could ask for, ya know. He always looked out for me as a kid, and..."

Sam chuckled wryly, running a hand through his floppy fringe.

"This'll sound weird, but he was like a mom and dad wrapped up in one. He's more than my big brother in that regard."

The college student chanced a glance over at Gabe and his aura, unsure as to how the typically laid-back and playful man would respond.

Gabe's aura was swirling with too much emotion; empathy, concern, understanding, curiosity, and something close to sadness. The man's face was soft, much like it had been earlier that morning (which felt so long ago), but a different kind of soft. Sam couldn't really place the expression.

Or maybe you don't want to.

"Dean sounds like a good guy then." Gabe said after a quiet filled minute. "Do you... do you have any other family?"

"My nephew, Ben." Sam automatically responded with a warm smile as he thought of the kid. "He's the greatest 4-year old on earth, and I won't change my opinion on that. How about you?"

"Family?" Gabe asked.

Sam nodded, and the golden-eyed man shrugged, his aura dimming a bit.

"I don't really have any."

While he had spoken casually like he was telling someone something mundane like the time, his aura told a different story. It shrank around him and dimmed to a pale, washed out version of his usually
sunny colors. The way it moved and curled around him was an almost...protective motion, and Sam instantly felt guilty about asking.

*I'm such an idiot. He obviously doesn't like to talk about it.*

"Guess we both have less than stellar home lives." Gabe joked, and Sam smiled at the man's attempt to lighten the subject.

Traffic eased up after that, and so did the conversation. They were back to joking around by the time they came to a stop in front of Sam's apartment building, with the Winchester feeling surprisingly sad to have to leave.

"Well, this is it." Sam remarked, one hand perched on the door handle. He was stalling and knew it, but he found it suddenly hard to leave the warmth and ease of the car to depart into the night.

"Can I get your number?"

Sam practically gave himself whiplash with the way he turned around to look at Gabe, who was starting at him unabashedly.

*Number?*

Gabe's aura was largely confident, if a little shaky with nervousness, and his face reflected that for the most part. This was the brazen, bold detective, and Sam felt his face warm a bit underneath the man's intense gaze.

"If you want to, of course." the older man amended, though his aura remained the same.

*He thinks I'll give it to him. No,* wants me to give it to him.

The college student felt a small thrill at the thought(he had a lot of acquaintances, but after Jess, not so many friends), and gave Gabe a smile as a response.

"Why not?" he said cheekily as he tugged out an ever-present pen from his pocket. "My phone's dead, so you'll have to suffice with the old-fashioned way."

And with that, he grabbed Gabe's hand.

The spark that passed between them felt like static electricity, but stronger. Gabe's aura was almost like a solid thing to Sam, as real as the warm skin and skin and bones that made up Gabe's hand. Sam had a flashback to the Roadhouse a couple nights ago, when Gabe had accidentally brushed his face to give him his highlighter. It felt just like that, but even better since Sam was making contact with Gabe for longer than a second.

*How the hell is his aura so strong?*

"Ouch, you gave me a good zap, Sammy!" Gabe joked, and Sam shook himself free from his reverie, realizing he was getting far too caught up in the feel of Gabe's aura.

"Whoops." he said, quickly scribbling his number down. "That's what you get for driving so dangerously."

"Hey!"

Sam flashed him another smile, trying to cover up the giddiness that Gabe's aura always seemed to induce in him. Really, what business did the man have in owning such an incredible aura?
"Thanks for the ride, Gabe. Good luck with Reynold and the case."

Gabe looked up from his hand with a bright grin, gold eyes crinkling at the edges as his aura shone. It was like looking at a star.

_Holy shit._

"See ya tomorrow, Sam-a lam."

The college student rolled his eyes to save face and shut the door quickly before he did anything stupid like linger. It was freezing outside, but he hardly registered the cold and managed to make it to the stairwell of his apartment building before his goofy grin broke out.

"Jesus Christ." he said out loud as he practically bounded up the stairs, his tiredness momentarily forgotten in the aftermath of Gabe's aura. That last smile the detective had lashed had been radiant, and his aura had almost been a living thing. If the sun had to come down to earth in the form of a person, it would definitely resemble Gabe.

Sam exited the stairwell on the third floor and walked down the carpeted hall until he came to a stop in front of 3-H, which was his.

He hummed a nameless tune under his breath as he fumbled for his keys, finally managing to unlock the door. However, he didn't get very far, as he was accosted by a familiar blur of dark hair.

What the hell?

"Ben?"

"Unca Sam!" came the muffled exclamation from his knees, and Sam shuffled the rest of the way into the apartment with the four-year old attached to his limbs.

"What...wait, what are you doing here?" he asked, feeling very caught off guard and confused as he looked around.

The living room was a bit of a mess, with a lot of Ben's things scattered about. The crayons were spilled out all over the coffee table among a few toy cars, with the pillows piled up on the floor in front of the TV, along with an abandoned blanket cocoon. Some of his textbooks were open like they'd been flipped through, though why Ben would be interested in those Sam had no idea. Any other person would be concerned that he had doodled in them, but Sam knew Ben would never.

"Daddy left me here a while ago. He said you'd come soon, but you didn't." Ben said, looking up at him with dark puppy dog eyes and a blue-tinted aura. "He called you lots though."

Shit.

Sam managed to hold back a few choice swear words (Ben didn't need his shitty role model becoming any more shitty), but he let himself rage at his brother internally for 3 seconds before he responded.

"My phone was dead, buddy." he said genially after taking a calming breath, picking Ben up and settling him on his hip. "But I'm here now. Have you been up all this time?"

Ben shook his head as he wrapped his small arms around Sam's neck. "I guess I fell asleep, cause I woke up when I heard the door."
Sam nodded practically. "Good, cause you have school tomorrow. Did you eat?"

"Uh huh, I'm not hungry."

Sam nudged a few things out of the way with his foot as he moved through the apartment, including an empty chip bag.

"I bet." he remarked dryly. "Come on, I'll get you settled."

"Hmm." Ben hummed, already half asleep again, and Sam sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. He was going to kill Dean the next time he saw him. And where the hell was Kevin if he wasn't here?

Ben was practically gone by the time they made it to his room, hardly stirring at all as Sam got him tucked in(on the side of the bed pushed up against the wall, since he rolled around a lot).

After taking a shower and turning on his phone(5 missed calls and 3 texts from Dean, all from around 8), Sam tossed the offending electronic device on his cramped desk angrily and sat down on the edge of his bed, cradling his head in his hands.

He was 19, for God's sake. 19-year olds tended to party and date and in general get caught up in the flow of life. Everyone he knew did that, and yet here he was, stuck in a rut and babysitting a 4-year old because his brother decided he needed to take off at the last minute doing his stupid job.

That wasn't the problem though, as he didn't mind watching Ben at all. Ben was a great kid, and Sam could truly say he loved him with all his heart and would jump in front of a train for him without a moment's thought. He took Ben whenever he could, both because he knew it made things easier for Dean and Lisa, and he enjoyed spending time with his nephew.

But that scene in the living room unnerved him. It reminded him too much of how he grew up, except back then he had Dean, and this time Ben had been left alone to fend for himself.

What the fuck had Dean been thinking?

"Go to sleep."

Sam nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of Ben's voice, turning around to see the child frowning at him in a very Dean manner. His eyes were intense as if he could read his thoughts, and Sam thought then that the look was very out of place on a 4-year old.

"You're here now, Unca Sam." Ben murmured, tugging up the covers a bit to cover his freckly nose. In the lamplight, they were hardly visible though, much like Dean's acted. "So sleep. Aren't ya tired?"

It's like he really knows what I'm thinking. Sam thought distractedly as turned off the light and got into bed. Ben gave off that feeling sometimes, and while he chalked it up to the child being extremely empathetic, sometimes the Winchester felt like there was something more behind it, whatever "more" could possibly be.

He was too tired to ponder on it much more tonight though. Ben was right; he was tired. The effects of Gabe's aura had worn off, and his exhaustion had returned full force. He could do with some sleep.

"Goodnight Ben." he murmured, finally shutting his eyes.
"Night, Unca Sam."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I made it in the nick of time! I did promise Thursday or Friday, after all. For some reason, this chapter was much harder to write, and I feel like it's a bit weak, especially with the dialogue, but oh well. The next few chapters should be much better, with more action, and really, this is more filler than anything else?

Expect an update at about the same time next week. Until then, tell me what you think in the comments (or not, your choice). I love reading what you guys think of the story so far!
Chapter Four: Family First, Then Lunch

A loud banging cut through Sam's hazy, gold-tinted dreams of coffee and an enveloping warmth. At first, he thought it was somehow part of his dream, but it didn't really fit, and he eventually realized sleep was lost to the racket as the pleasant dream slipped away.

"Unca Sam?"

Sam frowned, rolling over to see Ben gazing at him with wide dark eyes, his tiny hands clutching the covers nervously. His aura was a pale yellowy peach, swirling anxiously around him as he blinked sleepily. They must have woken up around the same time, though what Ben was doing here in the first place was the mystery.

Wait a minute.

Recollections of the night before slowly began to filter through Sam's half-asleep brain, and he promptly face planted into his pillow and groaned.

Who the fuck is banging on my door?

"Stay here, Ben," Sam ordered sleepily as he grabbed the bat he liked to keep nearby. There were sometimes confrontations in his apartment building, but he had never had anyone bang on his door before. "Keep quiet, yeah?"

"Uh huh," Ben said before ducking under the covers to hide.

The college student padded down his hall and to the front door, which was practically vibrating in its frame with the force of the violent knocks. It had to be somebody he knew if they were knocking persistently like that, which narrowed the possibilities down severely.

Whoever it is better have a good reason to wake me up like this.

He peered through the peephole, bat poised over his shoulder, before dropping it to his side as he realized who it was.

"Jesus Christ," Sam muttered before sliding the deadbolt and yanking the door open fast enough for the person on the other side to stumble a bit.

"What the actual fuck are you doing?" Sam asked as he yanked a battered Dean Winchester into the apartment by his leather collar before kicking the door shut. "Are you out of your mind? You nearly scared the shit out of us!"

"Where's Ben?" Dean asked, effectively ignoring Sam's mini-tirade as he looked around the living room while straightening his jacket.

Sam took a deep breath, nostrils flaring as he struggled to control the irritation he felt towards his older brother at the moment.

"You don't get to ask that after what you did last night. What were you thinking?"

Dean's stubborn expression mitigated a bit as he exhaled heavily and ran his hands through his hair,
clearly agitated.

"I didn't want to, Sammy! It was the absolute last resort, and I needed to leave Ben somewhere safe."

"He's four!" Sam exclaimed, throwing a hand into the air. "He could've done who knows what left by himself!"

"Ben's not a normal four-year old like that, but I acknowledge your point regardless."

"He's still four-wait what?"

The green-eyed man shoved his hands into his pockets (the pockets of that stupid leather jacket), and pointedly looked away, highlighting the forming bruise on his cheekbone.

"I know it was very irresponsible of me to just... dump Ben here and leave him alone like that," he said quietly. "But believe me when I say that Ben would have been safer here by himself than with me last night. So let me see my son."

Sam narrowed his eyes as he took in his brother's flashy aura. There was no trace of deceit; just restlessness to see Ben.

Well, tough luck.

"First tell me where you've been," Sam said firmly, nudging Dean onto the sofa with his bat. He noticed that while his brother was sporting a few bruises on his face and seemed to favor his left side, he didn't have any broken bones or other serious injuries. But then, he couldn't really judge at a glance with Dean since his brother handled pain so...uniquely.

Dean glared up at him with vivid green eyes and opened his mouth to protest, but seemed to see something in Sam's face that warned him off, because he looked away and relented.

"I...these guys from the Mayhem Arena kept calling me-"

"Wonderful," Sam interjected dryly, and the older man looked up at him crossly.

"It's not what you think, ok?" he snapped defensively. "I didn't go to fight willingly! Somehow my burner number got leaked and a guy I beat a few weeks ago kept calling me and harassing me for a rematch. Said he'd hunt me down so we could do it tonight, or, well last night."

The younger Winchester ran a hand over his face as he took in the information. "Did he give specifics?"

Dean nodded. "He gave street names I was nearby. I had Ben with me at the time, so I was panicking. I couldn't just give him back to Lisa without giving some kind of explanation, Bobby was too far away, Dad was-"

"We don't leave Ben with John alone," Sam said coldly.

"I know, I know." the leather-clad man said hurriedly. "Ok, Sammy, I know. But you weren't answering your phone at all-"

"It was dead." Sam groaned, flopping down on the couch next to Dean as he felt his ire over the situation wane a bit.

Really, it was his fault. They had done this exchange before, where Sam would leave work (Ellen didn't question it, as she knew what Dean did) and watch Ben for a few hours while Dean dealt with
whatever asshole or fight opportunity popped up.

Because that's what Dean's main living was, besides working at Bobby's mechanic shop. He fought in illegal, underground fight arenas, and Sam hated every aspect of it. It was dangerous in all sorts of manners, and while he could grudgingly respect Dean's talent for combat, he hated who taught him what he knew and began his messed up career in the first place.

*God, I hate John.*

The younger brother sighed.

"Jeez, what a *mess*. So you dropped Ben off here?"

"It was the best I could do," Dean admitted. "I hightailed it here, cause I figured at the very least Kevin could watch him for a bit, but no one ever answered the door, so I broke in."

Sam arched an eyebrow. "You *broke* in?"

"Picked the lock. Kevin wasn't here though for some reason," he said casually before turning to face Sam a little better.

"Look, I didn't *want* to leave Ben here alone, ok?" he said seriously, green eyes intense. His supernova aura reflected his sincerity. "You know better than anyone how much I hate that kind of shit."

The younger Winchester winced as he thought of their childhood, which for the longest had been either a string of motels or long days spent alone in the family house.

"I know your shift at the Roadhouse ended at midnight, so you'd have gotten here eventually. I had to put Ben somewhere safe, and I made sure that he had everything he needed." Dean continued, shifting on the sofa. "I stayed as long as I could risk it, and then I went and took care of it."

"Which is how you got those?" Sam asked, pointing to the assortment of purpling bruises on Dean's face.

The other man shook his head, running a hand through his cropped hair.

"No, the Mayhem guy was a piece of cake. He was on the other side of town, and when I was making my way back here, I ran into this guy getting mugged."

*Of course.*

"And you helped," Sam stated, not surprised at all. Dean had a strong moral code, and wouldn't have walked past something like that at *all* when he had the ability to help. Hell, even *he* wouldn't have.

Dean shrugged. "It was 3 against 1, and it was going south quick. I stepped in, but then I got slashed."

"Slashed?"

"You know how I am, I barely even noticed it." the green-eyed man assured. "And it was pretty shallow anyway, so don't freak out."

Sam leaned back against the couch, eyeing his brother carefully.

Dean had congenital analgesia or CIP. It was an extremely rare condition in which the person
affected didn’t feel pain. He had been diagnosed early on after he had fractured his leg when they were young and managed to walk back to the house on it without a single reaction. It was an extremely dangerous condition, as something Dean perceived as minor or trivial could actually be much more serious, like bruised ribs or internal bleeding. He had been admitted a few times to the hospital because of it, and Sam always worried one day it would be his downfall.

"Where is it?" Sam asked, and Dean pulled back his jacket to show the dried blood stain on his T-shirt and the small rip.

"The guy I saved happened to know how to patch me up," he said with a grin as he showed the neat white bandage on his stomach. "So he fixed me up, but apparently I ended up passing out on his couch. I’ve been running on empty these past couple of days, which is the only reason I fell asleep at all. I came straight here after leaving him a few bucks for his troubles."

Sam grunted as he examined the handiwork critically. He couldn't find any flaws in the bandage, so at least Dean wouldn't bleed out anytime soon. He had gotten lucky last night.

"So can I see my son now, oh wise protector?" Dean asked, and Sam sighed.

"Yeah, I guess." he relented as he stood up. "But zip up your jacket or something first. Ben doesn't need to see that."

Sam left his brother on the couch as he walked back to his room, where Ben was sitting up in bed now. His bedhead was horrendous, and his aura was much calmer now as he yawned.

"Who was it?" he asked curiously.

"Your dad. C'mon." Sam said, picking the now excited four-year old up.

"Really?" Ben asked. "Is he ok? Why was he knockin' so loud? What about the key?"

"He lost his key." Sam half fibbed. Technically, Dean had lost his key a month or so back, and after this experience, he would definitely have to get his brother a new one.

"Daddy!" Ben shrieked as soon as they entered the living room, wriggling out of Sam's arms to leap into Dean's outstretched ones.

"Hey, Benji," Dean responded, holding the child tightly. "Your Uncle Sam took good care of you, huh?"

Sam sighed and turned around, heading back to his bedroom. He suddenly felt tired again for some reason and sat on the edge of his bed. His alarm clock displayed 10:30 in glaring numbers.

So much for Criminal Law. he thought idly. Should I even bother going to school at all today?

The Winchester automatically frowned at his thought process. It wasn't like him to willingly skip class, even if he was feeling a little down or lazy. What was wrong with him?

Probably just the stress of dealing with Ben and Dean.

His phone buzzed, and Sam looked at it with mild interest. He'd say it was probably one of his classmates wondering where he was, but he didn't exactly have any friends in Criminal Law.

The number was unfamiliar, but the text spoke for itself, instantly sending Sam flopping back onto his bed and smiling.
Heya Sam, or at least, I hope this is u. It'd be quite a terrible thing if my dear Watson wrote a fake number on my hand.

"What an idiot," he said softly under his breath before firing back a message.

Sam: I would never do that to u Gabe

The response was almost instantaneous, taking Sam aback a bit. He hardly ever had anyone text him back that quickly besides Dean on the occasion, and Jess back in high school.

Ew, don't think of her. Sam thought, pushing his ex out of his mind.

Gabe: Good, cause then I'd have to find another Watson. Feel like meeting me for lunch?

Gabe: Unless u have class, or are just busy, then thats fine too

Sam gnawed on his lip. While he had missed Criminal Law, he could still make his afternoon classes.

"What to do," he muttered before deciding that he'd have to think on it for a few minutes. Besides, he had to see Dean and Ben out.

After kicking his brother out and saying a proper goodbye to his nephew (Ben managed to detach himself long enough from Dean to give his uncle a hug), Sam grabbed his phone and made a split second decision based on what he really wanted to do.

Sam: Sounds good. Where do u wanna meet?

... 

Gabe's aura looked particularly resplendent against the bright yellow of his car, flaring around him in a wide arc that easily dominated the immediate area. Pale, late winter sunlight turned his golden hair into a halo and cast a new light to his face that changed him a bit. Sam was more used to seeing him in either the dark or under the artificial lights of the Roadhouse and found he rather liked the way the man looked in sunlight.

"Well, good morning, Samsquatch, or should I say good afternoon?" the older man said with a smile as he approached.

Sam shook his head slightly, but couldn't quite manage to contain his smile.

"Hello to you too, Gabe. Hope I didn't make you got too far out of your way," he said, shifting on his feet.

They had agreed to meet at a local pizza place called Pete's Pizza that was a few blocks from Sam's apartment. It was pretty noticeable with its glaring neon signs and vibrant interior, so Gabe couldn't miss it even with his horrible driving skills, and Sam knew it well enough to recommend the food.

"Nonsense, kiddo." the golden-eyed man responded, waving aside Sam's concern. "Let's go have some pizza and discuss the case a bit. I hope you have a strong stomach, cause it's a bit of a doozy."

Inside, everything gave off an incredibly retro vibe. The floors were checkered white and black, the ceiling reflective chrome, and there were even red vinyl stools lined up along the long, white counter. Sam caught Gabe's grin at the aesthetic and felt better about his choice of revenue now. He personally liked it because people's auras tended to show up brighter in the restaurant for some
They got settled at a cherry red booth that looked out onto the street and bickered over their order a bit. Sam insisted he would pay and have a single slice, but Gabe was equally insistent Sam got what he wanted, on him of course.

Sam sighed. "Gabe, I can pay really-"

"Nope, not listening anymore." the consultant said loudly. "Like you can sustain yourself on one slice of pizza. What kinda bullshit is that?"

"But-"

"You're eating, I'm paying. End of story." Gabe declared, his aura showing just how stubborn he would be on the subject.

The college student eventually caved, albeit very reluctantly, and let Gabe order a whole pizza along with two Cokes and some breadsticks. Sam tended to eat a bit healthier, but he really couldn't afford to be picky when he was running low on food, and besides, he would never turn down some good pizza.

I am kind of hungry anyway.

"All right, ready to get briefed on the case, Watson?" Gabe queried as they sipped on their sodas.

"Mhmm." Sam hummed, a bit distracted by the other man's aura. It was especially bright today between being in the restaurant and the man's mood.

Did something go well with the case perhaps?

"So we found Reynold in this internet cafe about five miles from your place." Gabe started. "He was on display, with his arms outstretched, kinda Jesus style. Throat slashed, and some Enochian carved into his chest, along with some written on the wall."

"Ugh," Sam said, wrinkling his nose as his mind conjured up a graphic mental image. "Wait, why an internet cafe though?"

"Apparently he was a regular there. Liked to come in a few hours each week, and was spotted with another person on some of those visits as well." the P.I said, rummaging through his inner jacket pocket and pulling out his notebook. "Let's see...college-age, average build and height, short bleached hair, Caucasian, and mostly seen in a red hoodie with some kind of band logo on the front."

"Huh. That's kind of vague." Sam mused as he swirled his straw around in his drink. "Was the Enochian carved into his chest post-mortem, or what?"

Gabe smirked. "Someone's watched their crime shows."

Sam rolled his eyes. "I read books too, jeez."

"Nerd." Gabe teased. "And actually, yes, it was. That's not the wackiest part about the whole thing though. Reynold was drained dry of all his blood."

"All of it?" Sam asked incredulously. "How was that even done?"

Gabe shrugged. "That's the thing. The police aren't really sure how yet, but personally, I think he turned Reynold's upside down and let the arteries do most of the work through the throat cut, ya
"Gross," the college student muttered, wrinkling his nose. "All that just so he could write some weird message in blood?"

"Psychos are, well, psycho," Gabe said as he shook his head and repocketed his notebook. "The police still don't have suspects yet, and neither do I. There simply isn't any kind of evidence to work with, forensic or otherwise."

"Not even some kind of surveillance footage?"

"Campus cameras are grainy at best, and nobody stands out on them. There aren't any suspicious lone individuals, so I think whoever it was snuck out by tagging along behind some group. However, the internet cafe's tapes were tampered with."

Sam raised an eyebrow. "How so?"

"Some weird kind of interference." the consultant said with a frown. "It's getting analyzed as we speak, but about half an hour of it is just a mess of static and colored stripes."

"Do you think the case will go cold?" Sam asked, and Gabe sighed, propping his head in his hand.

"I hope not. At the moment, it looks like it could, but I have a gut feeling the killer isn't going to stop with Reynold."

Before Sam could question Gabe further on his disconcerting gut feeling, the waitress brought them their breadsticks, and they both simply ate for a few minutes. Sam couldn't help but scarf down the first few, earning a quirked eyebrow from the P.I.

"Someone's hungry," he commented, and Sam shrugged, scooping up some marinara sauce.

"Haven't really eaten properly in a while. Been too busy," he replied blithely.

Gabe's hazel eyes narrowed slightly as he seemed to scrutinize Sam. His aura changed slightly, but Sam was too busy chowing down on breadsticks to really interpret the difference correctly.

"I see. School getting to you?"

The Winchester snorted and shook his head, sending strands of floppy hair flying away from his eyes.

"No, school's fine," he said, pointedly not thinking of his Criminal law class, and the general apathy he felt towards school at the moment. "It's more family stuff than anything."

"What happened?"

Once again, Sam felt almost compelled to speak and found himself telling the other man what had happened with Dean and Ben, starting from the night before. Gabe was a good listener, clearly attentive, and he also asked questions in all the right places.

The pizza arrived near the tail end of Sam's story(a basic cheese pizza since Gabe kept joking about putting wacky toppings on it), but Gabe waited until the college student was completely done with venting before grabbing a slice.

"You can't tell anyone about this," Sam said nervously as he realized he had told a bit more than he anticipated; he had edited Dean's job a bit as simply being a boxer(which was legal), but still.
"My lips are sealed," Gabe promised as he mimed zipping his mouth shut and throwing away the key. "It sounds like an incredibly fucked up situation though. Do you watch Ben a lot?"

"At least twice a week, though I don't mind it really." the Winchester answered. "It just gets stressful when Dean just drops him off and I have no preparation, you know? Lisa's usually a lot better with keeping me up to date about when she'll do that, and what Ben's having issues with or things he might need to get done while he's with me."

"You sound like a third parent," the golden-eyed man pointed out with a teasing smile, but Sam took the statement far more seriously, frowning in thought as he chewed on his pizza.

"Sometimes I feel like one," he confessed after peeking at Gabe's aura, which was pretty inviting and stable. "It's gotten worse lately since Ben keeps spending more and more time with me. I think..."

Sam trailed off and looked out the window with a pensive look on his face, the words dying on his tongue. Outside, the lunch rush had drawn out all kinds of people, their auras mingling as they passed each other, every shade of color imaginable putting on some sort of cursed show for him. He could see stress, hunger, greed, adrenaline, happiness, determination, and hopelessness all at once, with hundreds of different, fleeting emotions mixed in between. Sometimes some colors stood out, but most of the time, the city's citizens ended up turning the streets into a deep, muddy river of emotion that was too vast to breach.

Maybe that's why I hate seeing auras so much, because in reality, they just end up mixing and creating a mess that only I can see.

A hand wrapped around his free one and the damned spark from last night jolted Sam out of his thoughts, though he managed to keep it under control this time. It was weaker than the one before, but Gabe's aura was no less potent as it reached out and caressed his hand, even as the man simply kept a firm grip on his fingers.

"You think what?" Gabe asked softly, his face inticing him to speak, to lay all his worries and tiresome thoughts out on the white tabletop.

That'd be nice.

Sam nearly dropped his pizza slice then, because for a moment, he had seriously considered telling the other man one of his most troubling worries: that Ben was somehow latching onto him as some kind of surrogate father figure that he didn't even need. He had only known Gabe for a few days, if that, and the idea of telling someone he barely knew something so personal was insane. The consultant was charming, incredibly so, but Sam needed more restraint.

Jeez, what the hell is wrong with me? he thought to himself furiously as he offered a reassuring smile to Gabe.

"Oh, nothing," the college student said as he extricated his hand(with more than a bit of regret) and attempted to laugh off his pathetic little weak moment. "Just me overthinking. How do you like the pizza?"

It was a blatant attempt to change the subject, and Sam knew that the other man could see right through it, but luckily, Gabe laid off.

Conversation drifted off to much safer territory as the two men demolished the pizza. Sam was impressed with the amount Gabe could pack away and was quite glad that they had bought a whole pie, because really, how could such a small guy eat so much?
"I've got a great metabolism," the consultant boasted as they finished off the last few bits of crust, and Sam snorted as the man puffed out his chest.

"Uh huh," he responded dryly, "You just like pizza, don't you?"

"Hey!"

Gabe managed the check, which, even though the P.I had been adamant about paying, Sam still felt slightly guilty about. He had polished off over half that pizza after all.

He didn't voice his concern again though since it was all over with, and besides, he had a feeling Gabe wouldn't handle another attempt of him trying to pay.

Sam walked Gabe out to his Beetle, the sidewalk a lot less crowded than it had been when they first arrived. The lunch rush was beginning to taper off, and Sam could make out people's individual auras a little better, though he didn't bother reading any of them much deeper than a cursory glance. He knew only too well how easy it was to get caught up in an aura, and had ended up looking like a fool in the process multiple times when he was younger.

"Going home?"

The college student snapped out of his half daze and nodded, scuffing his toe on the sidewalk.

"Yeah, don't really have much else planned besides working at the Roadhouse tonight," he said, lying about his classes. "It gets pretty busy on Fridays."

"I don't think I've ever been in on a Friday," Gabe said thoughtfully, and Sam smirked a bit.

"It gets kind of wild since the bar is much more popular then. I end up having to be the makeshift bartender a lot."

"Bartender, huh?" Gabe asked as his aura changed into a much more... interesting color, and Sam felt himself flush a bit.

"I just help out with the drinks every now and then, but if things get hectic, I'm the one that breaks up fights too," Sam said before running a hand through his fringe. "If you want to stop by for a drink, I'm sure I can save you a seat if you're not too busy with work."

Gabe grinned roguishly, shoving his hands into his jacket pockets.

"Sounds good, Sammy," he said as his smile morphed into a smirk that suited his face far too well. "I can always make time for a drink if it's coming from my favorite waiter."

"Favorite?"

"I'll see you then, Sherlock," Sam responded with a little smile, the nickname slipping out before he could stop himself. "Don't be too late."

He lingered just long enough to see Gabe's aura practically explode with satisfaction at the nickname and his face brighten before he started the long walk back to his apartment. The man's aura hadn't touched him then, but Sam swore he felt a warm glow in his chest as if he had been the whole way home.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE
This chapter is a bit shorter than the usual for the story (the usual being around 5k at the moment), with the reason being I actually scrapped my original beginning idea for this chapter. It was originally going to be a lot more serious, but I didn't really like it so here we are with some Sabriel moments.

Also, to those that were angry with Dean, I hope my little explanation abates your wrath a bit (hopefully). While Dean will make some questionable decisions (what character doesn't), he won't be a main antagonist. I'm just setting him up for some...ahem...well, you'll see.

I'd mention a bit about the next chapter, but I'm keeping it a surprise. Can't spoil too much, but if you liked the Sabriel in this, you'll enjoy it for sure.
Chapter 5: Unwanted Things Linger

The Roadhouse attire on weekend nights was a little different for Sam due to the vastly different purpose the restaurant served then. Sam usually wore some kind of dark colored shirt that showed off his muscles for intimidation purposes, and also took the time to sweep his hair behind his ears to show off the little silver studs he had gotten when he was 17 just to piss John off. The idea was that if he looked intimidating enough, people would think twice about starting some kind of conflict within the Roadhouse. Unfortunately, there was always at least one kind of scuffle at some point during the weekend, and since Sam was both the largest and most available employee, the task of breaking fights up fell to him.

Sam didn't mind it really. For one, Ellen always paid him extra when he did have to separate some drunken morons that had one too many shots of whiskey, and lately, he saw it as a form of exercise since he hadn't kept up with his workout routine.

"Yo, Sam, when did our cupboards get so bare?"

The Winchester walked out of his room(which really needed cleaning at some point) and into the living room, where Kevin was currently staring into the atrociously empty cupboards.

"I think it started at some point during finals week," Sam confessed as he towel dried his hair. Granted, finals week had been a few weeks ago at this point, but the life of a college student was busy, with food ranking at the near bottom of the list.

Kevin shook his head and turned around before groaning and throwing his hands into the air in exasperation.

"Jesus Christ, why must you walk around like some kind of Adonis?" the Asian boy complained as he opened the fridge. "Some of us are scrawny mortals that wear shirts, ya know."

Sam rolled his eyes and tugged on a shirt quickly. Kevin always liked to poke fun at the fact that he was a bit more muscular than average.

"Happy now?" he answered distractedly as he leaned over his roommate's shoulder to peer into the fridge. "And yikes."

A lone takeout container that Sam was pretty sure was over a week old and a container of peanut butter looked back, the sole survivors of the boys' voracious appetites.

"Exactly," Kevin stated as he shut the door. "We're screwed. I'd say I could get groceries, but you know most of my money goes to rent."

Sam nodded, leaning against the counter. He and Kevin had an interesting arrangement, largely due in part to both his status as a minor and, quite frankly, how loaded Mrs. Tran was. Kevin took care of just about all the utilities and 2/3 of the rent, while Sam handled his 1/3 of the rent and things such as groceries and internet. Kevin didn't have a job, so his mother took care of it, and Sam took care of his end of the deal.

"It's not a matter of money. More like time really," the Winchester reassured, even though it was a bit about money. Buying groceries would definitely lower his balance, as most of his Roadhouse paycheck either went to the apartment, savings, or things for Ben like entertainment these days. "I
just haven't been to the store lately, but it'll definitely be a thing this weekend. You got this list?"

Kevin passed him the rather lengthy list written in his neat handwriting, and Sam sighed internally at it before tucking it into his jean pocket. So much for setting aside some money this month.

"By the way, where were you last night and earlier today, man?" Sam asked curiously. Kevin hardly went out, being an even bigger nerd than he was and deadly serious about school, and hadn't messed with the college party lifestyle at all.

Kevin's aura changed a bit as he looked away, sliding his feet along the tile floor as he scratched his neck.

"I, uh, kinda got caught up with my old friend group," he replied sheepishly. "It was just a weird night of driving around and doing stupid high school stuff."

"Shitty beer involved?" the Winchester asked, amused. He had known Kevin in high school, and even though they hadn't been in the same grade, they had gotten along well, and he could think of a few people Kevin might have gone out with last night.

"I didn't touch any of it, but it was definitely involved," Kevin responded as his aura turned a little pinker.

"Sounds fun." Sam quipped, earning a punch to the arm from his roommate.

"Whatever. I'm getting some work done. Have fun breaking up fights."

"See ya later man."

After fixing his hair a bit, Sam grabbed his jacket and his bag and left for the Roadhouse.

The sun was beginning to set as the college student made his way to the nearest subway station, which was about five blocks or so from his apartment. There weren't too many people out at the time, as it was a little too early for the work rush heading home, but neon signs were beginning to light up as Lawrence prepared for the evening.

Sam pulled on his headphones as he descended the stairs into the subway, swiping his metro card at the turnstiles. Luckily, it was pretty empty, so Sam managed to get on a train quickly and settle into a seat. Lawrence's subway system was rather notorious for being a little shady, especially during the night, as gangs liked to use the system to conduct business. Sam had lost count of how many covert drug deals and other forms of petty crime he had witnessed on the metro.

By the time he emerged from the underbelly of the city and walked the rest of the distance to work, the sky was a dusky purple and most of the streetlights had turned on. The Roadhouse itself had all of its neon signs on, and the parking lot was already filling up with customers eager to kill a Friday night at the restaurant. The college student could tell it would be a busy night.

Entering through the propped open back door, Sam walked into the employee room, where Meg was busy primping a bit in the mirror. She was the only one in the room, though Sam could tell by the scattered stuff that there were a few others working tonight.

"You serving drinks tonight?" he asked, noticing she was wearing a much nicer looking black shirt, and that her makeup actually looked a bit fresher. Her aura was also very bright as if she had had a good day.

Meg tugged up her bra a bit and pulled out a tube of lipstick before turning to look at him.
"Yup, Becky called in sick," she said with a smirk.

Sam groaned with relief and clasped his hands as he looked skyward, silently thanking whatever deities existed. Becky Rosen was a complete pain in his ass, had been ever since she started working at the beginning of the year and found out he was single. While she was completely forward about her flirting with him, she didn't seem to have the guts to actually ask him out, which was a miracle.

"Good things *can* happen to a Winchester," he stated as he dumped his bag in a locker. "Try not to sucker punch Gordon this week, all right?"

"Tell him not to be so misogynistic." Meg fired back as she sprayed some perfume on.

Sam sighed, shrugging off his coat. Gordon was a crude man who seemed to have a thing for harassing the Roadhouse waitresses, but Meg in particular for some reason. Perhaps it was because she was the only who needle him with biting retorts.

"I'll take care of him if it gets physical, all right?"

"Uh huh," she drawled lazily, but dark eyes met his through the mirror, and he knew Meg understood.

Outside, the Roadhouse was alive with activity, the pool tables and billiard tables that went hardly touched during the week now teeming with people ready for a game. A few people were already at the bar even though it was barely five, and even more were sitting in groups at booths and tables, laughing raucously and talking loudly. Rock music was playing, just loud enough to be heard over the din, and Sam could see Benny cooking a massive amount of fries and other finger foods.

One pool table, in particular, was occupied in a different manner, and Sam sighed as he realized who it was.

"Why is Ash on the pool table again?" he asked Ellen as she walked by. "He has a whole cot in the employee room."

She shrugged, marble aura swirling fast with activity. "Dunno. You know how he is with the pool table."

The waiter sighed once more and shook his head before leaping into the fray.

Letting his thoughts roam while he mixed and served various drinks (he had gotten pretty good at it ever since he had stepped up to the plate when he was 18), Sam quickly fell into a bit of a working trance. It was common for him to muse on matters while he worked, all while keeping an eye on the floor and defusing trouble as best he could before things got too out of hand.

Ben, however much he loved his nephew, was quickly becoming a problem. Or rather, it wasn't his nephew that was the problem, but rather, his *parents*. Lisa wasn't even that bad when it came to dropping him off and asking him to babysit as she hardly ever did it, but Dean *definitely* used him a lot more. Sam could understand his brother's reasoning, as Dean didn't trust many people, and trusted even less with the safety of his son. A random babysitter was completely out of the question, though, Sam thought wryly, they got paid for their troubles.

Sam ended up paying for whatever Ben needed while in his care a lot of the time. Sometimes Lisa slipped some money in Ben's bag, but usually, it was left up to Sam to pick up the slack. At first, it was fine, but lately, he really couldn't afford to feed an extra person once or even twice a week, along with the other necessities of a young child. It was a miracle he even managed to do so in the first place considering he was the epitome of a broke, penny-pinching college student.
The waiter sighed as he thought of the four-year old. Ben was a great kid, really. Well-behaved, curious, and very bright, he was certainly different from the average runny-nosed toddler. He deserved better than the constant bouncing around family members he went through.

"Hey Sam, I need four shots of bourbon."

Meg was waiting at the counter with a tray propped on her hip, snapping some gum. Her violet aura looked a little frazzled like it usually did when she worked weekend nights, but at least she wasn't under the influence or intoxicated. People's aura did pretty interesting things under those type of circumstances.

"Coming right up." he responded, pulling out four clean glasses. "Gordon here yet?"

She sneered and shook her head. "Maybe he'll stay out this time."

"And maybe the sun won't rise in the morning. He'll show up at some point," Sam remarked distastefully as he set up the glasses of amber liquid on Meg's tray. For a fleeting moment, he was reminded of Gabriel's eyes as they caught the dim bar light.

_Great, now I'm thinking of Gabe._

"Wonderful," Meg muttered before turning sharply and making her way through the quickly filling restaurant. As she walked, he could see her aura fading gray at the edges.

_Gordon must really have her on edge. Maybe I should do something?_

"Hey, Sam!"

Someone tapped his shoulder, and Sam turned to see Jo Harvelle smiling up at him, a coat draped over her arm and her blonde hair in a ponytail. Her turquoise aura rippled around her like the Caribbean sea, clear and crystalline.

"Jo! What on earth are you doing here?" he asked as he took her by the shoulder gently and began to steer her away from the bar area. "You know your mom doesn't like you being here on weekend nights, especially in the bar area."

"I haven't seen you in a while though," she complained, pouting,"And I wanted to say hi. Have you missed me?"

"Of course," the waiter responded whole-heartedly. He had really. Jo was 17 and still in high school, and she was like the little sister he never had. She was feisty, stubborn, and fun to be around, even if she was a little on the wilder side and prone to incredibly annoying, tenacious moments.

"Good, cause I missed you too," she said in a matter of fact tone, "Have you taken your break yet?"

"Nope," Sam remarked, "It's not even 8 yet." Jo frowned, brow furrowing over her dark eyes as her aura flared a bit. While it was completely different in appearance from her mother's, they acted in remarkably similar ways.

"You work too hard," she said bluntly, "You'll go gray by 30 or something at this rate, and that'd be tragic."

"I don't work too hard." Sam objected, and the teen rolled her eyes and gave him a patented Sam Winchester bitch face that she had picked up from him.
"Yuh huh you do."

Sam shook his head. "I'm not debating this right now. If Ellen sees you out here, we're both dead meat."

The blonde sighed dramatically and tugged on her ponytail a bit before relenting. "Fine, I'll go into the employee's room. Happy?"

"Very," Sam responded as he nudged her one final time towards the back hall. Ellen had a good point when she said she didn't want Jo in the Roadhouse on nights like this, "Go do some homework or something."

"Ewwwwww."

Sam rolled his eyes and made sure she went down the hall before walking back to the bar.

As the night passed, the Roadhouse slowly transitioned to what Sam called 'bar mode'. The usually fluorescent lights were replaced with more yellow lighting, and the lights inset into the bar were turned on. All the TVs were tuned to sports channels to satisfy those that might be betting on a game, and baskets of fries and wings were churned out in massive proportions. People's auras were bright with excitement, and more than a few reflected their owner's tipsy states.

One man in particular instantly had Sam on alert. Gordon, a regular patron that wasn't well-loved, had walked in and settled at one of the tiny tables for two scattered around the bar area. His aura was almost...predatory, and the Winchester tensed a bit. Gordon usually had an off-putting, muddy aura, but this was different. It was darker and angrier than usual.

He looks like he's going to try something.

"Where the hell is Meg?" he muttered as he scanned the room for the dark-haired waitress.

He quickly spotted her in the restaurant section of the Roadhouse and decided to keep an eye on her. Once she came back to get some drinks he'd warn her. The two of them may not have been friends, but Sam detested people like Gordon and would do his best to act as the unofficial 'protector'.

Gordon, however, quickly slipped to the back of his mind as a golden aura drifted through the door. Sam automatically felt a smile tug on his lips, but he did his best to bite it back as Gabe made his way towards the bar. His aura was by far the brightest in the establishment, tinging his immediate area with a pastel hue that lingered in his wake.

"Well, look at you, Sammy," the consultant said, eyes flicking over him before meeting Sam's, "I didn't think you knew how to make an outfit without at least one flannel."

"Shut up," Sam said as he rolled his eyes, even as he tugged self consciously at one of his rolled-up sleeves, "You want a drink or what?"

"The fruitiest martini you can possibly make," Gabe responded with a grin, and Sam snorted.

"Why am I not surprised? Can you have anything without sugar?"

"That'd just be boring," the detective complained as he propped his chin in his hand.

The Winchester quickly made Gabe's drink (he made it as excessively sweet as possible) and slid it to him, sticking a little paper umbrella into the side with a smirk.
"One ridiculously sweet martini for Mr. Holmes."

Gabe smirked right back, eyes gleaming gold. The bar atmosphere accentuated his aura and made him almost glow.

"You're simply too kind, my dear Watson," he fired back as he twirled the umbrella through the drink, a few strands of golden hair falling across his forehead.

Get it together, Winchester.

"Anything interesting happened today?" Sam asked as he began cleaning some glasses, and Gabe shrugged.

"Not really. I went back to the lab to see if they got anything new, and they haven't. Before I left, I did leave an impressive doodle on the taskforce whiteboard.

Sam arched an eyebrow at the other man's wicked-looking grin. "Do I even want to know?"

Gabe began to giggle, and Sam shook his head at the man's theatrics before a flash of movement near the pool table caught his eye.

"Oh great," he groaned, tossing down his rag, "I'll be right back."

Someone was trying to roll Ash off of the pool table, but they seemed to be quite intoxicated already, as they weren't really succeeding. Ash himself was barely stirring, and the waiter took a breath before gently tugging the drunk guy away. It was practically an unspoken Roadhouse rule that nobody disturbs Ash while he slept, especially if he was on the pool table. For some strange reason, he preferred sleeping there.

"But I wanna play pool!" he said adamantly, and Sam nudged him towards the other pool table.

"Play here then, this one's-er-occupied."

The guy mumbled under his breath, but drifted away, which made Sam sigh in relief. Ash had caused a few conflicts with his presence on the pool table before, with the Winchester able to think of at least three off the top of his head that had ended in brawls the mullet-haired man had slept through.

"Sorry about that," Sam apologized as he went back to Gabe, serving a shot of whiskey and collecting used glasses along the way.

"Who's on the pool table?" the detective asked curiously, and the waiter shrugged.

"It's just Ash. He runs the Roadhouse's webpage and does all the tech stuff for Ellen."

"And he sleeps on the pool table?"

Gabe seemed genuinely intrigued by the thought, and Sam rolled his eyes.

"Yes, he does, though I don't think it's very comfortable," he stated with a pointed look at the other man, who pasted an overly innocent look on his face.

"I would never."

"Drink your martini."
Gabe's phone began to buzz, and the man fished it out, glancing at the screen and perking up a bit. His aura flared with excitement, and Sam just knew it had something to do with the case.

_Maybe they got a hit on the other blood type?_

"Hello? Yeah, it's Gabe. Really? Yeah, hold on a sec."

The consultant tugged out his ever-present black notebook and put his hand over the phone.

"You got a closet or something I can duck in real quick?"

"Yeah, sure," the Winchester said, "Who is it?"

"Castiel, our Enochian expert," the detective responded, "He's got the translation."

Sam led Gabe to the employee break room, where Jo was sitting with some homework in front of her, much to Sam's amusement. She looked up as they came in and raised a questioning eyebrow at Sam, who quickly gestured for her to go with it.

"All right, I'm putting you on speaker," Gabe said as he sat down at the table.

"I didn't know you had friends, Sam," Jo whispered as she scooted her stuff to the side, and Sam gave her the bitchface before returning his attention to the call.

"I will warn you that the message isn't exactly revealing much except for a demented mind perhaps," Castiel said with his gravelly voice. Just listening to him conjured up images of the man's powerful blue aura for Sam, "It's also a bit lengthy, so write it down."

There was the sound of rustling paper, and a cleared throat before Castiel read.

"'The devil and his accomplice have been slain. With their blood, the journey to purity begins. Man will bleed, angels will fall, and demons will run from my power. An eye for an eye, a wing for a wing. The time has come for heaven and hell to clash, and for justice to be exacted upon the earth. Beware, for Death has come.'"

There was a short pause as they all processed the gravity of what had just been read. Sam furrowed his brow in thought as he absorbed the words.

_An eye for an eye doesn't sound good. And is the devil supposed to be Reynold?_

"Of course, that's just a rough translation, as a lot of the tenses have been switched up, and there's also something about children either being birthed or tainted by a darkness that I can't really translate correctly. It's all smeared and added rather hurriedly at the end from what I can make out."

"Anything else about the message that stands out?" Gabe asked as he scribbled furiously into his black notebook.

"There's a big emphasis on the 'an eye for an eye' part, along with 'purity'. I can say that whoever wrote the message is no expert at the language."

"How hard is Enochian to learn?" Sam asked curiously, "Would you have to learn it from somebody?"

"That would be the ideal method, but there's a basic selection of works about Enochian on campus, along with some internet sources," Castiel responded, "Anyone with a bit of determination could learn it, but to use such an archaic language would mean Enochian must have some sort of
significance for them."

Sam tapped his fingers against the table thoughtfully, "It's supposedly the language of angels, right?"

A pause. "Supposedly. That's all speculation of course."

There was a meow and the sound of something heavy falling to the floor.

"Dammit, get off of that Bee!" Castiel hissed, earning a snicker from Jo as the cat, or 'Bee', meowed back.

"Also, I thought you should know that there were...people asking about the Enochian," Castiel continued tentatively.

Gabe sat up, aura turning serious. "People?"

"Three, last night," the Enochian expert continued, "At first, I thought they were just mugging me, but one of them kept asking me what the Enochian said."

Sam straightened, feeling a sense of deja vu as he listened to Castiel speak.

There's no way...did Dean save Castiel last night?

"You're OK though, right?" the consultant asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. A Good Samaritan helped me out. I was more confused as to why they wanted to know about it, considering who they were."

"You know who they were?"

"I'm not yet familiar with the inner workings of Lawrence, but I saw an interesting patch on their jackets which I'm sure signifies some kind of gang. It was a red eye."

Shit.

"Dead Eyes," Sam breathed, leaning back, "What the hell do they want with Enochian?"

"I'll call you back Castiel, all right? Just hang tight or something, and don't go outside unless you have to." Gabe said hurriedly before ending the call and getting to his feet.

"This case just got a lot more interesting," the detective began as he braced his hands on the chair and leaned forward, "Sam, what do you know about this gang called Dead Eyes? I've only heard of them in passing at the station if I'm being honest."

"They're this small gang that started maybe... 5 years ago?" Sam started, leaning back in his chair, "They're small, but they're incredibly vicious in what they do, which is usually transporting drugs for other bigger gangs, or doing the dirty work for other gangs at a price. They operate out of Plant Park and kind of run the immediate five-block area."

"You can't go to Plant Park anymore at night without running into them," Jo remarked, shutting her textbook, "And their official gang sign is a red eye."

"Someone must've hired them to intimidate Castiel into giving them the Enochian, but who would go through the trouble? And why?" Sam muttered, chewing on his lip thoughtfully.

"Hey, I'm the private investigator here," Gabe remarked, crossing his arms, "You're not supposed to
worry your pretty little head about it."

"Ooooh," Jo said as she waggled her eyebrows and fixed Sam which a look, which he pointedly ignored.

"Then why exactly am I working with you then?"

Gabe shrugged. "Moral support."

His aura showed he didn't really mean it, but Sam decided to have a little bit of fun with him. He wasn't the only one who could joke around a bit, and he wanted to mess with Gabe a bit. Why, he wasn't sure, but it'd be good to turn the tables on the jokester.

"Wow, fine." he said, standing up and making a show of looking hurt, "I'll just get back to my job then."

The other man's eyes widened, and Jo snickered as he began to backtrack.

"No wait Sammy, I didn't mean it like that-"

"Heat of the Moment" by Asia began to play, and Gabe swore passionately as Sam made a show of walking out of the room in a wounded manner.

He snickered to himself as he heard the man angrily answer his phone, before doing an abrupt 180 in mood as he looked out onto the Roadhouse.

Meg was arguing with Gordon, whose aura was practically screaming homicide. It was practically black with a fury Sam hardly ever saw, the ugly color undulating and lashing out in dark tentacles of color that the waiter noticed left a faint imprint on whatever they touched. It was an extreme change from the man's usually muddy and average aura, and Sam wondered in alarm what could have caused the abrupt change. Yes, it had been rather angry when he had first walked in, but this was completely different.

Something drastic must have happened to Gordon to change it like that.

They were attracting some attention, enough so that even the most drunk around them were noticing, and not in a good way. A lot of auras were darkening with anger, irritation, and the itch to fight, especially those closest to the strange tentacles Gordon's aura had developed.

This isn't good.

Sam squared his shoulders and made his way through the throng of people, ready to defuse the conflict. He wasn't quite quick enough though, as Gordon decided tonight he was going to lash out.

"You little bitch!" he yelled, striking out with a hand that Meg barely managed to duck (she moved faster than he expected), and Sam took three giant strides to grab the man's hand and twist it to the side. As soon as he did, he could see the tentacles wrap around his hand in a heated brand that he could swear he almost felt. A pulse of anger ran up his arm and made his blood simmer, but Sam was far more level-headed than the average person, so he simply took a breath and ignored it.

What the fuck is going on?

"That's enough Gordon," he said in a placating, but firm voice, using his other hand to nudge the waitress off to the side to get her out of the way. "Maybe you should-"
"Fuck off!" the man snarled, lashing out with his other hand to land a glancing blow on Sam's face.

*Oh, all right then. That's how you want to do it, huh?*

"Dumbass." Sam muttered before grabbing the man by his dirty collar and hauling him up out of his seat, "You really shouldn't have done that."

"Get off of me!" Gordon spat, managing to squirm away from the Winchester's grasp as he raised another fist and swung it.

Sam had quick reflexes though and ducked it. Gordon's momentum carried him into a table, silverware clattering and beer bottles spilling as he landed on top of it. Unfortunately, he landed on the table of some rough looking dudes whose auras were looking distinctly unfriendly.

"Ah shit," Sam muttered as the dude began to whale on not only Gordon but the closest by people as well. Soon enough, there was a full-on brawl, leaving the waiter to steer Meg towards the relative safety of the bar as people began to shout and swing.

"What the hell did you just do?" Meg hissed as they ducked behind the counter, and the college student shrugged, even as his mind raced mentally at the weird aura situation he had just witnessed.

*There's no way Gordon could've started that with his aura. Right?*

"Technically it was Gordon. You ok?" he asked, and the girl stared at him before smiling wryly. Her aura was remarkably clean of the strange black fury.

*A strong character, just like I thought.*

"Yeah, I'm just peachy keen right now. I think I'm soaked in alcohol," she remarked, tugging at her wet shirt, which smelled distinctly like whiskey.

A glass shattered somewhere, and Sam winced.

"What got Gordon so fired up?" he asked, and Meg shrugged.

"Beats me. I think he's on some kind of weird drug, cause he was totally erratic tonight."

The Winchester furrowed his brow in thought. A drug *could* have altered Gordon's aura, especially if it was a strong one or some kind of psychedelic, but he'd never seen one twist a person's aura so severely before.

"I'll have to go handle things. Just stay here, yeah?"

"Oh, I have no desire to go out there. Have fun, Winchester," she said dryly as she crossed her legs, settling down on the floor.

"Yeah, yeah," he muttered before vaulting over the bar.

... 

Fighting was something Sam had been trained to be proficient at. It was something John called a "Winchester tradition", though Sam secretly believed his father had taken the "tradition" way too far when it came to his sons. After all, how many people could say they could take down a grown man with one hand tied behind their back, or that they knew ten different ways to kill a man barehanded by the time they were 7?
There was fighting, and then there was what John had taught them. Sam was just glad that he didn't have Dean's condition because John had exploited it in his older brother. He was also glad that he had never told his father he could see auras because he knew that the man would try to find a way to exploit it just like he had with Dean. He and Dean had known that much even when they were young, which was why it had remained a well-guarded secret between the brothers.

As a result, Sam's lessons had been a bit different from his brother's. For one, since he was the youngest, John had expected Dean to be his main protector anyway, and since he didn't have CIP, his father had been a tad less brutal with him. He had still learned it all in the end though.

However, just because Sam loathed John and the violent ways he was taught didn't mean he wasn't good at it.

A table cracked severely as Sam bodily threw a man into it, effectively separating him from another guy wielding the smashed end of a beer bottle. He then disarmed the other man of his bottle so quickly that the poor guy actually stared at his empty hand in shock for a second. He didn't get to stare for long though, because he joined his opponent on the table, which broke in half under the additional weight.

"Oops," Sam said with a wince. Ellen would be mad about that.

"Sam?"

He whipped around to see Gabe making his way through the chaos, nearly getting trampled by two people grappling each other. Sam tugged the other man towards him just in the nick of time, earning himself a chestful of Gabriel Milton.

*Holy shit.*

In close proximity like this, the man's aura was overwhelming, enveloping him in warm, pastel hues that instantly dissolved the tense state he had worked himself into while fighting. Sam allowed himself to bask in it for 3 seconds(Gabe's hair smelled sweet, which clashed interestingly with his cologne) before he forced himself to let go. He noticed though that the man's aura didn't hold a trace of the black fury, even though they were in the thick of it.

*Makes sense though. Gabe's aura is far too powerful to be influenced like that.*

"Watch your step," Sam quipped with a grin, and Gabe blinked up at him before ducking quickly as a glass flew past their general direction.

"I got a call about another body!" he yelled over the din. "Same set up as Reynold, so I'm gonna go check it out! I'd ask you to come with me, but-"

"No, I'll come!" Sam said as he shoved a table out of the way with a hand. "Ellen's probably gonna call the cops soon, so-shit!"

A chair came out of nowhere and nearly hit Gabe, but Sam managed to get a protective arm up to block it. It clattered off of his arm, and the Winchester winced slightly. That would leave a bruise.

"Holy fuck!"

"Let's get you out of here." the waiter said as he steered the stunned detective through the chaos.

The sounds of the bar fight cut off abruptly behind them as the door swung shut. Their breath frosted in the air as they stepped out into the parking lot, where Sam rotated his shoulders experimentally.
He wasn't too sore, though he'd probably have some impressive bruising in the morning.

"You good?" he asked Gabe, who was running his hands through his hair and seemed a bit frazzled judging by the staticky quality his aura had taken on.

"Yeah, I'm great." the man replied sarcastically, "What the hell was that?"

"A...bar fight?" Sam responded in confusion, "It's usually never that bad if it's any consolation."

"No, you! Where did you learn to fight like that? That wasn't just some regular, average fighting. You looked like you trained with, I-I don't know, the Marines or some kung fu master or something!" Gabe exclaimed, swinging his hands in the air to make his point.

Sam winced and scratched the nape of his neck.

I wish it had just been a kung fu master.

'I just picked up some things along the way," he said evasively, "Come on, don't we have a body to check out?"

The P.I stared at him for a moment in disbelief before pointing a finger at him.

"We'll discuss this later," he said in a tone of voice that sounded like, much to Sam's amusement, a frustrated parent. He really couldn't take Gabe seriously when the man had to look up at him to speak and struggled to smother a laugh at the sight.

The door swung open with a bang that startled them, and Sam looked up as Jo emerged with his bag and an exuberant look on her face. Her aura held a trace of the black fury, but it didn't seem to be affecting her negatively at all. If anything, her teal aura seemed to be taking care of it, leaving her in a bubbly mood.

Weird. Different people process it differently?

"Don't forget your bag, Sam!" she said as she practically skipped up to him. "I figured you'd slip out with your...friend."

Jo purposefully looked over at Gabe with a telling gaze as she paused on the word 'friend', a Chesire grin planted firmly on her face.

"Don't worry, I'll cover for you," Jo said before Sam could explain what exactly his relationship was with Gabe. "Mom probably won't mind anyway. Lord knows you put in enough hours here."

She flashed a smile before racing back into the Roadhouse, blond hair a beacon in the night.

The two men stood there for a moment before Gabe made an incomprehensible noise and turned on his heel, rubbing his forehead with his hand.

"Well, come on, Samsquatch," he said as somewhere inside, someone threw what sounded like a table. "We've got a body waiting for us."

"Will I even be allowed on the crime scene?" Sam asked curiously as they made their way to Gabe's car.

The P.I waved a hand, "It'll be fine, as long as you don't have a weak stomach."

"I don't," he rushed to assure, thinking of all the injuries he'd had to patch up on Dean and himself
over the years.

Sam was eager to get inside the Beetle, even if it was cramped. It was much warmer than outside, especially once Gabe cranked up the heat. He sighed and leaned back against the headrest, letting his hair fall into his eyes.

"You good?"

The Winchester glanced over at Gabe, who was looking at him in concern. His aura shimmered with it, and Sam let himself gaze at it for a moment longer than necessary, finding that strange sense of reassurance from the pastel colors.

"Yup," he replied, running a careless hand through his hair, "I just haven't had to deal with a fight of that scale in a while."

"Are weekend nights at the Roadhouse usually filled with violence?" Gabe asked jokingly as he pulled out of the lot, and Sam shrugged, the movement tugging at his sore back.

"Sometimes. Trust me, it's usually a lot more manageable. For some reason, everyone was pumped up tonight." he said with a frown. Gordon's aura had been worrying, and Sam had a feeling that the man's presence had been the major factor for starting the massive brawl. It was like Gabe's aura in that sense, though the emotions they encouraged were much different. How Gordon's typically average aura even managed to do something like that was a mystery in itself.

"Seemed like it. You want some candy?"

Sam blinked at the man before smirking a bit.

"I was taught not to accept candy from strangers."

Gabe gasped, dramatically clutching his heart. "I'm not a stranger, Sammy!"

"Both hands on the wheel, Gabriel," the waiter practically ordered in response as the Beetle swerved ever so slightly, "How did you ever get your license?"

"I bribed the driving instructor with a blow job," the man said with a deadpan voice, causing Sam to choke. His aura had barely shifted at all, which meant that Gabe was either a great liar or that he had actually done it.

If he did, then 1) he's a true menace on the road and 2) he's perhaps interested in guys in some manner.

Before Sam could decide which was true and why it was so important, the P.I burst out laughing.

"Oh, the look on your face!" he exclaimed, slapping the wheel. "I wish I had a camera for that expression. Has anyone ever told you that you have an extremely expressive face?"

"Hmph," Sam grunted, crossing his arms as he sat back in his seat. "Has anyone ever told you that you're a convincing liar?"

"Plenty of times," the consultant responded blithely, "Someone even had the nerve to call me a chronic liar, but that's not true. I'm just very good at keeping a straight face."

The golden-eyed man waggled his eyebrows as he said so, dispelling the mild irritation Sam had felt at Gabe's well-told fib.
It's hard to stay mad at Gabe. He noted, letting the man chatter the drive away as they ate candy
from the stash the man had in his glove compartment.

The crime scene was, interestingly enough, located about a mile away from Plant Park, in a much
smaller park that was constructed in a half circle formation, with one main path that ran through it.
Sam recognized it vaguely; he had passed it a few times in his travel through the city. The largely
unassuming park was now alight with activity though. Yellow crime tape cuts it off from the street at
its entrance, and there were four squad cars parked with their lights on, the blue and red reflecting off
of the shimmering oil stains that were a constant on Lawrence streets. There were a few people
looking on with interest, but it was too late for a real crowd.

"All right, if anyone asks, you're my new partner in training," Gabe stated as they stepped out of the
car, "Which, technically isn't too much of a lie since you are my Watson."

"So we're recreating the first episode of Sherlock now?" Sam joked as he shoved his hands into his
coat pockets, and Gabe grinned brightly.

"That we are Sammy. Let's go!" he said excitedly, his attitude reminiscent of a kid in a candy shop.

The college student shook his head as he strode up to the crime tape on the heels of the golden-eyed
consultant, only hesitating briefly as he noticed the two men in uniform standing guard on either end
of the entrance.

"Evening Garth and Zeke." Gabe greeted with a nod to each man in question. Garth looked like the
youngest, with a playful baby blue aura that reflected his youth. Zeke was older and more serious
looking, with a solemn plum aura that radiated a sense of serenity that Sam was only used to seeing
in elderly people. Zeke couldn't be much older than his mid-thirties though. Both had fairly strong
auras which Sam enjoyed, though he also noticed that there was a presence of another aura that
felt...off.

"It's Gadreel." the older man responded with the air of someone who was in on an inside joke. it was
probably the man's automatic response to his nickname at this point, and Sam wondered how he got
Zeke from Gadreel of all names.

"Evening, Gabe!" Garth replied cheerily, "Knew you'd come. Think you'll have any luck tonight?"

"I hope so," the consultant responded sincerely, "may I introduce you to my new working partner?"

Both of the cops looked over at Sam with interest, who shifted a bit nervously under their gazes.

"This is Sam," Gabe continued, "He's like my sounding board now, you know? He helps to keep me
on track and is pretty sharp too. He's already helped out a lot on the case."

Sounding board? Sharp?

Sam glared at Gabe, who made a quick gesture for him to go with it.

'Oh, that's great!' Garth exclaimed before his face fell a little. "I feel like we'll need it with this one."

Sam noticed that the cop's aura had dimmed a bit, and stepped closer to the crime tape. "What makes
you say that?"

Garth shrugged, looking to Zeke for a second, then over his shoulder into the park before back at
them.
"It...I don't know, it doesn't feel right," he responded with a shudder. "I've seen my fair share of bodies on patrol, but this just feels weird. Like something's...lingering."

The Winchester blinked before it suddenly hit him with a bolt of clarity.

There was something lingering. He could sense it beneath the cop's auras, and if he looked hard enough, could even see it beyond their shoulders against the path. It was dark and malevolent, similar to Gordon's aura but somehow different. This aura was much more potent, and instead of squirming around in rolling tentacles simply chose to sit and drift around slightly like a poison mist.

_Fuck._

"Superstitious, Garth?" Gabe teased, though Sam could tell by the man's aura that he was a little more on guard now. Did he sense it too? There was no way that he should've though, that any of them should've.

"It doesn't feel right," Zeke responded quietly, crossing his arms, "I've seen even more than Garth, and I've never seen anything like it either."

There was a pause as they absorbed the quiet man's words before the silence was broken by the squawk of a radio. Garth jumped, and even Sam jolted slightly at the sound, having been studying the faint trace of the foreign aura.

"Zeke, can you please tell me where the everlasting _fuck_ Milton is?" a woman's voice asked irritatedly, and Gabe flashed a grin.

"That's my cue," he said as he ducked beneath the tape, "I'll see you fine gentlemen later."

Sam stayed behind the tape for a half a second, suddenly reluctant to go further down the path, but he also didn't want to be questioned by the cops, so he stepped beyond the tape as well. A sense of foreboding immediately washed over him, and he shuddered slightly as the dark aura swirled around his ankles like cold, dirty water.

_Fuck, fuck, fuck-_

"Who was that on the radio?" the college student asked in an attempt to distract himself from the aura(why was it so malevolent?).

Gabe started down the path, which was blessedly lit by white streetlamps. They were a bit too far spaced for Sam's liking at the moment, but it was better than nothing.

"The lead detective, Jody Mills," he responded, "I end up working with her a lot, and while she sounds very snippy, she's actually very appreciative of my presence on cases like this."

Sam doubted that, but he didn't say anything. He was too busy trying to subtly shake off the dark aura that seemed to want to stick to his legs. The further they walked down the curving path, the stronger it got.

_Shit, what do I do? If the aura's like this, what will it be like around the actual body?_

"Sam?"

The Winchester nearly ran into Gabe, who had stopped in the middle of the path.

"Uh huh?" he answered distractedly, eyes skimming over the aura, which was skirting around
Gabriel and his aura like oil from water. It was relieving, seeing the fury-filled black shy away from the light and warmth that was Gabe before Sam thought morosely that he probably wasn't half as decent as the P.I if the aura kept wanting to stick to him.

"Are you ok?" the consultant asked quietly, gold eyes bright in the dark. "Is this about the body? Cause you don't have to come if you don't want to."

"No, it's not that," Sam assured before looking down at his feet, which were barely visible through the misty aura. "It's just...it doesn't feel right."

Good job getting your thoughts across, Sam. Aren't you supposed to be the touchy-feely Winchester? He scuffed his feet against the path, knowing he sounded lame.

A warm hand clasped his elbow, and Sam looked at the other man with surprise.

"Garth just has you all riled up," the man said jokingly, though his aura revealed his lack of confidence behind his words. "Just stick by me and you'll be fine."

Sam gazed at the other man for a long second before nodding. He already felt better simply standing near Gabe, with the hand on his elbow doing wonders.

The two men continued down the path, albeit much closer to each other now. Their arms grazed occasionally, sending encouraging waves of warmth that quite literally kept the dark at bay for Sam.

This situation just got way too serious. What the hell did I get myself into?

"About time you got here, Gabriel."

They had arrived, and Sam knew that he had made a big mistake by coming to see the body.

The aura was emanating from the corpse, which was strung up on a streetlamp. Sam could just make out wide, glassy eyes and Enochian painted on the sidewalk before the dark aura reared up like a living thing in front of him. It swirled into a vaguely humanoid shape that turned to face him with a featureless face.

Holy shit.

Sam took an instinctive step back and glanced away, but Gabe took a step forward, completely oblivious to the teeming mass of fury just a few feet away from him. His aura flared out though, and the bright hues managed to dissolve the terrifying mass into a stream of dark mist that dispersed around them for the most part.

What the fuck was that? Sam thought wildly. It saw me!

"Came as quickly as I could," Gabe replied distractedly to the brunette standing off to the side with a blonde woman next to her, "He matches the description I got at the internet cafe."

The brunette nodded her head, no-nonsense attitude bleeding into her strong, forest green aura.

"Name's Trent Cork. 21, LU student with a computer science major," she said as she flipped open a notebook. " a couple of kids found him, and Garth was first on the scene since he was just down the block."

"Which was about an hour ago," the blonde interjected. She had a strong Midwestern accent and a peach-colored aura, which settled around her comfortably. "Who's your pal, Gabe?"
She smiled encouragingly at Sam, who drew a modicum of comfort from the woman's obviously cheery disposition. He needed to keep it together and try to act normal as if he hadn't just witnessed an aura form into a monster a minute ago.

*Good thing I'm a great liar.*

"My new partner," Gabe said as he peered at the body, which was unnaturally pale for even a corpse. "Sammy, introduce yourself."

The college student rolled his eyes before introducing himself to the two women. The brunette was Jody Mills and the blonde Donna Hanscum. Donna seemed rather accepting of him, while Jody seemed a bit more standoffish. Sam couldn't really blame her since he probably looked suspicious shifting around so much and looking around constantly. It wasn't his fault there was some kind of half sentient mist of rage hanging around the crime scene though.

"So Sam," Jody started as Gabe poked and prodded at the body with a pen (Sam didn't think that was very professional, but neither of the women was commenting on it, so he didn't mention it. It seemed to be normal work behavior from Gabe.) "What do you do when you aren't sleuthing with our resident maniac?"

"I can hear you." Gabe quipped, and Sam shrugged.

"I'm a law student at LU. Sophomore year."

"Oooh, a lawyer. Sounds fun, dear." Donna said, and Jody narrowed contemplative eyes at him before making an approving noise.

"Makes sense. Considering the borderline illegal things Gabe has done while working cases, he'll need a good lawyer."

"Hey!"

Donna giggled, and Sam decided to take a small risk and step closer to the body.

A wooden plank had been lashed around the pole so Cork's arms could be stretched out 'Jesus-style' in Gabe's words. Cork himself looked like he'd taken a beating, and, as Sam peered closer (he really wasn't squeamish of dead bodies and stuff like that), he noticed something odd.

"Is he...frozen?" Sam asked, tilting his head, and Gabe glanced over at him with a pleasantly surprised expression on his face.

"How can you tell that it's not just from the wonderful evening?" the P.I asked.

Sam looked at Gabe, recognizing the expression on his face. It was just like John's before he ran him through a new routine he should know, but it had a much more positive connotation on the golden-eyed man's face.

*He's testing me.*

"Ice crystals on his skin and clothes," the Winchester responded, still looking at the other man before shaking his head minutely and turning away, "He also doesn't reek like a corpse should, and has a bit of a blue pallor going on. Was Reynold like this too?"

"Lab found he was frozen as well," Donna commented helpfully.
"So he's storing them somewhere?" Jody asked, clicking a pen, and Gabe nodded.

"Probably some kind of meat locker or another kind of freezer big enough to store a body. He slits their throats," he said, gesturing to the large, gaping cut that traced much of Cork's throat, "and drains them of their blood, which he then uses to paint this."

They all looked down at the Enochian message they had been sidestepping carefully this whole time. Beneath the dark aura, the bloody runes seemed even creepier, and Sam shivered a bit at the sight.

"We're going to have to call Castiel back on that," Sam muttered.

"Yup," Gabe replied, popping the p as he pulled out his phone. "Good thing I have his number now. Did I tell you we got the message from the lecture hall translated Jody?"

Jody arched an eyebrow and tapped a foot, clearly expectant as Donna practically bounced on her heels. Sam hurried to inform them of what they'd learned earlier as Gabriel snapped a picture of the Enochian and presumably sent it to their resident Enochian expert.

"Sounds like an A-grade wacko," Donna said as she tsked, "What's with all the biblical reference?"

"This 'journey to purity' part's got me worried," Jody said, writing in her little notepad, "he's obviously not going to stop unless we catch him."

"Or until he decides he's done," Gabe added as he once again began to circle the body, "I just want to know how he got him up there."

They all looked up at Cork, whose feet were a good four feet above the ground. The light shone down on him, casting dramatic shadows. It was all very theatrical, and Sam wondered idly if the psycho was somehow involved in the theater scene at Lawrence before he frowned. Something about the set up seemed...weird.

"Is it just me, or is he looking at something?"

"He's kinda dead, Sammy," Gabe quipped, and the Winchester threw him a standard bitchface before looking more closely at Cork's eyes. They were glassy with death, but his head had been tied back and tilted in a specific direction.

"He's definitely looking at something," Sam muttered under his breath.

He stepped off to the side so he was facing the same direction as Cork before looking out in front of him. There was a bench on the other side of the path, but Cork was looking higher than that, so it was something in the thin line of trees. His belief was only cemented when he spotted the faint trail of the malevolent aura disappearing off the path, which showed that the perpetrator had made a pit stop.

Sam followed the dark wisp of aura, his feet crunching through the undergrowth. He didn't have to go far before the white flash of racing stripes caught his eye.

"Over here," he called out over his shoulder. The other three followed after him curiously, with two women clicking on flashlights.

"Impressive," Jody remarked as they gathered around the sports duffel that had been poorly concealed beneath a thin covering of dead leaves, "What am I keeping you around for Milton?"

"I have something called feelings, Jody," Gabe retorted in an overly wounded manner, but he
flashed a grin and a wink at Sam, who felt his chest tighten a bit at the sight, "Good job, kiddo. We'll let forensics handle it."

"Speaking of forensics, where the hell are they?" Jody asked, unclipping her radio.

"They're held up in traffic. Come on, boys." Donna said, leading them back to the path.

Jody muttered something that sounded a lot like 'goddamn Lawrence traffic' under her breath before she followed.

After Gabe had a brief discussion with the two women, the duo made their way back down the path. Gabe's part was done until forensics showed up and processed the scene, specifically the bag. Sam knew opening the bag then and there was a foolish idea, but now he was ridiculously curious about the contents.


"We'll learn about the contents soon," Gabe reassured, seeming to pluck the thought right from his head, "It'll become a priority since this case just turned into a double homicide."

"Do you think he'll become a serial killer or something?" he asked, sticking close to Gabe and his brilliant aura. The malevolent aura had faded a bit, but it was still there, and Sam didn't want to take any risks with it.

The P.I sighed, shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't want him too, but at this rate? Probably. Has Lawrence ever even *had* a serial killer?"

Sam paused, mind flashing back to the only serial killer he could think of. It had been almost two decades at this point, but...

"Sam?"

*He doesn't know. It was too long ago, and he's not a local.*

"Yeah, there was one."

His voice was surprisingly steady, but then, it *had* been almost twenty years, and he personally didn't remember much from the time.

Gabe opened his mouth to ask something more before seeming to see something in his face and promptly shutting it. They walked the rest of the way in relative silence.

*There's no way it could be him though. Nothing about this is similar to that at all.*

There was a larger amount of people at the entrance now, and both Garth and Zeke were speaking with people, trying to get them to back up. Sam could make out a white van with Lawrence P.D lettered on the side, and watched as two men rolled out a stretcher.

*Forensics have finally shown up.*

"Ah, this is going to be a bitch to get through," Gabe sighed, shoving his hands into his pockets, "Maybe we can slip past that way..."

Around him, the dark aura paused in its movement.
Sam looked at the aura in confusion before realizing that he sensed something. It felt exactly like the faint mist around him, and he looked into the crowd of people, locating the aura easily.

It was centered around a guy with his hood pulled up, pulsing outward in dark waves that stuck to the people surrounding him before fading away into the night. It was the worst aura he'd ever seen, and all Sam could think was that something horrible had to have happened to the mysterious person to create such a monstrous aura.

Then he realized what it meant, and froze.

*No way. It can't be, but...why would he show up at the crime scene?*

"It's him," Sam whispered, earning a confused look from Gabe.

"It's who?" Donna asked. The women were walking up behind them, but the college student hardly noticed as he stared at the guy in the hoodie.

"He's here," Sam said, taking a step forward as he continued to gaze at the pitch black aura, "There, in the-"

The guy in the hoodie looked up at him before taking a step back. Sam knew he knew he had been spotted, because a moment later, he broke out into a run.

*Shit.*

Sam hesitated for only a moment before he took chase into the night.

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

If you've made it to the end of this mammoth chapter, then congrats to you, as this is nearly twice the length of my previous chapters! I hope it makes up for my somewhat late update. This was supposed to go up around Thursday, but I had a super busy week between submitting my portfolio for my AP class (any fellow artists out there?) and just not feeling well in general.

Anyway, enough about me. I've left this on a bit of a cliffhanger, because that's just how I planned it (I do plan out my chapters a bit you guys). The more I wrote, the more I considered splitting it since it's so long, but I eventually decided not to.

I'm considering writing a chapter from Gabe's POV, but I'd like to know if any of you would like to see that. If it did happen, it would be chapter 8 (I know, very specific, but I have 6 and 7 already planned out). Gabe's perspective wouldn't be a regular occurrence, as I feel Chromaticity is working well so far from Sam's POV, and I rather like working with Sam as the main narrator.

So? Gabe's POV in the future? Leave a comment telling me what you think, and I'll tell you my final decision at the end of the next chapter, which shouldn't be so late unless it becomes massive like this one. Apologies in advance if it does!
The Chase

Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 6: The Chase

"Sam, wait!"

The Winchester ignored the exclamation and leaped over the crime tape in a fluid motion that sent pedestrians scattering. Sam only had time to think that he must make quite the sight before he leaped over the hood of the medical examiner's van, skidding across it and breaking into a full run after the hooded assailant that was nearly at the end of the street. There was only one thought on his mind as he focused on the killer and the dark aura seeping like poison from his silhouette.

I have to catch him.

He heard the clumsy thud of someone landing behind him with a curse and felt the edges of Gabe's warm aura against his back, but it barely broke through the iron-clad determination that had taken over. Sam knew in a dim part of his mind that he had reverted to his old training; the years of sweat and grime and blood taking over at the instant they were needed. John had raised him a certain way, and no matter how hard he tried to shake it off, it would always be with him, rearing its violent head at the sight of injustice or depravity.

Maybe Dean was right. Maybe I can't forget all of this.

A car screeched to a halt as the killer ran into the street, and Sam followed without hesitation despite the honking, his mind already running through the best possible method to take down the runner as quickly and efficiently as possible. It was staggering how quickly the old ways came back to him, and how easy it felt to slip back into the damned Winchester skin. It was a curse, being a Winchester.

"Sam! Wait up! Holy fuck, Jody, get a squad car!"

Gabe's voice faded quickly, but Sam could still feel his aura sitting on the peripheral of his mind; he was still behind him.

But not for long, Sam thought grimly. Even if he had slipped a bit when it came to his workout, he was still fast, and the killer was incredibly fast himself. He could already sense Gabe's aura dimming and hear his footsteps fade with every foot of concrete covered.

Still, he was oddly touched by the consultant's attempt to keep up. If anything, Gabe was stubborn.

Dark mist left a visible trail in the frigid night, one that Sam followed intently, even as he kept an eye on the killer himself. The aura was strong enough that even if he lost physical sight of the culprit, Sam knew he'd be able to find him once again by following the telltale mist.

Regardless, he wouldn't let him out of his sight. It was already going to be hard enough to explain away why he was chasing after some seemingly random person he picked out from the sparse crowd. No need to add fuel to the fire.

The killer darted into a shadowy alley, and Sam followed suit, already on guard. Alleys held lots of things that could be used to deter a pursuant. Trash cans, stacks of boxes and crates, junk; anything really that could be easily knocked over.
Sure enough, the hooded man started doing just that. Sam was faced with two trash cans, crates, and what looked like the remnants of a wooden table that were all knocked into his path. He leaped and dodged accordingly, barely registering the sudden obstacles as his muscles carried him forward.

The killer seemed to grow frustrated by his persistence because he started zig-zagging in an attempt to throw him off. Once the alley ended, he made a sharp left and darted down another parallel alley further down, essentially doubling back. Sam frowned, but rounded the corner blindly regardless, already preparing for the worst.

_I swear, if something gets thrown at me-

A flash of metal was his only warning. Instead of the assailant, he was greeted with a trash can lid that seemed to come out of nowhere.

_Fuck._

If he had been anyone else, he would have received a nose-breaking blow to the face, but he managed to duck most of it, instead, receiving a glancing blow to the side of his face. Sam winced as it hit the side of his face that had already taken a hit in the Roadhouse brawl, but it wasn't severe enough to warrant him slowing down.

"Ok then," Sam muttered, snatching up the lid as his eyes fixed on the killer, who was already halfway down the alley and clambering onto a Dumpster to scale a chainlink fence that blocked off the alley. "Two can play at that game."

Sam aimed, cocked his arm back, and hurled the lid all within a second. It didn't matter that the alley was poorly lit and that he could barely make out the culprit's silhouette; conditions like that were just petty challenges in John's book.

The lid managed to bounce off the killer's back just as he reached the top of the fence, sending him falling over the other side. Sam allowed himself a small smirk as he raced forward, eager to cover the lost ground.

_Gotcha._

However, the killer seemed to be made out of sterner stuff than he had anticipated. He was barely on the ground for a few seconds before he scrambled to his feet, tugging his hood back up over his face before Sam could make out any of his features. All he could see were the stray strands of some kind of blonde hair and the flash of some kind of light colored ring on the man's left hand.

"Shit!" he swore, not even bothering with the Dumpster, instead, leaping straight at the fence. He climbed over easily, having scaled over similar fences a thousand times before, and landed on the other side with a muted splash into an oily puddle.

The killer made it down the alley and out onto the street before Sam could hear the faint wail of sirens. He couldn't see any lights, however, which meant they weren't nearby. They were probably trying to locate them now. The killer seemed to be spooked regardless, because he suddenly made a shift for a particular side street, putting on a new burst of speed.

A golden aura reappeared at the same time behind him, and Sam allowed himself a brief moment of surprise as he followed the suspect.

_Is that Gabe? He actually managed to keep up?_

Warmth increased as the aura grew in proximity, confirming that yes, it _was_ Gabe. Sam managed a
quick glance over his shoulder and saw the shorter man just emerging out of the alley with a phone to his ear.

He'll call the cops, and they'll be here soon. I just have to stay on the chase for a few more minutes.

With a renewed determination (and the reassurance that Gabe was calling for reinforcements), Sam forced himself faster, his muscles burning in protest. He would have to restart his workout routine after tonight if he was already beginning to feel the burn.

Up ahead, the killer made a leap for a fire escape, and Sam quickly caught on to the other's intention. In this section of the city, the buildings were closer together, enough so that if one was athletic enough, or idiotic enough, they could cross the distance between buildings by rooftop.

Rusted rungs scraped at Sam's palms as he began the climb, skipping as many rickety steps as he could by utilizing his tall frame to swing himself up. The building seemed to go up at least ten stories, with the suspect about two floors up. If he moved faster, he could get the mystery man on the rooftop.

All the while, Gabe's signature aura remained within distance, which meant the man was also climbing up.

What the hell is he thinking? Sam thought as he swung himself over the edge of the roof. He was concerned the other man would fall or injure himself in some manner, and with good reason. Surely he didn't have the kind of training that Sam did. Did Gabe get training from the Lawrence P.D? Did cops even get that kind of training?

Speaking of Lawrence P.D, he could hear the sirens, and louder. If anything they were on the block, which meant Sam needed to end this.

The killer was halfway across the roof, white sneakers standing out against the pitch black of his aura. He was heading for the opposite side of the building, and Sam picked up speed, knowing he'd need every bit of it if he was going to follow the maniac over the edge.

Sam was maybe about five feet behind the killer when the hooded figure leaped off the building, clearing the distance between the neighboring buildings and landing on the other, shorter building in a sloppy roll.

My turn.

A rush of adrenaline carried Sam over the edge, the winter wind sending his jacket flapping back like wings as he soared over the divide easily. This was also something he had practiced numerous times, and thus hardly felt a smidgen of fear at the recklessness of the act. There was only the rapid beat of his heart and the grudging excitement of doing something so risky so perfectly.

He landed in a flawless crouch and was about to go take down the killer, who was now limping slightly when he heard a yelp behind him. At the same time, what he felt of Gabe's golden aura took a sharp turn towards fear, and Sam came to a halt as he whipped his head around.

Gabe was nowhere in sight.

Oh no.

"Gabe? Gabe!" he yelled, running back to the edge of the building, the chase forgotten. His excitement and anticipation of finally ending the chase melted away, replaced by a sharp stab of fear as his heart crawled up his throat.
"Please tell me he made it over the edge, please, please-

The familiar flashy aura reappeared as Sam looked over the edge, and the Winchester felt his heart go back to its usual place in his chest when he saw the golden-eyed man clinging to a window ledge. Then it went right back up his throat as he realized how precarious the situation was.

"Shit Gabe, come on!" he yelled, extending a long arm down to Gabe, who looked up at him with wide, scared eyes as he held out an arm.

"Sam!"

Sam hissed as their fingers barely scraped each other; he was too high. He got down on his belly and grabbed Gabe's free arm, bracing himself as he dug his fingers into the other man's arm.

"Sammy, what the hell are you doing?" Gabe asked, voice high pitched with fear, "Wait, Sam-"

"You gotta let go of the ledge Gabe," Sam said, voice steady as he solidified his grip on the man's arm. He could feel the bright aura wrapping around his own arm as if tethering itself to him. "I'm going to haul you up, ok?"

Gabe was out of breath, golden skin pallid as he stared up at Sam with shock. He was already shaking his head violently while Sam was nodding to him reassuringly.

"No, no, you can't. I'm too heavy!" Gabe yelped, clinging to the ledge with his free hand, and Sam shook his head, fringe falling into his gaze.

"No, I got you. You have to let go so I can pull you up," he said as calmly as he could, even as his heart was beating irregularly. He had to be the voice of reason, or else Gabe would panic even more and possibly do something stupid. The man was already scared enough as it is. "You're going to grab my arm and hold on as I pull you up. It'll take 3 seconds."

"Sam, no, I can't," Gabe wheezed, "Just let me go, I'll be fine."

Sam arched an incredulous eyebrow, momentarily taken aback by the man's shift in attitude. "What are you going to do, fly up?"

"I'll-I'll climb up," Gabe responded, but he fixed wide, skittish golden eyes on him. For a moment, Sam stared, before gritting his teeth and retightening his grip on Gabe's arm as he realized what Gabe's problem was.

He couldn't trust him.

It made sense really. They had only known each other for less than a week, and looking at them objectively, they were a strange pair. Neither of them knew the other well or was especially trusting in the other; certainly not enough to place their life in the other's hand in a situation like this. They hadn't had the time to develop that sort of trust. Sam could sense Gabe wasn't a very trusting individual anyway, and this wasn't helping matters at all.

However, even if Sam could empathize with Gabe's internal struggle, he needed the golden-eyed man to place his faith in him, if only for a few seconds.

"Trust me," he said strongly, hoping the other man would. "Please, trust me."

Golden eyes stared up at him for a moment longer before they finally squeezed shut and a white-knuckle grip was loosened from the window ledge.
The Winchester grunted as all of Gabe's body weight was suddenly focused on one arm, but he didn't let go, even as the man squeaked with fright. He simply pulled Gabe up, ignoring the strain on his arm as he used his other hand to grasp the back of Gabe's jacket. A moment later, they were both safely on the roof, panting with exertion as they lay in a tangle of limbs.

Safe. He's safe.

"Jesus Christ, Gabe, what the hell were you thinking?" Sam asked roughly, letting go of the handful of Gabe's jacket he was still clinging to. "Have you ever leaped off a rooftop before?"

Gabe muttered something incomprehensible into his chest(and when had he even gotten there?) before looking up with narrowed eyes.

"You..you made it look so... easy," he managed to huff out between breaths, and Sam stared at him in disbelief for a second.

"That's because I-" he started before swallowing his words. What he wanted to say was that he was trained and that he knew what he was doing because he'd been leaping off of roofs for years now, but Sam obviously couldn't say that, "I have longer legs than you, so of course it was easier for me."

Gabe blinked, then made some kind of disgusted sound before rolling off of him, kneeing him in the gut rather impolitely as he did. Sam barely huffed at the jab, more reluctant to let the man go because he was taking his wonderfully warm aura with him. Somehow, the pastel colors had settled like a blanket over him and had abated the chill of the night like it let off some sort of physical heat he could really feel.

"Have you ever leaped off a fucking building, Sam?" he snapped, scrambling to his feet. "Did you think about that before you went and jumped like-like some kind of moron?"

Sam blinked, almost mildly insulted by Gabe's words. He knew he probably would have been more prickly about it if it weren't for the fact that Gabe's aura had left him feeling warm and fuzzy. Now though, the colors were shifting to more vermilion hues as the man expressed his anger.

"I have, actually," the college student snapped, rising to his feet in a smooth motion, "On a dare, so it's not like I was completely reckless."

At least I came up with a decent excuse, and it's partially true anyway. Sam thought, reflecting back for a moment on the time Dean dared him to leap a building when he was 12. He had done it too, even though it had been a particularly reckless move that even John hadn't approved of.

"Still, what the fuck were you thinking, chasing after the suspect?" Gabe asked, throwing his hands into the air as he aura progressed to shades of orange. "That was far too dangerous for you!"

"Someone had to catch him!" Sam retorted, crossing his arms tightly as he clenched his jaw. "In fact, I almost did, but then you went and almost fell to your death!"

"I told you to leave me!"

"And let you fall?" Sam asked incredulously. "Fuck that!"

Gabe's eyes were practically on fire, the way they were bright with anger. His aura was livid, no longer so warm and welcoming. Sam edged a tiny step back as the now fiery colors threatened to scorch him.
"We could've caught him if you'd left me, but instead you let him get away!" Gabe hissed, hands clenching into fists, and Sam bristled both at the unfair accusation and the sudden change to the argument.

What's wrong with him?

"Me? I decided to save your life." Sam snarled, his fingers digging into his arms as he crossed them even tighter than before. Unlike Gabe, he didn't like to express his anger through swinging limbs. "It's not like I let him get away on purpose!"

The Winchester took a step closer, ignoring the strange heat Gabe's anger gave off and the vivid sparks of color that danced around the man.

"Your life was more important in this situation," he said passionately, causing Gabe to take a step back as the anger in his gold eyes died a bit.

"You still should've caught him when you had the chance," the man muttered, and Sam's nostrils flared as his own anger finally ignited properly.

"This isn't even my job!" he exclaimed, finally uncrossing his arms to throw them in the air in vain. "It's yours. You're the stupid fucking private investigator and consultant extraordinaire, so if anyone should've caught him, it's you! I'm just some dumbass college student running around Lawrence like a chicken with its head cut off instead of studying for law like I should be because some hyperactive stranger I barely know roped me into a psychotic case!"

Sam's chest rose and fell sharply as he jabbed an accusatory finger at a pale Gabe.

"I shouldn't even be here," he said, far more quietly than his previous tirade, "So don't try to twist the situation to something you can control, because you can't."

For a moment, the two men stared at each other, the wind swirling around them and cooling their fiery tempers. Harsh breaths abated to something more regular, and Sam swallowed loudly, his hand dropping as he slowly untensed.

Good job at remaining rational Sam. If only John could see you now.

Gabe's aura went back to its usual pastel self rather quickly, the anger bleeding away like ink diluted in water. His shoulders slumped, and the consultant sighed heavily, toeing the roof with an already scuffed boot as he fixed his eyes on his feet. It was a classic despondent pose, one made even more dejected by the dimmer shades of blue that tinted Gabe's aura.

"You're right," he said, shoving his hands into his pockets. Below them, Sam could hear the sirens wailing, and flashes of red and blue light could be seen reflected in the windows all around them on the street, adding even more color to the night. "That's not fair for you. I-I don't know, I guess I got caught up in the fact that I..."

Gabe grimaced and turned away, and Sam frowned before stepping closer.

"You what?" he prompted gently, the remnants of his anger forgotten in the face of Gabe's disheartened aura.

The consultant looked up at him, golden strands of hair escaping from his usual swept back style to dance around his eyes. He looked exactly as if he'd chased after someone, and was still a bit paler than Sam would've liked, but his eyes were striking regardless. Sam found that he couldn't look away even he tried, because even though Gabe's aura was impressive and flashy, his eyes were just
as expressive and even better to look at.

*Who knew eyes could be so...so...*

A wry smile played across Gabe's face as he shrugged.

"I guess I-I just got caught up in the *adventure* of having a partner to work with, no matter how...*unofficial* you may be," the golden-eyed man started as he looked out to the city before them, "I've never really worked with anyone properly before, not even anyone in the police department really, and...I like working with you?"

*He...liked working with me?*

Gabe darted a quick glance at him before his smile softened into something genuine. Whatever Gabe had seen in his face, he must have taken it as a good sign. Sam hoped he didn't look like a complete idiot.

"I know it seems strange, and it is. I tend to work better alone actually, and we only met properly *Wednesday* for fuck's sake. Yet here I am, calling you up at late hours to talk about murder and crime you really shouldn't be involved in," he continued, face falling a bit, "It sounds super selfish now that I'm really thinking about it actually, but I *do* like working with you. You're smart and determined and good at sleuthing, and you're nearly half as annoying as some of the detectives I've had to coordinate with. So...I guess I just got frustrated, cause on one hand the suspect got away, but at the same time I don't want to see you get hurt."

Sam felt his face warm a bit at Gabe's heartfelt words. His aura held no trace of deceit and even seemed to brighten a bit as he spoke.

Gabriel Milton was a loner. That much was obvious by his partially nomadic lifestyle, and no matter how charismatic and persuasive the man could be with his jokes and bright aura, he kept himself at arm's length from the very people he enthralled with his personality. He wasn't sure why the man did when he clearly enjoyed being social, but Sam knew it wasn't his secret to uncover. Therefore, he felt a strange sort of satisfaction that out of all the people that made up Lawrence, Gabe chose a tired, ragged waiter at a random diner at midnight to be his crime-solving partner.

It made no sense, and a big part of Sam was still hesitant about the whole thing (he was in school, he was broke, he was *tired*), but another part of him was warming up to this new aspect of his life. He had to admit, *thrive* on the dangers and conundrums that Gabe dealt with in his occupation. Who knew being a consultant could be so exciting?

Logically, Sam knew he should walk away while he had the chance and go back to his usual grind in life. He had a goal after all to be a lawyer, didn't he? He was supposed to work hard and carve out a piece of the world just for him, and prove John and all those people that said he'd fail wrong. Hadn't he made it this far?

*But you're almost burned out. You can't keep going like this.*

Between school, the Roadhouse, family and friends, Sam realized that somewhere along the way, he had factored himself out of his own life, as odd as it sounded. When was the last time he had done something for himself, not because he felt he *had* to, but because he simply *wanted* to?

"Tuesday."

Gabe blinked up at him in confusion, and Sam shrugged before smiling mischievously.
"We met Tuesday night."

The radiant smile he was rewarded with could've lit up the entire Lawrence skyline, and Sam knew then that he'd made the right choice.

...

"I'm hungry."

The abrupt statement jolted Sam out of the slight daze he'd fallen into as soon as he entered Gabe's car. After they had given a rather miffed Jody and Donna their statement (the two ladies had been rather unimpressed by the risks he'd taken judging by their auras), Sam had had to explain why exactly he'd gone after the suspect. Luckily, since the dude had run off before Sam had given chase, he'd made himself look highly suspicious, so he managed to slide by just saying the dude had looked fishy and that he felt he had to go after him.

Jody and Donna seemed to accept the rather flimsy excuse (Sam suspected everyone was just super tired and over it), and the duo had then decided to sit in the Beetle for a minute to warm up and catch their breath. Apparently, Donna had hopped into it and attempted to follow Gabe in it during the chase, and just thinking of it made Sam want to laugh. To think that he had been followed by Gabe, who had then been followed by Donna in his Beetle. It must have made quite the sight.

"You're hungry?"

The consultant nodded, squirming in his seat as he turned to face him. Outside, the streetlights cast dramatic stripes of shadows across his face and illuminated the cab in bars of light that gave Sam a strangely nostalgic feeling. It reminded him of the car rides in the Impala when he was much younger, and the way the streetlights would flash by and cast patterns of light and dark within the interior of the car.

I wonder why that of all things popped up in my head.

"I worked up an appetite doing all that running," he proclaimed bluntly, "I don't know how you do it, Sam-a-lam, but personally, I'm famished."

Sam stared for a moment longer before shaking his head.

"Unbelievable," he muttered, even as his traitorous stomach rumbled quietly at the thought. Luckily, Gabe didn't seem to hear it. "Where do you want to eat?"

Gabe shrugged, "I don't know."

Of course.

The college student sighed and leaned back in his seat, absently rubbing his cold hands over his thighs to encourage circulation. Tonight had been particularly cold, and now that he had stopped running, it was beginning to creep up on him.

"You sound like a stereotypical girlfriend, you know that right?" Sam commented with a small smile.

"I do not!" Gabe spluttered indignantly, earning a brief chuckle from Sam that disintegrated into a cough.

"Ah shit," the Winchester said, shaking his head like a wet dog and sending his fringe flying once the abrupt coughing fit ended.
"Shouldn't have gone after the suspect," Gabe teased lightly, though his aura reflected a healthy amount of concern for his well being, "Now you've gone and made yourself sick."

"Winchesters don't get sick," Sam automatically recited before wincing. John had particularly liked to recite 'Winchesters don't_" quotes whenever he or Dean had had some sort of health or personal problem.

"Very macho," the P.I quipped, earning a classic Sam Winchester bitchface.

"Whatever. Are you going to go get food, or are we going to argue back and forth over where exactly we're going to eat?"

"Fineee," Gabe said loudly, drawing out the word as long as possible, "We'll go get some Wendy's, all right?"

"Sounds good to me," Sam responded, mind already wandering away to think about chicken nuggets.

The nearest Wendy's was thankfully about two blocks away. Sam was spared both suffering from his hunger and Gabe's insane driving for too long, and soon enough, they were munching on chicken nuggets and fries in the Beetle, which the consultant had parked sloppily in the restaurant's empty lot. Neither of them had felt like leaving the warmth of the car to go inside.

"So why do you want to be a lawyer, Sammy?" Gabe asked after a few minutes of quiet eating.

Sam shrugged, sipping on his Coke(he'd really need to work out soon) before he replied.

"Just always wanted to be one," he answered vaguely, thinking back to his old boyhood years where wanting to be a lawyer was an act of defiance in the Winchester household, "And I'd like to help people in that particular way. There are lots of different ways to help people that I could've pursued, but for some reason being a lawyer stuck out."

Better than beating up the bad guys, or hunting them down.

"How did you end up being a consultant/private investigator?" Sam asked curiously before he got too lost in his thoughts.

The older man tilted his head and chewed on a french fry thoughtfully.

"I'll be honest, I didn't really huge aspirations when I was young," Gabe started, "I, uh, grew up in the foster system, so I didn't really think too hard on my future till near the end of high school. By then I had gained a deep loathing for standardized education, so the idea of going to college wasn't very appealing at all."

"I don't blame you," Sam commented, thinking on his own rather uninteresting years of high school. Really, the only reason he was in college was because it's his escape ticket and he genuinely liked learning, not because he liked the system or atmosphere in any sort of way.

"I originally got the idea to be a P.I from T.V, to be honest," the consultant said sheepishly, "To me, it was like a detective, but cooler, so I just went with it since it was the best thing I had, you know? I got the necessary certifications, and then I was bouncing from state to state, just helping out wherever I felt like it."

"While living out of your car."
Gabe rolled his eyes but smiled good-naturedly.

"Yes, while living out of my car, but only sometimes," he explained, "Usually if I only stuck around a place for a few months. I've actually been in Lawrence for the longest out of all of them."

"That's good," Sam said genuinely. He didn't really want to think of the golden-eyed man picking up and leaving Lawrence on a whim. "Any particular reason why besides our exceptionally high crime rate?"

Gabe laughed before shrugging and sipping his fruit punch. The drink had been a surprising (or maybe not so surprising) choice that Sam had teased the man about. Gabe had defended it heartily, even though it was just another nail in his coffin regarding just how obsessed he was with sweets.

"Not sure, actually," he murmured, looking at Sam with a curious expression. His aura was relaxed and settled, with mint and ivory shades enveloping the car in warm waves that made the Winchester relax as well. "Maybe I'm getting tired of the weird little nomadic lifestyle I've had going. It's fun, but...I don't want to live out of my car forever."

They gazed at each other for a moment before Sam realized what he was doing and broke eye contact.

"Makes sense," he said, fiddling with his fry box as he cleared his throat, "I wouldn't want to live out of a yellow Beetle either."

"Hey!"

Sam snickered as Gabe punched him in the arm, and the two men finished eating soon after that, but only after they argued over the true value of Gabe's Beetle and stole each other's remaining fries.

"It's so late," the college student complained as he caught a glimpse of the time on Gabe's dash. "One o'clock? Time flies by when I'm wasting it with a moron who seems to think Beetles are perfectly sized vehicles."

"They are to normal sized people," Gabe sniffed before glancing over at Sam.

"I could drive you home, but my place is closer," he said casually, even as he almost ran over a Wendy's trash can as he attempted to pull out of the lot.

"Watch out," Sam said automatically, having grown gradually used to Gabe's abhorrent driving skills, a state of being that he wasn't yet sure was a good or bad thing. "And sorry, but I don't think I'd sleep comfortably in the Beetle."

"My apartment, Samsquatch! I'm being serious!" Gabe exclaimed, clutching the steering wheel. His aura was nervous looking, reminding Sam of when the man had asked him to lunch a few days ago.

Sam knew Gabe had been talking about his apartment but had tried to buy himself time to think by cracking a joke. He wasn't the only one that could use that method after all.

*Pros and cons. Pros: I can fall asleep faster, spend time with Gabe maybe, not have to deal with my gross room right now, and avoid any late-night visitors that seem to invariably drop by. Cons: Things can get awkward.*

The Winchester frowned at his rather disproportionate mental list before yawning loudly. He was beat, truth be told, and he had already determined both now and on previous occasions that Gabe meant no harm, so what was the problem?
He knew he'd probably argue with his sleepy logic in the morning, but frankly, Sam just wanted some sleep, and he didn't particularly care where as long as he got it as soon as possible.

"Yeah, all right," he said, leaning back against the seat, "It'll be interesting to see what size your furniture is. Do you think I'll be able to fit on your couch?"

"Not with that kind of attitude."

Streets slipped by as the two bickered idly, though Sam could tell they were both a little nervous about the situation. Well, Gabe was apprehensive at least. The college student was a little too tired to really worry properly about the exact nuances of the situation, and it could be seen through the increasing amount of jokes and yawns as Gabe drove them through the city.

Traffic gradually grew thinner and thinner as they entered a quieter part of the city filled with more recently built apartment buildings and mural-covered walls. An underpass contained a colorful depiction of an angel, and Sam watched as the multicolored wings flashed by in a blur of color.

"I hope you're awake enough to get yourself to my apartment," Gabe teased as they pulled into the underground parking lot of a five-story apartment building that sported big windows and a white exterior. It was a lot different from Sam's rather run down red brick building in East Center, and he was reminded once more of the differences that existed between neighborhoods and districts in Lawrence.

"I'm awake," Sam grumbled as Gabe parked the car. He was pleasantly surprised to find that the man had managed to park somewhat within the painted lines as he grabbed his bag and opened the door.

He wondered if any of the apartment residents were familiar with Gabe's horrible driving skills, "What floor are you on?"

"Fourth."

The two walked to the elevator, and Sam watched idly as Gabe's aura filled the whole compartment. It really was a massive aura, and Sam wondered how the consultant could be so unaware of it. He had asked Dean once if he was aware of how grand his aura was, and had received a baffled look in response.

Gabe's apartment was at the end of the well-lit, carpeted hall, and didn't stand out much from its companions along the hall. Sam made note of the number(406) before Gabe opened the door and led him inside, flicking the lights on along the way.

There was a door directly to the right that was shut, and to the left, space opened up into a kitchen. The white counter wrapped around in an L shape and acted as a make-shift divider between the kitchen and the living room, which was beyond the kitchen and held a couch pushed up against the left wall, along with an armchair and paper covered coffee table. Across from the living room was an interesting sliding door that Sam assumed led to the sole bedroom in the apartment.

"Do you think you can fit on the couch?" Gabe asked jokingly, but the college student wasn't paying attention, as his eye was caught on the view.

The large sliding doors in the living room lead out to a balcony that showed much of Lawrence, and the skyline was simply great. Sam's own bedroom window just looked out onto the street below and didn't have much else to look at, save for the occasional parked car, but from here, he could see a large portion of the city, including a bit of downtown.

"You should see it from here."
Sam jumped slightly as Gabe's aura wrapped around his hand a split second before the man's hand did, and he allowed himself to be lead to the left and into the bedroom.

The king-sized bed was messy and unmade, and there was a whiteboard against the right wall that looked as if a mad genius had brain vomited thoughts onto it, but Sam was far more entranced with the left wall, as it was made entirely out of glass from floor to ceiling.

Woah.

"This is great," the Winchester breathed, stepping up to the glass and gazing out at the glittering city stretched ahead of him, "I've always wanted a place like this."

"Like this?" Gabe echoed, and Sam nodded, looking down at the golden-eyed man.

"If I'm going to live in Lawrence, I might as well have a decent view of the city," he quipped, earning a smile from the consultant.

"I should get you acquainted with the place then, even though I think you've seen just about all of it," Gabe remarked, tugging him away from the wall, which Sam departed from reluctantly.

The first door Sam had passed when entering ended up being the bathroom, which held a connecting door that led to a washer-dryer unit and, strangely enough, Gabe's closet. It seemed the whole right side of Gabe's apartment was connected through a series of doors, much to Sam's amusement, which Gabe simply rolled his eyes at when the college student mentioned it.

"The couch is a pull-out," Gabe explained as they returned to the living room. He shoved the coffee table back, sending a few papers scattering to the floor. "I think your feet might hang over the edge, but..."

"Very funny," Sam said dryly as he grabbed the fallen papers and dragged the coffee table back the rest of the way. The papers held lots of hand-scribbled notes, and he could spot more than a few police files amongst the mess of reports and yellow legal pads. "Are all these cases you've worked on?"

Gabe grunted as he pulled out the mattress, which creaked as he bent it into shape, "Huh? No, those are all current cases."

"But there has to be at least twenty here!" Sam exclaimed, holding up a few files as examples, and the consultant waved a negligent hand at the mess of paperwork.

"Sometimes they just want me to go over the details of a case and make sure nothing's out of place, or they want me to interview a suspect. Other times, I just look at a crime scene and tell them what I see, or look over the evidence. I don't close all of them."

"That's still insane," he remarked, and Gabe shrugged.

"It's a bit of a workload, but I enjoy it. Keeps me on my toes. I'll go get you some sheets."

Sam began to shuffle some of the papers into some semblance of order, all the while sneaking peeks at the view through the sliding doors.

Gabe's got a great set up here. And to think he lives out of his car part-time.

A whoosh of displaced air sent the college student ducking automatically and vaulting over the coffee table, which wasn't hard given the size of his stride. Sam whipped around in time to see a pile
of bedding fall to the ground where he'd been standing with a soft thud, and a surprised Gabe standing a few feet away.

Oh.

"Jumpy much, Sammy?" he asked with a nervous chuckle, eyes wide, and Sam winced slightly before shrugging and making a noncommittal sound.

"Hey."

Warm colors reached out to him before a hand grasped his forearm. He looked down in mild surprise to see Gabe peering up at his face with concern, brow furrowed.

"Your face has gotten worse," he explained quietly as he reached up a hand to grasp his chin. Sam for some reason let him, and the consultant tilted his face this way and that.

_I wonder why he's so concerned._

"It'll be fine," Sam responded just as quietly before offering a small, reassuring smile, "I've had worse."

That seemed to be the wrong thing to say since both Gabe's face and his aura darkened visibly.

"Worse?"

"Just from Roadhouse fights and stuff," he responded vaguely as he stepped back a bit. "Nothing too serious."

Gabe gazed at him for a minute before crossing his arms and nodding his head. His aura swirled discontentedly around him.

"All right, Sam," he said, clearly not believing a single word Sam had said.

_Oh great._

The college student sighed before deciding he was too tired to ease Gabe's worries properly. It was a sign he was really tired when the pull out mattress was looking positively inviting.

"Look, sometimes things get rough at the Roadhouse, like tonight, but not always. I also got into the occasional scuffle when I was younger, so I know how to fight." Sam said, trying to remain as vague as possible without sounding like he was copping out.

Gabe still looked a bit unconvinced, but he uncrossed his arms and seemed to accept his explanation, at least for the time being.

"There's a spare toothbrush and stuff in the bathroom," he said, seeming to linger for a moment before turning away, "Good night Sam."

"Night, Gabe," Sam said, watching the man enter his bedroom and slide the door shut with a soft bang. It was a rather anti-climatic finish to the night, but then, he wasn't really sure how he'd expected the night to end.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

And I'm back with another Saturday update! I think Saturday updates once a week will be the update
schedule for those who are curious, and it'll probably remain that way until school ends in June for me.

This chapter is just some more Sabriel content, as the next chapter will shift focus a bit to the Winchester brothers. I'm really itching to start laying out more plot, because I have some wild ideas in store for Chromaticity, but I can't do it quite yet.

To those that gave me their opinion on the Gabriel POV, thank you so much! That chapter will be coming up soon, and while it won't contain too much ground-shattering information, I hope the change in perspective will bring a breath of fresh air to my story. I'm not really sure what I was thinking having my first bit of fan-fiction be a multi-chapter world building sort of story, and I think I'm a little out of my depth to be honest.

And my final bit of information, this chapter and all chapters on will now start with a disclaimer. Honestly, I can't believe I forgot it to begin with, but it's there now, just in case!
Chapter Seven: Spring Cleaning

A faint ringing cut through the strange dark place Sam found himself in, the sound echoing strangely. The dark shifted, revealing it was a thick mist that Sam had to push through to reach the sound, which was growing steadily stronger. Suddenly though, the darkness fell away, and Sam's eyes snapped open to the sound of his phone ringing.

"What the hell?" he murmured, fumbling for the bothersome device, which was a few inches away from his face and displaying Ellen's name of all people on the screen.

"'Ello?" he answered sleepily, scratching his face as he withheld a yawn.

"Morning Sam. Hope I didn't wake you up," Ellen responded on the other side, and Sam grunted as he rolled over, dragging the covers with him.

"No, it's fine. What's the matter?" he asked, trying to sound as if he hadn't just woken up.

"Well, the Roadhouse is still a bit of a mess from last night. I won't be opening until the afternoon, if I open at all really, so long story short, you have the day off sweetheart," she said, the faint sounds of the register ding behind her.

"Really?" Sam asked, sitting up, before being distracted by one key fact.

He wasn't in his apartment.

"Really." Ellen reaffirmed. "I'll see you Sunday, Sam. Take it easy."

"Yeah," Sam responded distractedly before ending the call.

The early morning sunlight was streaming in through the large windows to his left, yellow beams illuminating the assortment of bedding around him and the pull-out mattress he was laying in. The view from the windows showed a completely different section of Lawrence than that of his usual neighborhood. A coffee table a few feet away in front of him was stacked high with paperwork, and a familiar olive green jacket was draped over the armchair. Sam gulped as he looked across the living room to the metal sliding door.

Shit.

It was partially open, showing just a portion of a bed outfitted with white sheets and someone with a golden back lying on top of them.

Shit!

Sam flopped back onto the mattress, causing the whole contraption to creak and sag downward ominously, but he didn't register much of that as he was too busy trying to process the fact that he had somehow ended up in *Gabe's apartment.*

*What. The. Hell.*
The Winchester ran a hand over his sore face carefully, trying to piece together the previous night's events. There had been the Roadhouse and the strange aura that had triggered the bar fight, ending up with Gabe at the crime scene, and then...

"The chase. Dammit," Sam cursed softly, thinking of how the suspect got away. Granted, it had been either catching the killer or saving Gabe, which was a choice he didn't even have to think about, but it still stung. He should've caught the bastard much quicker.

Who knows what the killer will do now. Will the chase have spooked him, or will he just be encouraged to kill faster now?

Somewhere deep in the city, a police car with its sirens wailed by, the faint sound reminding Sam that he couldn't linger.

He rolled off of the mattress silently and stretched his muscles, wincing at the twinges in some of them. While he'd had worse beatings, last night's events had certainly left their mark on him, and the side of his face felt particularly bruised.

Grabbing his bag, Sam padded quietly to the bathroom at the other end of the apartment, eddies of warm air stirring against his bare back as he walked beneath a particularly strong vent. He didn't want to wake Gabe and wasn't sure how deep of a sleeper the man was. Judging by the late hours the man liked to drop by the Roadhouse, Sam knew at the very least that the man held a rather messed up sleeping schedule.

The bathroom was outfitted with a white tile floor and a rather minimalistic decor, the frosted glass door of the shower cubicle drawn shut. Sam quickly put the spare toothbrush he'd used last night to work before taking a good look at his face in the mirror.

A purpling bruise spanned from the top of his cheekbone down to his jawline, drawing the most attention. There was a cut near his eyebrow that had already scabbed over, and a shadow of a forming bruise beneath his jaw where someone must have got him in the Roadhouse, but other than that, his face was all right. His hair was getting long though, and Sam pushed the brown strands back experimentally before wrinkling his nose and letting them fall back. He wasn't made for the combed back style Gabe wore.

Sam contemplated taking a shower, debating whether or not it would wake the other man up before eventually deciding against it. Using Gabe's soap would have been weird, and while he could do with a good hot shower for his sore muscles, he could hold off. He did make note of the shampoo Gabe used and was amused to find the bottle looked just as fancy as the way it smelled in the man's hair.

Pulling on the shirt he wore the night before, Sam stepped out of the bathroom and into the kitchen. The part of the L counter that separated the living room and kitchen had a few mismatched stools and chairs tucked beneath it and held what looked like Gabe's junk bowl and a red journal that Sam had no doubt the man used for work. It held a faint trace of the man's aura on the leather cover, a testament to how strong Gabe's aura was.

Now that he was thinking of it, the whole apartment held traces of Gabe. Sam looked around with a more careful eye this time, and since he was far more alert than he was both last night and earlier when he woke up, he could see it. The man's aura lingered in places like the armchair, the coffee table, and practically covered the bedroom door in a draping of watercolor ivories and golds. Combined with the large amounts of winter sunlight streaming through the windows, the whole apartment was decorated in hidden hues only Sam could truly appreciate.
What a shame that no one else can see this.

"Wow," he breathed softly before realizing he was staring and shaking himself out of his reverie.

Gabe's refrigerator and cabinets were both well stocked, albeit with some questionable food choices, reminding the college student that he still needed to go grocery shopping. Sam pulled out some coffee and a mug and set to work making a cup of coffee for Gabe. It was the least he could do considering the consultant had been kind enough to let him crash at his place for the night.

While the coffee brewed, the Winchester fixed the living room up. The pull out mattress creaked loudly as he refolded it, causing the soft snores he could hear coming from Gabe to pause.

*Crap.*

Luckily though, Gabe didn't wake, as the snores continued after a few tense seconds. Sam worked even more quietly after that, resorting to all the techniques John had taught him about moving quickly and quietly. The bedding was folded neatly, the coffee table replaced, and he even tried to put the paperwork in order, though Sam had to give up when he realized half of the papers didn't really fit into a category.

An aspect of the living room that the Winchester hadn't taken notice of before was the canvas tucked behind the sofa. Under the assumption that it must have somehow fallen last night, Sam tugged it out, only to pause about halfway.

It was a half-finished painting of what looked like a male angel, and it was very good even in its rough stages. Between visiting art museums and seeing student's work displayed on campus, Sam had seen artwork of all types and felt he could say that it was good. Gabe had to have made this, though why it was shoved behind the couch was a mystery. Surely the man didn't hate it?

The Winchester could see other canvases tucked away further back, and he had a gut feeling that there was probably more artwork scattered around the apartment, tucked out of plain sight, but why was it all put away like some kind of secret?

*They're probably just here since he's busy with work.* Sam thought firmly to himself as he gently tucked the canvas back into its proper place. He knew, however, that the thought would nag him later.

Once he was done, Sam stepped back and admired his handiwork, quietly pleased with the neatness of the final product. From here, he could smell the brewing coffee and decided to dare a glance into Gabe's room.

The consultant's aura was calm with sleep, illuminated brilliantly by the morning light that entered through the glass wall. He was curled up in the white bedding that accentuated his tan skin, and judging by the state of his hair, would wake up with an extreme case of bedhead. Overall, it was a very peaceful atmosphere, and Sam was loath to disturb it and the sleeping man.

*He'll wake up soon enough after I leave.*

He stepped back carefully, eyes lingering on Gabe's aura-cloaked form for a brief second before he turned away.

In the kitchen, Sam leaned against the counter and searched his bag for some paper and a pen, eventually pulling out the desired materials. The plan was to brew a nice cup of coffee for Gabe, leave a note, and head back home on the metro, which should be manageable since hardly anyone rode it on early Saturday mornings. He knew from outings with various friend groups that there were
more than enough metro stations in North Heights, and he had a pretty good sense of direction, so
locating one would be easy enough.

Sam stared at the paper for a second, rapping the pen against his thigh as he gnawed on his lip. What
was he supposed to leave on his note?

*Why is this so much harder than necessary?*

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. It was just a stupid note, and here he was obsessing over
what exactly he would write like some schoolgirl writing a love letter to her crush.

*Except this has no correlation to that kind of scenario.* Sam thought, even as his neck flushed at the
thought.

Eventually, after two failed rough drafts, Sam managed to write a decent note, which he then tucked
underneath the cup of coffee he mixed up just for Gabe. Hopefully, the consultant would wake up
before it got too cold.

*If not, then he's missing out on a damn good cup of coffee.*

After making sure for one final time that the apartment was in order, Sam left the aura-filled place,
the door clicking shut quietly behind him.

...  

Back home, Sam collapsed onto his bed, the mattress creaking much like the one from Gabe's pull
out. He thought wryly to himself that his mattress was somehow worse than the pull out one before
he exhaled loudly and dragged himself back out of bed to take a shower, as he *really* needed one.

The hot water worked wonders on his tense muscles, and the Winchester gradually relaxed in the
safety of the shower. Last night had been absolutely crazy, and while he had experienced worse in
the way of violence, it had been a while since he had gotten into a fight or chase.

Sam only left the shower once the hot water abruptly changed to cold(it liked to do that whenever he
contemplated having anything other than a brief shower). Wrapping a towel around his waist and
pushing his wet hair back, he stepped next door to his room, where he simply stood in the doorway
and stared inside.

It wasn't that it was a *mess*, because Sam Winchester and messy didn't belong in the same sentence at
all, but...ok, it was *definitely* a mess. About half of his closet was on the floor, his desk was
overflowing with papers and junk, and now that he was looking at his pitiful bed, Sam couldn't
remember the last time that he made it properly. He was also pretty sure socks *weren't* supposed to be
draped over his lamp, and when did Ben's Batman figurine end up sticking out of his underwear
drawer?

*When did it get like this?* he thought with mild horror to himself before stepping into the less than
satisfactory room. He managed to scrounge up some clean clothes, and after tugging on a pair of
grey sweats and drying his hair with a towel properly(*properly being *better* than dripping wet),
decided to tackle his room.

Much of the morning was simply spent cleaning. It first started with Sam's atrocious room and trying
to get it back into something more presentable, but it soon overflowed to the bathroom next door.
Then it was the living room, which, since it was the hub of activity in the apartment, was looking
downright wrecked in Sam's opinion. By noon, the apartment was undergoing an impromptu, mini
early spring cleaning, with the college student at the center of it.
Sam had always been the most organized of the Winchesters. He had received more than his fair share of ribbing for it, but someone had to maintain some sort of order when it came down to it. Neither John nor Dean were particularly organized; in fact, some of their habits could even be described as sloppy (like Dean’s eating at times). As a result, it had fallen to Sam most of the time to make sure wherever they were, whether it be a shitty motel room or the depressing family home, was clean, or at the very least, not a pig sty. It wasn’t that he was obsessive about it or anything; it was just force of habit by this point.

He was just going through Ben's box to see what his nephew might be missing (because he had a feeling the box was missing some essentials) when someone knocked on his door. Since there was a doorbell that just about everyone used, the possibilities were narrowed down substantially. Only a few people knocked, and besides, there was only one person who rapped once slow, then twice fast that knew where he lived.

"Morning, Sammy!" Dean said enthusiastically, earning a bitchface from his younger brother as he opened the door with a sigh.

"Morning?" Sam echoed back as Dean strolled into the living room. His brother's aura was particularly magnificent today, reflecting his unusually good mood despite the fact that his face was still bruised from his fight with the Dead Eyes Thursday night. "Do you... need something?"

"Can't I drop by to see my brother?" the green-eyed man asked nonchalantly, and Sam snorted as he shut the door.

"Not when you're you. What do you need?"

Dean rolled his eyes before shoving his hands into his jacket pockets. As always, he was wearing John's old leather piece, apple green tendrils curling around the jacket and revealing just how precious it was to him.

"I just want to take you out to lunch today. Pete's Pizza?"

Sam's mind immediately returned to a few days ago when he had lunch with Gabe at the very same place.

*That had gone well. Gabe sure could pack away pizza.*

"Uh, sure." he replied somewhat distractedly as he replaced the lid on Ben's box, "Just let me get ready."

"What was that?"

Sam looked up, a perfect picture of mild confusion.

"What was what?"

Dean's green eyes narrowed slightly as he gestured vaguely to Sam's face. His expression screamed 'I-know-something's-up-as-the-older-brother-but-I'm-not-sure-what'.

*That. That look.*

"Nothing," Sam responded a little too quickly before turning to leave, "You better be paying, by the way."

Dean's eyes remained narrowed, but he seemed to decide to let it go for the moment as he shrugged.
and made an affirmative noise. Sam knew better though and decided to mentally prepare himself for when his older brother would ultimately interrogate him and try to catch him off guard.

"Yeah yeah, just go get ready, princess. I'll wait here on the couch," he responded, collapsing on the poor piece of furniture, which sagged dangerously and groaned loudly in protest.

"Don't do that," Sam admonished offhandedly, even as he stifled a snicker at Dean's expression when he sunk into the couch.

After pulling on a particularly old flannel and some faded jeans, Sam returned to find his brother standing a few feet from the couch, glaring at it with a furrowed brow as if it had deeply offended him. Once again, the younger Winchester struggled not to laugh and managed to put on a straight face as he clasped his brother's shoulder.

"You need a new couch, Sammy," Dean grumbled as they exited the apartment, "Your upholstery's getting a little worn there."

Sam thought of the average, yet perfectly presentable shade of navy blue the couch came in and finally laughed.

"Yeah, because it's obviously the upholstery that's the problem."

The Impala was waiting for them outside, parked crookedly against the curb and gleaming in the pale morning sun. Dean had received it officially from John on his 18th birthday, though those last few years leading up to it, John hadn't driven it as much and it was more of a formality than anything else. 'Baby', as Dean lovingly referred to the car, was probably on the top five things his brother loved, and if Sam hadn't been sure of how much Dean loved his son, he would've said Ben had a rival for attention.

"Ben with Lisa?" Sam asked when they got into the car, and Dean nodded as he started the engine.

"She has a rare weekend off, so she decided to make use of it with him. I get him for most of the upcoming week though." Dean replied before smiling, "You should've seen the masterpiece he made in school though. It's frickin' amazing."

Sam smiled indulgently as his brother chatted about Ben and handed him his phone to show him what his nephew had made preschool. It was a rather well-done family portrait, that, much to Sam's delight, included an extra tall stick figure person with a mop of brown hair to represent him. He practically smirked when he realized that John wasn't included in the line-up, though that wasn't much of a surprise. Ben's aversion to visiting his grandfather was a well-known fact, with visits having been reduced to major holidays at this point because of it. Dean thought it was strange, but Sam just felt Ben was perceptive and had good taste in people.

"I don't know what you've been teaching him, Sammy, but he can also read a lot," Dean remarked as they slipped into a vinyl booth at Pete's Pizza. It was much busier than it was when he had come with Gabe, and Sam settled in for a bit of a wait for food.

"What do you mean?" the younger Winchester asked curiously.

"He can read paragraphs now. That's what his teacher said at least," Dean said proudly, aura brightening, "Ahead of everyone in his class in reading actually."

"Really? I mean, I read longer stories to him, but he's always just followed along."

"Nerd," the green-eyed man said teasingly, "Maybe Ben picks up on more than he lets on."
Sam thought back to the textbooks Ben seemed to be fascinated with, and the way he always seemed to truly think before he said anything, or at least, as much as a four-year old could possibly think before they ultimately blurted something out.

"Yeah, I think he does."

The brothers ordered breadsticks and drinks (Dean went with a beer that Sam eyed disapprovingly), and conversation flowed to other subjects. Both of them had been busy the past few weeks, and they caught each other up on what had gone on in their lives in the meantime. For some reason though, Sam didn't tell Dean of Gabe. In his mind, he had just met Gabe that week, and while there was a strong connection between the two of them, he was sure Dean would hassle him about it, and he didn't want a big brother lecture at the moment. Dean had never really grown out of the overprotective older brother personality, and while some of those characteristics had turned into fatherly protection for Ben, Sam still got lectured and fussed over.

Dean's aura suddenly turned darker and staticky at the edges. It was subtle, but the yellower hues disappeared and were replaced by more tense shades, signaling that his brother was about to say something that Sam probably wouldn't like.

*Five, four, three, two...*

"I visited John yesterday," Dean said abruptly, setting his beer down slightly harder than necessary.

Across the table, Sam only twitched a bit, a true testament to his self-control over the matter. But then, he had managed to internalize a lot of his feelings regarding the elder Winchester in his youth.

"He still drinking?" he asked evenly after making sure his Coke went down the right pipe.

Dean rubbed a hand over his jaw and looked away briefly, his little gestures telling all that Sam needed to know.

"You know I don't want to hear about John if he's-"

"I know, I know, but Sammy, he's just drinking beer! It's not even hardcore stuff anymore. Hell, I drink beer!" Dean exclaimed, gesturing wildly with his Corona.

"But you have self-control or at least some semblance of it," Sam said sharply, lowering his voice, "And you don't knock Ben around when you're drunk."

Dean's face darkened, his aura following like an impending thunderstorm.

"I would never." he hissed, gaze intense enough to burn a hole in concrete, but Sam didn't waver. He was probably one of the few who never did when Dean got angry.

"Then why are you still trying to defend John to me?" he asked, leaning in.

The stormy aura faded a bit as Dean reared back, a brief look of confusion flitting across his face, and Sam sighed.

John had raised Dean to be a soldier, putting it bluntly. Whether because Dean was the eldest and felt it was his duty to take the brunt of the responsibility off of his shoulders or because he truly respected John, Dean had let himself be molded into...whatever John had attempted to make out of them. While Sam had spent his whole life trying to shrug off their father's ideals, Dean had simply accepted them, and the result was a man in his twenties that had probably experienced more violence and conflict than an aged war veteran and actually thrived off of it.
Dean's conflict had always been being stuck between John and Sam. On one hand, he respected his father but loved Sam, and since John and Sam had and would probably always butt heads, Dean would always be stuck in the middle. Sam knew this, which is why he always tried to control himself whenever John was invariably brought up. However, Dean made it hard to remain in control when it was so obvious that he was still firmly in John's grasp, even after all that had happened.

"Whatever, can we just eat our fucking food?" Sam asked as he viciously stabbed a breadstick into some marinara sauce.

Dean grunted and took a large sip of his beer, letting go of the subject for the time being.

Auras washed over Sam as people came and settled into booths around him, the contrasting moods and emotions linked by an underlying tone of hunger. It was a typical restaurant environment for him, and he allowed the various colors and emotions to wash over him and develop into background noise, much like how people barely paid attention to music played in public places and far off conversations.

"Sammy?"

"Uh huh?" the younger Winchester responded, opening his half-lidded eyes.

"You're doing it again."

Sam shifted in his seat, shaking his head minutely to clear it. It seemed he hadn't exactly let all the auras fade into the background.

"Sorry," he muttered, and Dean waved a breadstick in a dismissive gesture before taking a large bite.

"S'not your faul'" he said with a full mouth, "I do it too."

"Yours is different," Sam responded, wrinkling his nose at his brother's eating habits.

"Maybe, but it's the same concept."

Dean, for whatever reason (Sam suspected it was his body's way of making up for the whole lack of pain thing), had **incredible** senses. His eyesight was perfect, and both his hearing and sense of smell were way above normal. As a kid, it had been rather annoying to have Dean hear everything he muttered under his breath, but John had taken advantage and trained Dean to be completely aware of his surroundings. If Sam couldn't be snuck up on because he could sense auras, then Dean couldn't be caught off guard either because no matter how quiet you were, he would always know you were there.

The smell of pizza wafted towards them, preceded by a glimmer of a lavender aura.

"One medium half cheese, half meat lover's pizza for the two fine gentlemen," the waitress, a perky blonde, said, setting the steaming pizza down on the table, "Need any refills?"

Sam watched with mild amusement as Dean flashed her the 'I'm-sex-on-legs-and-I-know-it' smile and tilted his head slightly to show off the perfectly chiseled jawline.

"No, we're good here, sweetheart, I have to drive later," he said with a more roguish smirk and a tilt of his bottle.

The waitress giggled, aura practically coming alive with lust, and Sam sighed, rubbing his forehead with one hand as chewed on his straw.
Dean really can't help himself, he marveled to himself privately as his brother's aura barely changed with the flirtation. It was like flirting was just another form of conversation to Dean; something light-hearted and casual and as typical as breathing for the older Winchester. It was one of the few things that Sam knew John hadn't had to teach him, as even John had been taken aback by how... provocative Dean could be, and just how much he used his good looks to his advantage.

"Your man ho is showing," Sam quipped as soon as the waitress left in a cloud of longing, earning an eye roll as Dean snorted.

"I'm not a ho," he fired back, helping himself to some pizza, "Can't I make some conversation?"

His supernova aura didn't fluctuate at all, reflecting just how much Dean believed in what he said.

Typical Dean.

"Not really since your conversation starters tend to be really shitty."

Dean arched an eyebrow, and Sam shrugged innocently, prepared for the worst.

"Shitty, huh? Talking about our father is taboo now because of your dispute," Dean retorted, brow furrowing slightly.

And John comes back to the conversation. Again.

"Well, I don't really want to talk about someone that thought me going to college and being a lawyer was 'disrespectful' and 'not what a Winchester does'." Sam fired back.

"Dad just wants what's best for you."

"How is not going to college good for me?" he asked disbelievingly before shaking his head.

"Look, if you can't talk with me once without trying to get me to reconcile with John-

"Someone has to try!" Dean snapped, aura beginning to swirl around him in a frustrated manner, "And stop calling him John for fuck's sake. He's your dad too."

No, he's not.

"He'll be John to me from now on since apparently, I'm not his son," Sam said icily as he clenched his glass with one large hand.

Dean frowned, falling back against the booth seat. He looked genuinely shocked, which caught Sam off guard momentarily.

"He never said that, did he?"

Sam blinked before chuckling wryly and running an anxious hand through his fringe.

Right, John only spoke like that when he was piss drunk and Dean was out.

"Yeah, he did. He also told me you were the favorite, but then, I didn't really need him to tell me that since everyone's always known that."

The younger Winchester stood, appetite suddenly lost. Speaking of John always did leave him feeling hollow and bitter.
"So much for lunch."

"Look, you probably already know since you're so perceptive during your nighttime activities, but the guys you fought the other night were Dead Eyes," Sam said, lowering his voice at the tail end of the sentence, "try not to get caught up in some gang shit, ok?"

"How do you know they were Dead Eyes?"

Sam grimaced; he had forgotten Gabe, along with all the Gabe-related activities he had been partaking in the past few days, were nonexistent at the moment with Dean.

"That guy you saved, Castiel? I know him from campus. He told me he suspected they were," he responded, managing to save face, "Just be careful."

Dean frowned, green aura a picture of swirling emotion that Sam didn't really feel like micro-analyzing right then.

"Sammy..."

"I'll walk home," the college student replied shortly, tossing a crumpled fiver on the table before quickly exiting the restaurant.

The sharp air hit him like a slap in the face; it was remarkably cold today. Sam stuffed his hands into his jacket pockets and ducked his head, ready to start the walk home. However, he barely made it down the block before his phone buzzed in his pocket.

Fishing it out, Sam gazed with mild irritation at the screen, expecting it to be either Dean or some other random person he didn't really feel like talking to at the moment. The irritation melted away though when he saw who had texted him.

Sherlock: While the cup of coffee u left me was divine(the note was cute too), I was sad to see u had left. U couldve stuck around ya know

A smile flitted across Sam's face as he stopped at a crosswalk, mood instantly elevated by the text from Gabe. He had liked the coffee?

Course he did, you poured a hell of a lot of creamer in it.

Sam: Didn't want to intrude. I'm glad u liked it though.

The reply was almost instantaneous.

Sherlock: Like youd ever "intrude" Sammy, youre always welcome at my place, which somehow looks neater now.

Sam: Whoops, your coffee table really bothered me. Feel like coming over to discuss the case?

The younger Winchester promptly swore under his breath as soon as he sent the text. He wasn't sure what possessed him to type out an invitation to his shitty apartment of all things(really Sam?) and he was instantly regretting his decision.

Fuck, I'm such an idiot, how are you going to have the nerve to invite Gabe over to your place when his is so much better-

A buzz had Sam looking tentatively down at his phone.
Sherlock: Sounds good. I think I can manage the drive without getting lost lmao

Sam gulped at the text before tucking his phone into his pocket and picking up the pace, long legs eating up the sidewalk. He needed to get home, now, and somehow get the place presentable within an hour before Gabe showed up.

He was so screwed.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

OK, so technically as I'm writing this its still Saturday so I'm not late. Just...cutting it very close. You know how school and exams can get you guys, so have mercy upon me, I beg of you.

Anyway, to make up for this very filler-esque chapter(in my defense, it's supposed to be a bridge chapter anyway), this note will be a little longer. I know, I know, you're here for the Sabriel, and you can totally click off now, but just hear me out because there's some important stuff.

The summary has been changed since the original bothered me, plain and simple, but the new one isn't much better to be honest. I'll also go back and change the chapter names prior to this one as they also bother me(they're too basic for me, whoops). Just to let you guys know if you notice any of that sort of stuff change.

Gabe's little secret talent for art was a complete flash of inspiration, and I've managed to find a purpose for that weird tidbit I threw in there. Let me know if you enjoyed that or not, because stuff like that tends to happen as I write.

Speaking of comments, thanks for leaving them! I really enjoy receiving them, especially when you guys leave your theories on how the story will go. I find those ones really great, as it's nice to hear a different perspective.

To wrap it all up, I'm letting you know officially that the next chapter will be from Gabe's POV! Prepare yourselves for that particularly goody, and let me know how you like the story so far. Story theories and mini fangirl/boy rants are always enjoyed.

Yikes, I've rambled for a while. Until next Saturday!
Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter Eight: Personal Connections

Gabe was falling.

Bricks rushed past him, the narrow buildings closing in on him as he fell. He couldn't stop his fall, couldn't do anything to save himself; the buildings were completely smooth and had no ledges that he could grab on to. Even if there was something, he was falling too fast to grab anything properly.

A strong hand suddenly grabbed him, fingers hot enough to sear through his jacket, but not hot enough to hurt. Gabe gulped and looked up, but he couldn't make out a face. Just dark hair shrouding a masculine face, and beyond him, a star-filled night sky that somehow coexisted with the city lights around them. The man was leaning over the edge of a building, and Gabe wondered vaguely how that had happened when he had just been falling a second ago.

"Why don't you fly Gabe?"

The voice was soft but distorted. Gabe couldn't recognize it at all.

"Fly?" he echoed, his own voice sounding strange to his ears, and the man tilted his head. Behind him, a strange golden-white light flared up, turning him into even more of a silhouette.

"I know you can. I can see your wings."

"No, I can't," he denied, the fear of falling searing his chest, and the man inclined his head.

"Perhaps now isn't the right time," the mystery man murmured before reaching out his other hand to tug Gabe up to safety.

The scene changed then as the golden light suffused everything, the buildings falling away as white sheets took their place. He was sitting on a bed now, his bed, with the mystery man beside him. They were facing his glass wall, but he couldn't really make out much outside apart from the vague glare of city lights. Everything was hazy, with what little focus there was centered inside on his bed.

All he could make out of the man beside him were broad shoulders and a few flashes of features; a strong jaw, large hands, the dark swoop of wavy hair. Whoever it was exuded a sense of familiarity, someone he was truly comfortable with, but that made no sense as no such person existed for Gabe. Perhaps that's why they were so blurred; it was like looking at someone painted in watercolor.

The mystery man was speaking, but Gabe couldn't hear him. Everything was muffled and slightly distorted in his dream world as gentle hands gestured. City lights sent splashes of color across the man's face as he turned towards him, and Gabe was leaning forward now, curiosity itching to see who it was. It was dark, but he just knew he'd be able to make out the man's face if he just turned towards him a little more.

"...beginning. Everything's just beginning."

"Beginning?" Gabe asked, his tongue suddenly hard to move.
The man nodded, face turning towards him. His face was shrouded in darkness, but Gabe could see bright eyes that burned into his.

"Are you ready?"

The soft click of a door sent the dream slipping out of his hands like water as Gabe jolted awake automatically, used to waking up at the drop of a pin. He remained still as he took in the fact that he was both unusually well rested and that it smelled like coffee.

Coffee?

"Hello?" he called out cautiously as he sat up, running a hand over his face as he automatically glanced around for any presence of a person. He didn't think he had brought anyone home for a little fun last night, but it wouldn't be the first time a temporary lover slipped his mind in his first few minutes after he'd woken.

His room didn't smell like sex though, so that wasn't it. The golden-eyed man sat frowning for a second before the events of last night hit him.

Sam.

Gabe scrambled out of bed so fast that he nearly face planted into the ground when his legs got entangled in the sheets. He kicked them away with a frustrated noise before running out into the living room, but he was too late.

"Fuck!" he hissed, stamping one bare foot rather childishly as he took in the couch, which was already folded back up and held a stack of neatly made bedding. If it weren't for the much more organized coffee table (really, his apartment looked much neater than it had last night) and the strong aroma of coffee, Gabe would've said that it looked as if no one had stayed over at all.

He knew better though. It smelled sort of like Sam beneath the coffee; the clean, sharp scent of soap and a faint trace of sweat that he had probably worked up from the chase last night.

Gabe sighed loudly and glared once more at the empty living room, half angry that he had slept through Sam's departure and half disappointed that the college student hadn't stuck around longer.

He probably had somewhere to be. Poor boy's always working hard with either being a waiter or with school.

Scuffing his feet dejectedly against his hardwood floors as he walked, Gabe shuffled into the kitchen, perking up slightly when he saw the steaming cup of coffee waiting for him. A note was tucked beneath the cup, and Gabe read it eagerly as he wrapped his free hand around the mug.

The note was written in spiky cursive, which he had strangely been expecting. Sam just looked like a cursive kind of guy to him.

Morning Gabe, I didn't want to wake you, so I figured I'd make you a cup of coffee and be on my way. I'm not sure why you come to the Roadhouse for coffee so often when you have way better grounds here, but I'm not complaining.

Anyway, thanks for letting me stay. Last night was pretty crazy, and I really appreciated having a place to crash. Maybe we can discuss the case later properly without it being either nighttime or right before something dramatic happens?

See you soon,
Sam

Gabe made a strange squealing sound into his coffee as he reread the letter twice before he finally forced himself to calm down. Sam was just so sweet and polite and...

*Emotionally damaged and unavailable? Probably straight as an arrow? Stressed and overworked and definitely not thinking of anything romantic at all?*

The consultant sighed, propping his elbows on the counter as he stared at the inked words.

In all honesty, he wasn't really sure *how* he felt about Sam. He had always noticed the waiter whenever he visited the Roadhouse, but it had always been at a distance, both figuratively and literally. Sam had never served him, and Gabe had been perfectly content with eyeing the waiter from afar. With his boyish looks and muscular body, he had made for a pleasing, contrast-filled sight whenever he dropped by. Gabe would be lying if he said he didn't visit the Roadhouse sometimes just to catch a glimpse of the waiter some days, and he'd forever appreciate stumbling across the restaurant-bar combo six months ago.

He had never had the urge to get with him though. Not that he didn't want to; he'd pounce on him in a heartbeat if he could. It was just that Sam didn't seem like fling-material. Even from afar, Gabe could tell that Sam just didn't seem like the casual sex sort. Maybe it was the genuine nice air about him or the way he seemed so gentle, regardless of his dominating physique.

Whatever it was, it had kept Gabe away for a good while. He liked the way one night stands were clear-cut emotionally. There were no obligations or strings attached, and once Gabe got a good fuck(or two), that was that. No messy feelings or relationships to worry about. If there was anything Gabe despised, it was romantic, long-term relationships.

Sam was...different though. The attraction he felt for the waiter wasn't fleeting and temporary like it was with his one night stands. It wasn't even purely sexual either; it was softer and much more pure in motivation. Gabe found that he liked joking and eating with Sam just as much as he liked admiring his physique. It was also incredibly easy to just be *friends* with Sam.

Gabe pushed away from the counter and moved to the couch, sitting down carefully so he wouldn't spill the precious drink.

Perhaps he just liked Sam in general? Not just as a friend, nor a potential temporary lover, but some weird blend of both? Was that even possible?

*I think regular people call that a boyfriend.*

The consultant shivered in automatic distaste at the thought. He wasn't a 'boyfriend' kind of guy; he moved around too much to start and properly maintain any kind of romantic relationship. Besides, it was much more fun to keep his options open and flirt with whoever he felt like. Even if he hadn't really been flirting with anyone since he met Sam properly on Tuesday night, much less hooked up with anyone.

Sipping his coffee(which was fucking great), Gabe stood from the couch. He was feeling restless, the itch between his shoulder blades pushing to get up and do *something*. It was a strange instinctive thing he'd had since he could remember; the itch always pushed him to do something, probably to distract him from how weird it was.

A flash of red caught his eye, and Gabe grabbed the journal sitting on the counter before sitting on a stool, grabbing a pen from his junk bowl and flipping the journal open.
Scribbled words and mindless doodles looked back, lists and possible theories intercepted by sketches of things like bullets and crime scenes. It was a method that the consultant had quickly adopted when he first got into his profession; writing down important things or making visual representations of certain things got his thought process straight, and more often than not, helped him solve difficult cases faster.

The red journal, in particular, was for more experimental stuff. The most outlandish theories and horrible sketches went into it, along with truly random things from what a witness had been wearing at the time to his grocery list. Shortly put, it was a complete mess, but Gabe didn't mind it too much as no one else besides him would ever be allowed to look in it.

Finding an empty space on a half-filled page, Gabe began to write down details from the night before that he hadn't had a chance to put down. Things like the streets that the suspect had taken, to what the suspect had been wearing. Considering how adept the suspect had been at trying to evade them, Gabe figured he was familiar with the area the chase had taken place in and was definitely a Lawrence local. Not that he hadn't already figured that.

An image of Sam leaping across the divide between the two buildings from last night suddenly popped into Gabe's head. The college student had looked almost magnificent taking that great leap, hair wind-tousled and his jacket flaring behind him like...like...

Gabe shook his head slightly. The way Sam had so easily cleared the divide had been the sole reason he had attempted crossing as well, which had been a big mistake.

"All right, focus," he muttered as he shifted uneasily at the thought of how he had only been able to make it to a window ledge. "What else about the suspect stood out?"

The word 'ring' was underlined as Gabe reread the list. It seemed the ring stuck out in Sam's mind when he had given chase, and he himself felt the ring was important. If Sam had managed to see it on a chase in the dark of night, then that meant the piece of jewelry was large and probably had some sort of sentimental value to the suspect, who, in every other aspect, seemed to be pretty average. He had average build and height, possibly blonde, and was in his late teens to twenties. The suspect would blend in perfectly in Lawrence, as the university was host to thousands of students, not to mention the various high schools in the area.

Gabe grimaced. While the chase had been close, the suspect had gotten away, and they weren't even sure that whoever they had chased was even the killer. He had a feeling it was, but no confirmation. Sam had only had a feeling as well, and they hadn't gotten anything concrete from the whole thing. It would make more sense to focus their energy on the Enochian left at the most recent scene, the duffel bag, and the possible connection between Cork and Reynold if there even was one.

Gulping down a few swallows of his cooling coffee, Gabe began to doodle a few runes in Enochian, managing to spell out his name absent-mindedly before realizing what he was doing.

_Dammit._

He immediately scribbled out the offending symbols, scratching it out hard enough to tear a hole through the page. Swearing, he shut the journal with a slam and tossed it away, the book smacking against the floor with a harsh enough thud to make him flinch just a bit.

_Can't think about that. Stupid, stupid, language._

Gabe ran his hands through his already messy hair, tugging on the golden strands hard as he tried, and failed, to avoid thinking of the Enochian.
He knew it had been Enochian, knew from the moment he stepped onto that first crime scene in the lecture hall. It had been like a slap to the face, seeing the archaic language used in such a brutal manner; dark red symbols seeming to mock him as they dripped down the wall, only half dry.

It had been such a long time since he had read any, much less \textit{written} anything that it had caught him off guard at first. Once he had gotten over that though, he had been put on high alert immediately. Enochian was an uncommon language, had been for a long time. It had been dead before Latin was even a thing, and hardly used at all save for whatever academic purposes it held in museums or old books. The fact that it had reared its ugly head when he was supposed to be free from... it was way too much of a coincidence.

This case was much more than the budding serial killings it appeared to be from the surface. Gabe knew that, but he couldn't just come out and say that. He could get pulled from the case for being too closely involved, and besides, nothing had truly happened yet. Later maybe, but right now, no one important knew he was working the case.

\textit{You'll have to keep an eye out for them though. If this case gets big enough, it'll be like pouring chum in the water, and then the sharks will come.}

Gabe also had a funny feeling about how fast the suspect had been on the chase. There was track-star, Usain Bolt speed, and then there was the suspect. It was astonishing that Sam had even kept up with the little fucker, let alone been close to catching him. Must've been those mile-long legs of his.

\textit{Of all the things you have to be thinking of at the moment, you choose Sam Winchester's legs? Great prioritization.}

"Well, they're damn fine legs," Gabe muttered, essentially arguing with himself. He tended to do that sort of thing and had long accepted the vocalization of his mind conversations. It helped in a strange manner to talk to himself like the journaling did, though he suspected it stemmed from not having anyone to talk to about work most of the time.

After picking up his journal and writing "drug use?" next to a possible reason for the suspect's speed(Gabe had seen first hand what strange things certain drugs could do to a person physically), the consultant finished the last of his coffee with a sigh.

\textit{Maybe I should text Sam if only to acknowledge the coffee.}

Gabe glanced at the kitchen clock and frowned. It was late morning, and if Sam had gone to work at the Roadhouse(kiddo seemed to be there 90\% of the time), then he probably wouldn't see the text for a bit. There was no rush.

Under that thought process, the golden-eyed man decided to get himself straightened out. While Sam had tidied up his living room, he was still a mess from last night, as he had pretty much stripped off his clothes and fallen into bed. Gabe wasn't digging the feel of dried sweat on his skin or the bird's nest his hair probably resembled.

Ten minutes in the shower did wonders for Gabe, whose legs were feeling like jelly after the chase last night. While he wasn't horribly unfit, he also wasn't a shredded Adonis-like Sam, who, while he hadn't seen much of the student's physique(he wore so many \textit{layers}), he had \textit{certainly} seen enough between the chase and that lovely maroon shirt he had worn.

The water had been hot enough to steam up the mirrors, so Gabe dried and combed back his hair without looking. He had done it often before and made sure that the stupid little curls at the nape of his neck laid as flat as he could get it. Why his hair curled at the ends when it got long enough was a
mystery, one that he didn't particularly enjoy.

Put in a better mood by the shower, Gabe hummed as he walked out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. He grabbed his phone from where he had left it on the kitchen counter and pulled up Sam's contact, firing off a text with a small smile.

**Gabe:** While the cup of coffee u left me was divine (the note was cute too), I was sad to see u had left. U could've stuck around ya know

A couple of minutes later, Gabe received a responding text, causing him to nearly trip as he was in the middle of tugging on some jeans (he was tripping a lot this morning). He managed to right himself though and snatched up his phone from where he put it on his bed.

**Watson:** Didn't want to intrude. I'm glad u liked it though.

"Idiot," Gabe muttered softly under his breath, "You're too sweet for your own good, Sam-a-lam."

**Gabe:** Like you'd ever "intrude" Sammy, you're always welcome at my place, which somehow looks neater now.

**Watson:** Whoops, your coffee table really bothered me. Feel like coming over to discuss the case?

Gabe blinked down at the clear invitation before him. Had Sam just invited him over, to his own place?

After confirming that yes, Sam was really inviting him over, the consultant went into overdrive, managing to text Sam back as he dressed.

**Gabe:** Sounds good. I think I can manage the drive without getting lost lmao

"Yes!" he exclaimed to no one in particular as he opened the closet and examined his reflection in the full-length mirror that hung on the inside of the door.

His irregular sleep schedule stood out a bit more prominently in the dark circles of his eyes today due to his crazy night, but other than that, Gabe felt presentable. He didn't want to dress too nice, as otherwise, Sam might think something was up. So he'd remain casual, like any other day, and try to keep things as normal as possible.

*You're just discussing the case, not trying to seduce him Milton so keep it tame.*

Walking out into the living room, Gabe grabbed his jacket, wallet, and keys before doing a quick once-over of his apartment. Everything was in place more or less, so with a jump to his step, Gabe grabbed his work bag and left.

... 

Standing outside of Sam's front door, Gabe was unexpectedly nervous.

Despite his habit of bringing people home for a little romp in the sheets, Gabe had never really visited other people's homes. As a child, he hadn't had close enough friends to do that, what with all his foster homes and subsequent moves. As an adult, he simply didn't create those sort of connections; outside of his work, he really didn't know anyone. His preference of skipping from state to state every so often didn't help either.

So as a result, he was equal parts nervous about somehow disturbing something inside that Sam
didn't want disturbed, and anticipatory about what exactly it looked like. Was it a typical college set up with empty pizza boxes and dirty socks everywhere? Gabe didn't think so (Sam was far too organized and neat of a person for that), but the point still stood.

The consultant summoned up some confidence from his inner well of patented, one of a kind Gabriel Milton confidence and rang the doorbell, the chime echoing somewhere inside. it was barely a half minute wait before he could hear approaching footsteps and the door was opened.

The first thing Gabe noticed was that Sam was wearing a battered muscle tee that showed off his physique splendidly. Biceps and triceps and all sorts of -ceps were on display, rippling underneath the silky tan skin. The collar of the gray shirt was stretched slightly, and the edge of an unexpected black tattoo peeked out from his chest, but not enough to give away what it was.

Holy fuck.

"Hey, Gabe. Come in," the college student greeted with a pearly white grin and a casual flick of his hair.

"Morning, Sammy," Gabe replied back after tearing his eyes away from Sam's broad shoulders (really, those were like the eight wonders of the world), "Didn't know you were into Led Zeppelin."

"My brother is," Sam responded with an eye roll as he tugged on his shirt and stepped aside to let him in. "Also, sorry about how warm it is. The heating unit has been acting wonky for a while, and it goes from hot to cold randomly. I swear just this morning it wasn't a sauna in here."

"No worries, Samsquatch," the consultant responded with a negligent wave of his hand. In fact, he'd probably thank the heating unit if he knew where it was because otherwise, he wouldn't have had this magnificent display of muscle otherwise.

Sam led him down the short hall they were standing in, passing the kitchen which was to his left and two doors on the right, and emerging into the living room. It was a strange blend of college and domestic, with textbooks and backpacks coexisting with what looked like coloring books, a kid's pair of tennis shoes, and a little bean bag chair in the far corner obviously meant for a child. A counter separated the kitchen from the living room and held more schoolwork and a small stack of children's books. Beneath the counter was a large plastic box labeled 'BEN'. If Gabe hadn't known that Sam looked after his nephew, he'd have said a child lived here.

Wonder how often Ben comes around. Looks like a lot considering all of this.

There wasn't much on the walls, but the carpeted floor was layered with a thick rug that matched the long, blue couch pushed up against the right wall. There were two windows set into the opposite wall, showing the street below, and a worn armchair sat diagonally to the couch near the windows. The coffee table was covered with textbooks and crayons, and someone's laptop, possibly Sam's, sat charging beneath it. Gabe moved to sit on the nearest end of the couch, which was the clearest from the assortment of pillows that filled it.

The couch sank beneath him as he sat, startling him slightly. His face must've been priceless, as Sam burst out laughing as the furniture creaked beneath him.

"I should've warned you about the couch. It's on its last legs." Sam remarked, and Gabe grumbled as he struggled to pull himself up out the impromptu blue upholstery cocoon he had found himself in.

"That's one word for it," he muttered under his breath as the couch refused to let him go.
Sam offered him a strong hand that Gabe was possibly a bit too eager to take. It was warm and calloused, pulling him effortlessly from the clutches of the couch.

_Hands of a worker. Or a fighter. He's so jumpy for a supposedly average college student._

"I'd offer some refreshments, but the kitchen is pretty bare right now," the college student admitted sheepishly as he rubbed the back of his neck, "I could order some food though, or..."

Gabe's heart went out to Sam, who was obviously having a rough go of things at the moment. College had been much the same for him, if not harder due to the fact that he'd had even less of a support system and funds. It was part of the reason why he had done the bare minimum to get his investigative license and move on as quickly as possible.

"Don't worry about any of that, Sammy," he responded flippantly as he leaned forward to avoid being captured by the couch. "I want to get straight to the case anyway."

It was a little white lie, as the consultant was perfectly fine simply sitting with Sam and learning more about him, but it seemed to be the right thing to say, as his face brightened noticeably.

"I know it's too early, but I really want to know what's in that duffel bag we found," he stated as he plopped down on the couch beside Gabe, who immediately rose a good six inches on his end.

"I'll probably find out later today," Gabe answered as he opened his bag, "My guess is that there's at least a laptop. There was a faint rectangular outline through the bag from what I saw."

"You think something incriminating could be on it?"

Gabe blinked, momentarily caught off guard that Sam so readily accepted his hypothesis.

"Like what?"

The college student shrugged, turning more towards him as he twirled the hem of his shirt.

"Maybe...Cork was into some shady stuff that's stored on his laptop. Like drugs, or something gang-related that could have drawn the Dead Eyes in," he said thoughtfully, "Or maybe Cork was blackmailing the killer? But then the laptop wouldn't have been left behind..."

The Winchester's shirt rose higher as he continued to twist and twirl it, exposing more tanned skin and a flash of crunched abs above the waist of his jeans that Gabe did his very best to keep from staring at.

_Work thoughts, work thoughts, you're working right now-

"How do you think they're connected?"

"Huh?" Gabe said, pulling himself abruptly from his thoughts.

Sam tilted his head adorably, propping his arm on the top of the couch before leaning his head in his hand. The sunlight behind him was weak, but enough came through the cloud cover outside to turn Sam's eyes hazel-green.

_Work thoughts Milton. Keep it on work.

Gabe shrugged off his jacket, suddenly feeling how warm the apartment was. He was definitely changing his mind about thanking the heating unit; a curse was more fitting at the moment.
"How do you think they're connected?" he asked, repeating himself, "That is, Cork and Reynold? It's a little weird that they're both connected to LU, if through different ways, and they were both killed and set up in the same manner."

"They probably didn't even know each other," Gabe said matter of factly as he pulled out his black journal. Sam was being very distracting at the moment and he needed to do something with his hands to keep himself busy, "Most likely they somehow slighted the killer in some way, and that's how they became targets."

The consultant flipped open his journal to a clean page, clicking a ballpoint pen repeatedly as he gazed at Sam consideringly.

"The college link does seem important though," Gabe conceded, writing 'Commonalities' at the top of his page before writing the two victims' names, "Not only were both of them somehow connected to LU, but the killer himself could possibly be a student. He looked young enough, right?"

Sam nodded, brow furrowing seriously over his eyes, which definitely looked more green today, or at least here in the living room.

"Yeah, he couldn't be older than his twenties. He was fast as fuck too."

Gabe smiled wryly at Sam's disgruntled expression. He was obviously still sore about letting the suspect get away.

"I think that might have to do with drug use," the P.I theorized, "Steroids maybe. If it is, that could be a possible link to the Dead Eyes, though I'm still not sure how a gang of all things factors into all this."

"Gangs are a big part of Lawrence," Sam admitted, running a hand through his hair, "The Dead Eyes may be vicious, but they're pretty small fish in the grand scheme of things. Someone's probably working through them to get to the Enochian; a bigger gang, or someone with money and/or influence to hire their services. Either Reynold or Cork could've been caught up with gang stuff, maybe owing some sort of debt, and now that they're dead someone's pissed. Or maybe the killer is a gang member gone rogue."

Gabe groaned, rubbing a hand over his face before flipping to a different page to write down the valid points that Sam had just made.

"There's just too many possibilities right now," the golden-eyed man grumbled as he ran a hand over his hair, mimicking Sam, "There's not enough evidence or information right now to prove or disprove any of these ideas. I definitely need the lab analysis of both of the victim's bodies and the contents of the duffel, as well as the translated Enochian message before I make any more conjectures."

"About the Enochian, have you called Castiel yet?" Sam asked.

Gabe shook his head, "I'm going to swing by later and bring him some pictures. I actually went yesterday to visit him and to try to get him into protective custody after that whole gang attack on him."

"And?"

"He won't go," the consultant said with a huff, "He turned me down quite politely before saying that he wouldn't be intimidated by 'degenerates of modern day society'. He also said he'd be protected from further attacks, but he wouldn't delve into what exactly his 'protection would be.'"
Sam's eyes narrowed in thought, but before he could say anything, the front door was unlocked and someone walked in.

"Hey Sam, are you here—oh, hi." the boy paused, coming to a halt at the entrance of the living room.

Kevin Tran was Sam's opposite in many ways. Where Sam was tall and broad, Kevin was slimmer and much shorter. Gabe also recalled that Kevin was younger as well, still 17, but wickedly smart to make up for his youth. The kid looked as if he'd had a wild night judging by his crumpled clothes and messy hair.

"Mr. Milton," Kevin greeted, fair skin going a shade paler if that was possible, "Uh, what are you doing here?"

"Just visiting Sam. We happen to be acquainted," Gabe responded before Sam could, cutting the college student a look for him to go with it, "But we're also discussing the most recent development in the case. Do you know Trent Cork?"

Kevin went even paler, the blood that had been in his cheeks from the winter weather draining.

_Bingo. But how does studious Kevin know an upperclassman with a completely different major?_

"I, uh—about him?" he asked, clearly stalling as he removed his coat.

"We found him dead last night," Gabe stated bluntly, fixing his gaze on the teen, "And it appears he was killed by the same person as Reynold."

Kevin stared back at him with wide dark eyes before ducking his head and running a hand through his hair. Then he did the strangest thing.

The laughter started as giggles before trailing off into the hysterical, but at that point, Sam had stood to try to calm his roommate, who seemed to be unable to stop laughing.

_Probably shock_. Gabe thought grimly as Sam directed his friend (because Gabe could tell their living arrangement wasn't one made out of necessity; they had known each other for a while) to the armchair near the window just by the kid-sized bean bag chair.

"Is that—that motherfucker really dead?" Kevin asked, wiping at his eyes when his laughter finally trailed off, "God, that was really inappropriate of me to laugh, and...kind of incriminating actually."

The teen frowned, and Gabe hurried to reassure him, more caught up in the fact that Kevin had actually cursed. It revealed a lot about his personal opinion on Cork.

"No, I don't think you killed him, though I will need your alibi later to make sure," the P.I said, tagging the last part as an afterthought, "I'm more curious as to how you know Cork, and how exactly he was a 'motherfucker'."

Kevin blushed slightly at the reminder of his slip-up before he sighed and leaned back against the armchair.

"He's a piece of work. Or, was," Kevin started, the frown returning momentarily, "His main thing was test scores really."

"He sold them?" Sam asked, and Kevin glanced over at him before nodding.

"Yeah, just about any subject. There were cheaters, and then there was _him_," Kevin said with a
scowl, "He had the most subjects out of anyone, and any sort of test. Midterm, final, even stupid little quizzes. He hacked for his as far as I knew, and he was slick about it. His whole business was very hush hush, and you had to really hunt him down if you wanted to find him. People said it was because he was involved in a gang, and a lot of his profits went to said gang, but that was all rumor really."

The duo on the couch exchanged identical, knowing gazes, the interaction sending a shiver down Gabe's spine as he realized they had both had the same thought.

*Cork could have possibly been involved with the Dead Eyes, or whoever's working through them. Now that he's dead, their cash cow is gone if he really made that much money.*

Gabe wrote all this down as he simultaneously continued to question Kevin, feeling a small spark of anticipation. Finally, something was going right in the case.

"Did he ever work with anyone. A fellow student maybe? It seems he had a large operation going on," Gabe asked, keeping his voice business-like as if he hadn't just been given extremely important information a second ago.

"There was a lot of conjecture, but Cork never mentioned anyone, and whenever you met him he was always alone," Kevin responded with a shrug, "Only reason I know of him is because when I wouldn't give someone some answers on our Politics 1 Final, they mentioned Cork, and I did a little digging."

"Did you ever meet him?" Sam asked, and Kevin snorted.

"Not through his business, of course, but I ran into him a few times," he responded, "Acted like a cocky asshole."

Kevin shifted in his seat before leaning forward, looking as if he was going to deviate slightly.

"He, uh, met with Reynold once," he said, "I saw them a few months ago on campus. I thought it was weird since Cork didn't have a class with him, and Reynold isn't the type to talk with students. They were arguing."

"Any idea about what?" Sam asked, and Kevin shook his head.

"They were too far away. Cork was showing him something on his laptop though, and Reynold was trying to get him to close it if that's any help."

Sam shot him a slightly smug look which the P.I simply grumbled at, albeit good-naturedly. It seemed Sam was right about there being an actual connection between Reynold and Cork.

*He'd make a good detective. Shame he's studying to be a lawyer, but at least he'll make a damn good one.*

"What you've told us was very helpful, Kevin," Gabe said, doing his best to sound reassuring. The poor kid looked like he was about to pass out in the armchair, "Now, one more thing. Where were you last night between the hours of ten to one?"

"Old high school friends," Kevin responded automatically, relaxing slightly as he realized he wasn't going to be arrested on sight just because he'd gone out, "I was actually hanging out with Jo for part of the night Sam."

"Jo? What for?" Sam asked, instantly sounding quite defensive.
Gabe smothered a laugh as Kevin hurried to backtrack, hands up in a placating gesture.

"She needed help with a history project, and then AP Bio! Nothing like that." Kevin said, blushing, "Strictly school work until her mom came home around 11, and then I bummed around at a house party for the rest of the night because I got dragged there."

"Sounds good, kiddo," Gabe said, cutting off Sam, who looked as if he wanted to grill the poor boy further on Jo. He hadn't realized Sam was that close to Jo, but then, it made sense. Sam and Ellen were obviously close, family friends from what he'd gathered, and Sam had a protective streak a mile wide. Ellen's teenage daughter would definitely fall onto Sam's 'Must Defend' list, "Why don't go get a shower or some sleep? You look like you need it."

Kevin seized the lifeline with both hands and ran with it, literally. Gabe thought he'd burn a hole in the carpet with how quickly he darted down the hallway perpendicular to the entrance hall.

"He usually doesn't go out so much," Sam remarked after a minute, "I don't know, ever since the lecture hall, he's been all out of sorts. I think it affected him more than he let on."

The soft look of worry and compassion on the college student's face took Gabe aback a little. He knew Sam had a big heart, but it was quite obvious the depths of his capacity for empathy were deeper than he thought. Not many people could wear the sort of expression Sam was currently wearing.

"He was pretty shaken up at the scene," Gabe admitted, scratching the back of his neck, "Didn't help that the responding officers were treating him like a suspect."

Sam leaned back against the couch and crossed his arms, a dark look on his face.

"Why does the killer go so far with it? The Enochian and-and posing the bodies?" Sam asked, brow furrowed as he looked at the far wall, which held a mounted TV and an entertainment station with a PlayStation console and an impressive amount of DVDs. "Why write it in Enochian of all things?"

Gabe flinched slightly at the mention of Enochian before he pulled himself together.

*Stupid Enochian. It's just a language for Christ's sake. It can't...can't hurt you. Not now.*

"Maybe for the dramatic effect. The killer seems to be pretty deep into the whole religious spiel at the moment," he responded, trying to come off as nonchalant.

He felt eyes on him and looked up to see Sam gazing at him with an intense look.

Gabe had seen the expression before. It seemed to be a purely Sam Winchester thing, the acute, studying look. The way he looked at things as if simultaneously seeing it and something...something past it, like he was peeling back imaginary layers to get to the truth of things. Sam tended to look at people like that the most, and at its peak, he seemed to lose sight of the person entirely as he lost himself to whatever else he saw in them.

It unnerved Gabe to a degree because what could Sam possibly see since he clearly saw something. At times, Gabe felt as if the college was looking at him with a different perspective. A higher one of sorts, because when he looked at him like that, Sam's eyes suddenly seemed infinitely older and wiser, aged beyond their years by what they saw.

*You're reading too much into it. It's probably nothing.*

For some reason though, Gabe couldn't convince himself it was simply nothing. The look abated.
though, only there for a handful of seconds, and Sam was back to normal. His expression was slightly different though, as if he had found whatever he was looking for.

"Maybe," Sam said, though he sounded a little far away like he was still caught up in his thoughts, "There are religious motifs in the scenes. If he goes to LU, he could be a history or even theology major."

"No more conjectures, kiddo!" Gabe cried dramatically, effectively breaking the slightly tense moment that had fallen over them with Sam's look as he made the college student laugh.

"Ok, you made your point," Sam said between laughs as Gabe rolled back and forth on the couch, flailing dramatically through the 'pain of listening to more theories', "No more conjectures. But that means we have to wait for the evidence to be processed."

"And I have to pay a visit to our Enochian expert," Gabe sighed, packing his bag, "And maybe drop by the station, see where Donna and Jody are at on their end. It'll be pretty boring having to wait for the reports."

"Not a paperwork kind of guy?"

Gabe pulled a face that made Sam snicker.

"I guess not," the college student remarked, "I actually have schoolwork to catch up on. Ellen gave me the day off since the Roadhouse is still a mess, so I have to get all that done."

The duo gazed at each other for a moment before Gabe realized that he was staring and that he really did have to go.

"Right," he said, standing and grabbing his jacket, "I should go. Crime never sleeps and all that bullshit."

"It doesn't even take a break on the weekends?" Sam asked teasingly, and Gabe shook his head adamantly.

"Not even then. It's a complete travesty for hard working individuals like me who just want to have a little fun on a Saturday," Gabe whined as he pulled on his jacket.

"Must be hard being a functioning member of society."

"The worst," Gabe quipped, "I wouldn't recommend it."

Sam laughed before standing, casting a slight shadow over him with his tall frame.

"I'll see you out," he explained, tugging up his jeans, "Your sense of direction is so poor I don't want you getting lost trying to get to my front door."

"Wow, Sammy!" Gabe gasped, clutching his heart in mock hurt, "No faith in me!"

"Oh, I do, just not in your sense of direction," the college student replied matter-of-factly, steering him down the entrance hall with a gentle touch on his shoulder.

"How heartwarming," Gabe replied sarcastically, trying to ignore how warm Sam's hand was through his jacket.

Sam opened the door for him before leaning against it and looking down at him.
"Drive safe," he said, fiddling with the deadbolt, "It's supposed to snow later, and Lawrence is a bitch to navigate whenever there's any sort of precipitation."

"Lawrence is a bitch to navigate regardless," the consultant grumbled, but he sensed the undercurrent of concern in Sam's words and felt strangely cared for.

"I'll see you tomorrow?" Sam asked hopefully, and Gabe could've melted in the face of those puppy eyes if he had been a weaker man. However, he was made out of sterner stuff, had to be considering the way his life had gone.

"Monday," he corrected, trying to ignore the pang Sam's slightly crestfallen expression gave him. Stupid heart, "Sunday is paperwork/mentally prepare myself for Monday day. But I'll text you."

"Sounds good," Sam conceded with a small smile, "I'll see you then."

Gabe smiled back softly. He couldn't help thinking that Sam was really something else. It had been one of his better choices, finally getting up the nerve to talk to him on Tuesday night, and he had made some pretty shitty ones in his life.

"Bye Sammy."

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

So, I know today isn't Saturday, but I had the SAT yesterday (a college entry exam type thing for those that don't know) and that test was so draining. I had to be at the testing center by 8 and didn't get out till noon like what the hell.

Anyway, with my excuse out of the way, let's get down to the story! I didn't want to give too much away of Gabe's past in this chapter or future plot points, but at the same time I wanted to give food for thought, so I ended up struggling a bit to balance out those two desires. Between that and wanting this chapter to actually be somewhat long since his POV won't be back for a while (not too long of a while though), I'm afraid this chapter was going to be posted late anyway.

Hopefully that doesn't bother you guys too much though, as I'm not abandoning this story at all! I'm not really sure how long it'll get, as I only plan out 2-3 chapters in advance and have a rough long-term plot going, but this'll probably be 30 chapters minimum, and I have no idea what the upper threshold would be. I'll just see where it takes me.

Some bad news is that the next chapter will probably not be up by Saturday. I got assigned a bullshit complicated project due this week that is completely ridiculous. Who even gives a project on the second to last week of school anyway? Who??? I have better things to do.

Well, until whenever I see you next readers. I'd give a day, but I really don't know when I'll get the next chapter up, so just be on the lookout.
True to the predicted forecast, Lawrence was covered in a layer of snow by Sunday morning. It was only a few inches and nowhere near enough to shut the city down, but it was enough to slow the already horrific traffic and act as a nuisance to pedestrians trying to get around the now icy and slush covered sidewalks.

Snow was never a nuisance for Sam though. While he could see the downsides to it now that he was a busy adult, a large part of him still reveled in the icy weather. For him, snow held a sense of nostalgia, and the white canvas it created out of his surroundings acted as a natural backdrop for auras. As a result, winter was one of Sam's preferred seasons, and he was glad Lawrence's trend of long, cold winters would continue this year into March.

The weather was also great for business. People seeking a hot cup of coffee or a hearty breakfast streamed in to get away from the bitter cold, and the Roadhouse was doing well considering it was barely 8. If things kept up the way they were currently going, Sam was sure they'd make up for the lost profits from having to be closed all day Saturday. He still felt slightly guilty about the bar fight that had occurred Friday night, but Ellen had brushed off the whole event and had practically shoved him out onto the floor to do his job, stating that it hadn't been the first time the Roadhouse had been messed up in a bar fight.

Another much more personal reason he had been hesitant to return was because of the mysterious black aura that had tainted the whole restaurant during the fight. Sam remembered how the dark aura at the crime scene had mutated into a monster, and he wasn't sure if something similar would happen at the Roadhouse. While the two auras were similar in their dark nature, they were also different in that the one Gordon had spread seemed to be more anger based, rather than straight up evil like the crime scene one. It was a notable difference, as if he had to pick which one he had to face again, he'd pick the angry one in a heartbeat. Sam had become familiar with anger and its nuances over the years, and the emotion was much easier to understand than that of something so vile as the crime scene one.

Sam had nothing to fear though because there wasn't a single trace of the dark aura come Sunday. Just a very faint echo of it that clung to the shadowy corners of the building, particularly in the now restored bar area, but nothing substantial. If Sam hadn't been actively looking for it, he wouldn't have seen it at all.

Ellen was a whirl of activity, pink and white marble aura swirling more hurriedly today as she bustled about. The Roadhouse was so packed that she was calling every available employee and offering a bonus to anyone that showed up before noon to pitch in. Sam had already taken it upon himself to shoulder most of the grunt work, as he was the biggest guy on shift right now (he was the biggest guy on staff period) and was mostly sticking to clearing tables and rolling filled carts of dirty silverware. Even Jo was dragged into the action, but since she was doing schoolwork and Ellen wanted her to focus on her studies, she was delegated to simple tasks like making sure the coffee machines kept going and the dishes were cleared.

"Eggs and toast for table 6, Sam, and top off the mugs while you're at it! Jo, I told you to clean out and refill the coffee machines ten minutes ago!"
"Yeah, yeah," Jo grumbled, swinging herself off the stool she'd been perched on and taking her calculator with her. She looked frazzled too, but for a different reason. Schoolwork was starting to pile up as the second semester began to pick up, and while Jo was a very smart girl, standardized education grated on her nerves, which was understandable. No matter what kind of student you were, not many enjoyed school.

Sam grabbed the plate of eggs and toast from Benny, who was holding out the meal expectantly, along with the last pot of black coffee, before stepping out onto the bustling floor. Tables were assigned numbers based on a chart Ellen had pinned up in various locations, but the college student had been working there for so long that he knew where every table was and their corresponding number.

Auras washed over him as he delivered the meal and went around topping off mugs for those that wanted it. The two most dominant feelings were hunger and satisfaction, and those clashed with each other as people came in hungry while others left full. Underneath that were the various emotions that came with conversation; happiness, annoyance, attention, confusion, and a wide variety of others that were lost in the collective whole. The eclectic, colorful hues that marked the breakfast crowd were vastly different from the subdued greys and blues of the Roadhouse at night.

"Number six with extra sausage for table 4 and two order of waffles for table 14, Sam. Jo, those machines-"

"Yeah, I'm here, Mom. See?" Jo called out sarcastically as she waved her hand exaggeratedly from the extensive coffee station. They had six coffee machines and a myriad of creamers and sugar, along with stacks of to-go cups and straws, "And stop harassing Sam, huh? You have 5 other people willing to carry plates, and he's injured!"

"My hero," Sam quipped as he slipped past her to reach the counter, earning a winsome smile from the blonde, "And my face doesn't look that bad."

Jo gave him a look that clearly said otherwise, crystal teal aura flaring to match.

"It's a shock you haven't scared away any customers, Sam. Must be your wonderfully handsome features beneath all those bruises."

"There's only two of them," the Winchester corrected, ghosting a hand over his still sore face. The bruises had darkened, but he had always healed quickly and knew that they'd begin to fade soon. They'd probably be gone before the end of the week.

Ellen rolled her eyes at her daughter's antics, but gave Sam the meals, along with a can of powdered sugar and syrup for the waffles. She also flashed an apologetic look that corresponded with the flare of color in her aura.

"I'll give you a bonus for that," she said, nodding to his face.

The waiter barely flinched as the hot plates were lined up along his forearm; between his flannel sleeves and the hundreds, if not thousands of meals he had carried, it was barely a nuisance. He did cringe slightly at the sticky handle of the syrup container though. He'd bet five bucks Becky had been the last one to handle it, as the girl was the messiest out of the entire waitstaff, beating out even Anna for the title.

"No need, Aunt Ellen," he responded, pulling out her old title in the hopes she'd forget about it. He knew she wouldn't though; she always made sure to pay him more than he felt he deserved.
Most of the morning passed in the manner until around 11, when the breakfast rush finally died down temporarily. By this point, a few part-time workers had shown up, none of which Sam was particularly close to. He tended not to get too friendly with the part-time workers, as they weren't around long, and many tended to be from different high schools in Lawrence. if they hadn't gone to Southview High then Sam didn't bother. In Lawrence, high schools were very divisive; many tended to only associate with people from their own high school and continued the same mindset long past those particular school years. Why? He wasn't sure, but he'd learned that it was best just to stick with who you knew instead of attempting to overstep boundaries many didn't want to be crossed.

Deciding he'd earned a little break, Sam ducked into the kitchen. It was one of the larger rooms in the Roadhouse, second only to the dining area in size, and with good reason. The Roadhouse was known for its exceptional grub, and it needed the kitchen to match. Everything was stainless steel and organized meticulously, with one long grill extending from wall to wall on the far side, rows of stoves and ovens on the right, and refrigerators and sinks along the right. The only messy aspect easily visible were the stacks of silverware on varying degrees of cleanliness by the sinks.

Benny was scrambling a massive amount of eggs at the grill while simultaneously filling the line of waffle irons they had. Even though the man was clearly working hard, his aura was still the same settled navy blue, shrouding him in calm layers of color.

"Mornin' Sam. Had enough of the floor?" Benny asked when he spotted the waiter standing hesitantly by the doorway, his Cajun accent prominent. Sam had learned that the busier Benny was, the more pronounced his accent became.

"Definitely. Mind if I help out a bit?" he asked politely. It was common knowledge that Benny controlled the kitchen with an iron-strong grip, and that hardly anyone was allowed to help out with actual food preparation. Considering the cook's affable personality, it caught a lot of people off guard, but Sam could understand the man's reasoning. Not only was Benny a killer cook, the kitchen was also his domain of sorts, even his home. He worked constantly day and night, and Sam had only ever seen the man leave a handful of times.

"Course, long as you avoid the stoves. Flip those waffle irons for me, would ya?"

Sam blinked in mild surprise before doing as he was told. Benny must be really busy if he had agreed so easily to let him help.

Poor Benny. Maybe I should let Ellen know to look for another cook again.

Ellen had tried over the years to add another cook to the roster, but Benny wouldn't have it. Some cooks had been scared off, refusing to work with Benny for unknown reasons. Whatever Benny said, it terrified them, and the other half simply couldn't keep up with the high demands. A few had tried to usurp Benny, but the key word was tried. None had succeeded, and whenever there was one of those cooks, Benny always grew sullen, and the hiring process became much harder, as they had to make him agreeable enough to try again.

The only person Benny had happily shared the kitchen with was Dean of all people. Dean had been drifting around at the time and had needed a steadier job to keep him connected to the real world and Lisa, who didn't know he fought illegally for the majority of his income and would probably never know. The two had gotten along marvelously, and the food. Sam hadn't ever served as many people in his life, and in those 3 months Dean had worked in the kitchen had probably been some of the busiest the Roadhouse had ever had.

It was a shame really that Benny and Dean had the big falling out. To this day, Sam still had no idea what had occurred, but the two barely spoke anymore, and Dean had never returned to work in the
Roadhouse. The only time Sam had broached the subject, he had received such a frigid response from his older brother that he had had to avoid him for the next few days afterward.

"Hey, Sam?"

"Yeah?" Sam asked, turning away from the now flipped waffle irons. Like the coffee machines, there were six of them lined up neatly in a row.

Benny was now adding assorted amounts of meat like sausage and bacon to a portion of the grill, the resulting sizzle sending a new wave of aromas through the air. His aura was still settled but contained a slightly different shade of darker blue at the edges. It was a barely visible difference, but for Benny, it was a big change.

"Put the clean silverware away. How well do you know Meg?"

Sam gazed at the stacks of washed silverware sitting on the smallest island in the kitchen (there were 3) and sighed before frowning slightly in confusion.

Meg?

"Uh, not that well," he admitted as he began the long process of putting the silverware back in their appropriate spots, "She's a very private person."

"That she is," Benny remarked as he began to ladle out portions of now ready eggs to awaiting meals, "Strange. She's been working here for almost a year an' a half, and we still don't know much about her."

The cook straightened his infamous cap (no one had ever seen him without it) before turning to look at Sam.

"I think you're the best person to talk to her," he stated, though his blue eyes held a curious look, as if he wondered why Sam was the best person to talk to Meg (Sam was already wondering as well), "She gets along with you the best, and you're not too forceful with her. Outta all of us, she's prone to listen to you more."

"I don't know about that, Benny," Sam said with a wry chuckle, though internally he was reeling. Why was Benny saying all of this?

Benny shook his head as he placed the ready meals on the counter, the steaming food ready to be served.

"Two orders of the Sunday special, a number six, and eggs and toast with extra butter!" he called out before gesturing with a dish towel at Sam.

"You don't give yourself enough credit, Sam," he remarked, "Point is, I need you to talk to Meg. She's getting into some bad stuff, and she needs help."

Sam frowned as he set some mugs aside to be returned to the coffee station.

Meg had been looking stressed lately, and her aura was showing that she was going through something. The Winchester recalled the pickup truck and the shady guy that had picked her up (on Tuesday? Wednesday?), and how it had made him feel uneasy. He had also never seen an aura go that pale before, much less Meg's aura out of all people.

*Maybe Benny has a point, and if anyone should talk to her, it should be me. Seeing her aura would*
"Give me an advantage in the conversation and steer me in the right direction to help her if I can."

"What kind of bad stuff?" he asked, arranging the assortment of plates into different stacks based on size as he spoke.

"Gang stuff," Benny said bluntly as he moved to the stove and picked up a ladle, abandoning the meat for a moment, "But I don't think she's a member herself. I think it's that scum boyfriend of hers, the one that picks her up in the pickup truck?"

"Yeah, I know who you're talking about," Sam said, skin automatically prickling at the thought of the guy and his muddy aura, "Do you know what gang specifically?"

"Not sure," the cook replied as he stirred a massive pot of what smelled like chicken noodle soup, "Though I think it's the Dead Eyes. Coulda swore I saw one of those stupid red eye patches on his jacket."

**Dead Eyes.**

Sam didn't believe in coincidences. Maybe it was the fact that he saw auras, or that he had always been more open to the idea of a higher power of some sort ever since he was young and far more idealistic. Whatever the reason, Sam was more open to the possibility that things were connected, and that nothing occurred at random in life, regardless of how out of place it may seem at the time.

Therefore, with the new knowledge that Meg was possibly connected to the Dead Eyes, Sam tentatively created one more new link to the case. With his Winchester luck, it'd probably pan out and simultaneously lead to trouble.

"I'll try to talk to her," the waiter assured, already deciding that he would definitely talk to her at some point, "She has been looking rather rough lately."

"That's one word for it," Benny said dryly before putting the lid back on the pot of soup, "I'm afraid she's caught up in something bigger than herself. Gangs are bad business, especially for someone that doesn't like to answer to orders."

**He makes a good point**, Sam thought, **Meg hated taking orders. How many times has she really done what Ellen tells her to do without saying something snippy?**

The conversation was ended when a part-timer rolled in a cart full of dirty silverware and orders picked back up. Sam continued to muse on the matter as the day passed along.

There was no evidence yet that Meg knew anything about the current killing spree or the Dead Eye attack on Castiel, but Sam had a gut feeling that she knew something. No one's aura changed that much unless they were caught up in something serious, and judging by the change, Meg didn't want to be caught up in any of it, whatever 'it' was.

Benny was right. He was the only one who could talk to her at this point, and at the same time, he just might be able to bring something to the case.

... 

Sam clocked out at seven that night. Between the extremely busy morning he had worked, and his bruises (everyone thought it was serious; he begged to differ), Ellen pretty much kicked him out and told him to heal up and get some sleep, and that he could work as much as he wanted on Tuesday.

The Winchester dragged his heels as long as he could but eventually relented. It helped that Becky
had decided to show up that night, an occurrence that Sam was pretty sure Ellen had set up. He wouldn't put it past her; she was one devious lady when she wanted to be.

By the time Sam emerged from the subway, night was well underway, city lights illuminating the gray slush much of the snow had become throughout the day. Pockets of pure white remained though, catching the colors of passing auras. It was an interesting phenomenon, one that Sam hadn't managed to figure out. Certain things, like physical objects, could retain auras with varying degrees based on both the object and the strength of the aura, while other things, like snow, seemed to reflect auras. Other things even amplified or nullified them.

Trudging up the stairs of his apartment building (the elevator was making that strange grinding noise again, and Sam didn't like riding it when it was doing that), the college student fumbled with his keys, a wave of sleepiness suddenly washing over him.

_Maybe Ellen was right. I could do with some sleep._

"Unca Sam!"

Sam felt an unwelcome sense of deja vu as his nephew tackled his legs in a bear hug.

_Oh no. Dean, I swear to God..._

"Hey, Ben," Sam greeted as cheerfully as he could, dumping his bag to the ground and picking up the four-year old with ease. Already he was resigning himself to another evening of watching his nephew, "What..."

"About time you got back Sam."

A female voice, one that the Winchester knew very well, suddenly changed the dynamic. Sam smiled as a familiar face poked her head out from the kitchen doorway.

_Oh, thank God. I don't have to beat Dean up now._

"Lisa!" he greeted happily. "What are you doing here?"

The brunette simply smiled enigmatically, her cobalt aura tinged purple with anticipation. Her hair was tied up in a practical ponytail, and she was dressed casually. She got off early on Sundays, which explained the lack of the scrubs Lisa practically lived in.

"Why don't you tell him, Ben?" Lisa asked her son, who smiled happily. Ben's aura sported a predominately sunny yellow color today, though the peach he was showing more and more peeked out underneath.

"We brought you lots and lots of food, Unca Sam!" he said excitedly, nearly stumbling over his words in his excitement.

"Food?" Sam echoed, a little slow on the uptake due to his long day at work, before realizing what they were talking about. "Wait, Lisa..."

"Ah, ah, ah, it was no trouble," Lisa said firmly, cutting him off before he could voice a protest, "Ben told me that your fridge looked "sad", and since you're always so busy, I put two and two together."

"Sad?" Sam asked, still feeling slow.
"Your fridge was very sad, Unca Sam," Ben said seriously as he patted his shoulder with a small hand, "So I told Momma, and she said she'd make it happy. And we did! Come see!"

Ben wriggled in his hold, clearly wanting to be put down, and Sam, ever the attentive uncle, obliged.

_Ben told Lisa I didn't have food?_

"We got a whole bunch of stuff, like milk and juice, but the _special_ kind of juice that comes in a can Momma says grown-ups drink, "Ben chattered as he leads the two into the kitchen, "What's it called Momma?"

"Coffee, dear," she supplied, letting Ben run the show with a grin, "And you better remember coffee is for grown-ups only."

"Uh huh," the four-year old said, clearly distracted, "So coffee, and other juice like apple juice and orange juice and..."

Sam let Ben list all the groceries Lisa bought. It was good practice for the child (Ben had surprisingly good pronunciation, and only slipped up a few times on the names of items), and besides, he needed to know how much he'd have to pay Lisa back. As the list went on and they perused the now full cabinets and fridge, Sam fell deeper and deeper into despair.

_There's no way I can pay her back in full right now. There has to be at least $100 worth of groceries here!_

"And that's all! Whatcha think, Unca Sam?" Ben asked with big brown eyes and a smile. He was clearly pleased with himself, and Sam automatically smiled at his nephew's exuberance.

"I think you did a great job helping your mom pick all of this out," he said, ruffling the four-year old's hair and earning a giggle, "Why don't you go into the living room and play while I talk to your mom? I'll be there in a minute."

Ben's aura changed a bit from the sunny yellow to something...different. It wasn't necessarily _bad_, like if he had gotten upset(much to Sam's relief), but it was definitely different. It was almost..._thoughtful_, though how thoughtful could a four-year old get?

_Not too much, but then, this is Ben._

It was _definitely_ thoughtfulness the more he looked at the blue shades intercepting the now stronger peach, and all he had to do was look at Ben's now tilted face to see the gears spinning in his head.

"All right, Unca Sam. Have some grown-up juice with Momma. Talking with Momma will make you feel better," he said in a tone of voice that mimicked Lisa's firmness before walking to the living room.

Sam blinked, taken aback, and Lisa chuckled at what must have been a very flabbergasted expression on his face.

"You just got manhandled, baby Winchester," she remarked, and Sam crossed his arms before leaning against the breakfast counter, pouting exaggeratedly.

"Ben's the baby Winchester, not me," he grumbled after casting a glance over the counter and into the living room to make sure Ben had made it safely, even though it was literally five steps, "Lisa, you didn't have to buy so much..."
Lisa was already shaking her head as she approached the coffee machine and began to get it started.

"Your fridge was empty Sam, like, really empty. I thought Ben was overexaggerating or something, but he practically threw a fit to get me here, and I knew then it was serious since he hardly ever throws a tantrum," she started, brushing a stray lock of hair away from her eyes, "When were you going to go shopping?"

"Monday," he mumbled unconvincingly, and Lisa fixed a pointed look on him before sighing.

"I owe you anyway, Sam," she said as the coffee machine began to gurgle, "For taking care of Ben whenever I dump him on you without notice and not complaining about it at all, even though you have college and work."

She chuckled wryly, cobalt aura taking a more serious hue.

"You know, sometimes I forget how young you still are. You've always been more mature than most," she said with a faint smile, "Even when you were just Dean's geeky little 15-year old brother."

"I wasn't the most popular in high school," Sam joked, attempting to alleviate the edge the conversation had taken with some humor.

It seemed to work somewhat, as her aura changed a bit, but Lisa Braeden had always been stubborn. He could tell, even without her aura, that the conversation wasn't over yet.

*Oh well. It was worth a shot.*

"You're a great uncle though, regardless of your age," she continued, leaning against the counter beside the coffee machine and crossing her feet at the ankles, "It's obvious you love Ben, and Ben loves you a lot too, almost idolizes you to a degree. I don't think a day goes by that he doesn't say "Uncle Sam showed me this," or "But Uncle Sam said..."."

Lisa tilted her head in thought, "Sometimes I wonder if he loves you more than Dean, cause it sure seems like it sometimes."

She smiled and laughed, showing she was joking, but Sam still felt a sharp stab of guilt. Hadn't he worried about just the same thing recently?

*Is it that obvious that even Lisa notices? And if she's noticed, does that mean that...that maybe Dean has too?*

The idea of Dean picking up on anything emotionally subtle nearly made him burst out in laughter. While Sam suspected Dean was a bit more sensitive than he let on(a combination of his repressed personality aspects due to how they were raised and having Ben no doubt), his older brother was always gruff and uncomfortable with displays of emotions, not wanting to deal with "touchy-feely rom-com shit". Dean probably wouldn't notice anything until it smacked him in the face, or if he did notice, he probably wouldn't say anything.

*It's probably for the best that Dean doesn't notice. He'd probably be angry anyway, and an angry Dean is one best avoided at all costs.*

"The point is, while I trust you wholeheartedly with Ben, you also have your own life, and I'm going to try to be more aware of that from now on," she said, tugging on her ponytail with a bashful smile, "It's actually quite embarrassing how much I drop him off. I don't think I've used a sitter in months, and I don't even leave some cash to help out."
"No, Lisa-"

"Shut it, Winchester. Someone has to keep an eye on you," she said, dark eyes becoming more intense, "Ever since that showdown with John, I think a lot of us took it as a sign of you becoming a 'proper adult', but we shouldn't have."

Sam stiffened at the mention of John, but ultimately relaxed when he realized that Lisa wasn't trying to blame him, or even worse, insinuate that he should reconcile with his father. She had never really given much of her opinion on the subject other than faint disapproval of how the whole thing went down and her displeasure of how both he and Dean had been treated.

The coffee machine stopped gurgling and hissed, a sign that it was done. Lisa seemed to take it as a sign that the serious part of the conversation was over, as she brightened visibly and lost that intense look in her eyes.

"About time. Now, tell me how you've been doing Sam. Anything interesting happen?"

Sam took in Lisa's open, welcoming aura before relenting. It was best he did, as Lisa would hound him to the ends of the earth if she sensed anything remotely intriguing, and besides, if he was going to talk to anyone about how utterly insane his life had gotten in the past week, it would be her. He had confided in her in the past, and she was a good secret keeper.

"A lot, actually," he started as they both made their respective cups of coffee. Lisa liked hers black with a splash of milk, and Sam liked his with a bit of cream and sugar, "But you can't tell Dean any of this, ok?"

Lisa blinked, taken aback, before smiling and nodding.

"Your secret's safe with me," she promised with a wink, "Now, spill the tea, or coffee."

The Winchester snorted at her wayward joke as she giggled before walking into the living room and settling on the sofa. Ben looked up from his coloring book briefly, looking quite satisfied at the turn of events judging by his aura before he returned to his coloring.

"So it all began last Tuesday night when I met this guy named Gabe at the Roadhouse," he began, and already, Lisa looked ridiculously interested as she crossed her legs and leaned forward slightly.

"Go on," she encouraged with a spark in her eyes.

And Sam did. His storytelling was a little choppy at first, but the more he spoke and relaxed, the more the events of the past week flowed from him until he was gesturing animatedly, nearly spilling his coffee when he got a little too eager. Lisa hhm'med and ahh'ed in all the right places, only asking a few questions here and there for clarification or if Sam forgot to tell something. She gasped when he retold the chase scene, smacking his arm for being so 'foolhardy and utterly Winchester' and smirked tellingly when he got to the part where he stayed the night at Gabe's. Sam left out certain parts, however, like whenever auras were involved, and things like the art Gabe had hidden behind his couch and how Dean had abruptly dropped Ben off.

"it sounds like something straight from a crime novel," she proclaimed when Sam finally got done retelling his wild week, "The underappreciated student meets a mysterious private investigator and gets caught up in a whirlwind of murder and mayhem as they undergo their nighttime adventures."

Lisa smiled when Sam rolled his eyes at her flair of dramatic.

"Does not," he retorted lamely, but Lisa did have a point. It all sounded quite fictional, which was
probably he had had a hard time wrapping his head around it all.

"I can certainly see why you don't want to tell Dean. You were running around with a practical stranger solving mysteries," Lisa remarked before her eyes became shrewd, "But he's not a stranger anymore, is he?"

Sam said nothing, but his silence must have been more than enough for Lisa, who hummed knowingly.

"Gabe sounds like quite a character to go running around in the moonlight with. You're going to help solve the case, aren't you?"

"I...yeah. At first, I was considering not to, but this case...I don't know, it's not just a random series of murders. Something's going on, and I want to help," he responded, carding a hand through his fringe.

Lisa nodded, expression becoming more serious as her aura darkened slightly.

"I heard about the murders on the news. So far they all have conflicting details, but the idea that it's some crazy religious psycho, possibly on drugs, seems to be sticking. If he kills again, they're going to call him a serial killer." she said, brow crinkling slightly, "And we both know how Lawrence's last serial killer turned out."

Sam flinched slightly as the nurse fixed a sympathetic look on him.

"Trouble always seems to follow you Winchesters around, doesn't it?" she murmured.

"It's the family curse," Sam responded automatically, having grown used to saying it over the years as he swirled a finger around the rim of his now empty mug. "We can't just seem to stay out of trouble."

Even though I tried. Maybe Dean was right. Maybe I can't escape being a Winchester.

He frowned momentarily before shrugging and smiling.

"It's been good seeing you, Lis," he said teasingly, "You should drop by my hovel more often."

Lisa slapped his arm playfully and smiled, "I should if it means I hear more stories like this and help one of my favorite Winchesters with his troubles. What are you going to do about you and Gabe?"

"What about me and Gabe?" Sam asked curiously, earning a tilted head from Lisa and a very strange flair of color from her aura.

"Well, your relationship with him started out quite epically. Are you going to let it be something temporary that ends with the case or when you've had your fill of adventure, or...?"

"No!" Sam responded forcefully before he cleared his throat awkwardly and continued in a much more controlled tone.

"No, I, uh, want to remain friends with him," he said, squirming slightly under Lisa's arched eyebrow of interest, "He's really fun, and even though it's been super dangerous and draining, I've had a blast this week. All the adrenaline, ya know?"

"Yeah, adrenaline," Lisa enunciated in a tone that clearly showed her suspicion in his words before she asked.
"Don't let him drain you too much though, Sammy," she advised, pulling out the nickname he so despised but yet everyone seemed to try to refer to him by. At least with her it only sounded acceptably...sisterly, "You have school and work to balance in your life, as well as socializing with other people. While I like what meeting Gabe has done to you, make sure you don't get too caught up in the adventure and forget about the rest of your life."

"Of course," Sam reassured before frowning quizzically, "Er, what do you mean by what meeting Gabe has done to me?"

Lisa smiled softly, cobalt aura lightening and swirling pleasantly around her.

"I could tell when you walked in. Yeah, you're tired, but you look so happy too. And satisfied, like something's finally going right for you," she remarked, placing a small, warm hand on his shoulder and squeezing gently, "It's about time something's gone right for you, Sam. You've had a lot of hardship in your life, and you deserve better."

Sam swallowed, suddenly overcome by emotion. Lisa's aura was just being so motherly right now, and it felt good to be acknowledged by someone. He hadn't realized it, but he hadn't really confided anything really important to anyone in a while, not even Dean, since the showdown(and it had been one hell of a showdown) with John.

Before he could say anything either awkward and too sappy, a soft tug on his leg made him look down to see Ben sitting at his feet, dark eyes fixed intently on him.

"Gabe sounds very nice Unca Sam," he said before holding out a piece of paper.

Sam took it curiously from him while Lisa leaned in to look at it. It was a rather imaginative drawing of what looked like Sam, if the long brown scribbles for hair and the sheer height were anything to go off of, holding what looked like a sword and wearing a cape. In front of him was a dark, tentacle riddled monster scribbled with black crayon hard enough to make the paper completely waxy. Behind him was a smattering of people. Sam could pick out Dean by the green eyes and leather coat, Lisa with her ponytail, and Ben himself. Strangely enough, Ben was standing apart from his parents, holding on to Sam's purple cape. There were even buildings in the background, tall skyscrapers that signified a city, possibly Lawrence.

What puzzled Sam the most though was that the dark, formless monster bore a decent resemblance to the humanoid creature he had seen at the crime scene Friday night.

"This is very creative Ben," Lisa praised, even if she sounded a tad confused, "What's Uncle Sam doing?"

"Protecting the family," Ben answered, startling the two adults on the couch, "He's the only one that can."

The two exchanged looks with each other. Sam felt a chill run down his spine as he gazed at the picture.

*It almost looks like the monster has a face.*

"Protecting from what?" Lisa asked.

"Evil," Ben replied solemnly.

Sam shivered slightly at the intense look in Ben's eyes.
There's no way he could know about the weird monster aura. No way. He was probably listening in on our conversation, and maybe the news and his imagination were inspired. That's all.

"I think Uncle Sam's been reading too many fantasy stories to you," Lisa joked before she stood from the couch, "It's getting late. Time for us to go Ben."

Ben frowned, looking as if he'd protest as Lisa scooped him up.

"But Unca Sam..."

Lisa shot Sam a 'do-you-see-what-I'm-talking-about?' look that Sam simply shrugged sheepishly at, even as his heart swelled a bit at Ben's obvious admiration for him.

"I'll tell Dean about our new...policy of sorts regarding Ben," she said as she propped Ben on her hip with one hand and scooped up their used mugs with the other, "I get the feeling he's been abusing this little set up more than I have."

"Nahhh," the college student denied with a neck scratch.

The nurse looked at him doubtfully before moving down the hall to the front door, ignoring Ben's put out attitude.

"Momma..."

"Nope, you have school tomorrow, dear," she said firmly as Sam passed her their coats, which had been draped over the breakfast counter.

Ben allowed his coat to be put on before he crossed his arms and pouted.

"But who's gonna warn Unca Sam?" he asked, outraged.

Sam tilted his head from where he was leaning against the kitchen doorway.

"Warn me about what?"

Lisa tugged on her own coat and sighed, tired but willing to accommodate her son's desires.

"Warn him of what?" she asked, unknowingly mimicking Sam's inner thought.

"Of the danger!" he said in an exasperated manner as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Unca Sam, you have to be careful!"

Ben said this as he turned to his uncle, who was now standing a little straighter. The four-year old's aura was swirling with sickly fear, the yellow-green shades of panic overwhelming the usual kaleidoscope of color.

"The monster could eat you!" he exclaimed passionately, running up to him and gripping the knees of his jeans. There was an almost desperate look in his eye as if he was truly worried that a monster could get to him, "You can't let it eat you!"

"I won't," Sam soothed, concerned by the genuine fear Ben held, "I'm too big and strong to let a monster catch and eat me!"

He snatched Ben up as he said this and spun him around, earning a shocked squeal from Ben and an approving smile from Lisa.
"Now, it's time for you to go home with your mother," he said as he set Ben upright, "You have school tomorrow, and you know how I feel about school."

"It's very important," Ben intoned, and Sam nodded, ruffling his hair as he zipped Ben's coat up a little higher.

"That's right. be a good boy, and I'll see you soon, all right?"

"Ok," Ben said, much happier and seemingly appeased, at least for the moment. His aura was back to the kaleidoscope, peach flitting in and out, "Bye Unca Sam."

"I'll see you soon, Sam," Lisa said, taking Ben's hand as the college student opened the front door for them.

"Call if you need anything," he offered, and the brunette smiled before punching his arm softly.

"That goes for you too, Mr. Winchester," she said, "I don't want to see your refrigerator be sad anymore."

"I'll keep that in mind."

Mother and son departed, and Sam was left alone once more in his apartment (Kevin was nowhere to be found. Again.), his head full of thoughts as he moved to sit in the armchair.

What had Ben been so fearful of? Perhaps Sam solving murders worried his nephew, and the killer was the 'monster'? But what would being 'eaten by the monster' entail? Getting killed? But that tentacle monster he drew...

Sam shook his head slightly. There was still Meg that he had to deal with, though since he never worked Mondays, it'd have to wait until Tuesday. He wasn't sure exactly how he'd broach the whole 'Hey, I'm worried you might be in a gang that just happens to be connected to a case I got dragged into. Wanna talk?' conversation, but he'd have to figure something out.

The college student sighed. Too much was happening at once in his life, and he had a feeling things would only escalate from here on out.

Figures. Trouble always follows me around like a shadow.

"So much for trying to escape the Winchester curse," he muttered into the empty living room before walking into his room. Perhaps the monotony of school work would give back a sense of normalcy to his life.

Yeah, and Dean will stop fighting to lead a normal life like the rest of us.

Homework held Sam's focus for about half an hour before a sudden wave of tiredness washed over the Winchester. He frowned as his head throbbed slightly, groaning as he dimmed the brightness of his laptop screen. A migraine was the last thing he needed now, much less sleep.

His head throbbed again, and Sam tossed his pencil down on his desk in frustration. He didn't know why he was suddenly very tired, but he couldn't go to sleep. He had work to do after all.

Sam was asleep between one breath and the next, the action so sudden that he couldn't have stayed awake even if he had tried. Next to him, his laptop hummed, the screen displaying dizzying colors that danced across the room. With one final, high-pitched hum, the computer suddenly cut out, the light show gone as quickly as it had come.
AUTHOR'S NOTE

Guess who's back with an update? I did say I'd post, and since school ended this past Thursday for me, I managed to bang out the last of this chapter, which I had slowly been working on these past almost two weeks. That stupid project I got I actually aced, and I'm glad the school year is finally over smh.

Before I go any further, can we just acknowledge the fact that there's already over 50K of this story? Granted, some of it is definitely my author's notes, but still! 50K is quite a lot considering it took me a year and a half to get the nerve up to actually post chapter 1. I definitely anticipate hitting the 100K mark in the future with this story simply because not only do I like writing Sabriel, I also kind of like the weird little AU I have going on and all the side characters.

Quick little notes on this chapter for those interested. Regarding Lisa, I wanted her to be a decent character and a good mother to Ben in my story, and bashing her wouldn't really work in my story for multiple reasons(some obvious and some not). Her purpose in my story and the rest of her character will be explored in good time. Ben is and will remain an enigma, though the theories you guys have come up with are fun to read. Finally, the last few paragraphs of this chapter...well you'll just have to read chapter 10.

Speaking of chapter 10, that'll be a doozy. It'll probably be somewhere around the length of chapter 5, if not longer. Think of it as me making up for my extended absence, as I know how it feels when a story doesn't update.

That's about it I think. Until next week readers!
I Am Death

Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 10: I Am Death

Sam was, for some reason, eleven again and stuck in a well.

Slimy stone walls rose up above him, uneven and jagged in construction. Dirty water sloshed around his now bony knees, murky green and covered in a layer of floating dead leaves and scum. It stank something awful, and the water was so opaque that he could barely make out his reflection in it. Sam wasn't too concerned about the questionable sanitary aspects of the water though, as he was more focused on why exactly he was a kid again and the corpse inhabiting the well with him.

It was a lady, that much he could tell through the decomposition. Beyond that, he couldn't make out any distinguishing features save for what were probably brown bangs and a pair of lurid green glasses that dangled from one ear, the lenses cracked beyond repair. Her glassy eyes stared in his general direction, the clouded irises showing that she had long left the land of the living.

Sam shied away from her, water sloshing around his knees. She was so bloated and decomposed that skin was peeling away from her, and he could see maggots crawling across her skin. It was obvious she'd been here for a while.

Ugh. Why is she here? And why am I here?

He held out his hands, which were now much smaller and less calloused, the faded nicks and scars he'd accumulated over the years from training reduced to just a few recent, pink ones.

Makes sense. Training didn't get intense for me until I was around eleven or so.

He wasn't sure why he was eleven, stuck in a well with a dead lady, or completely aware that the whole situation was just a vivid dream, but Sam knew that he wanted out. There was something off about everything, something that made his neck prickle and his gut twist in warning. The strange desaturated aspect of the light that drew attention to the grays and greens of his surroundings and the distinct lack of a sky above him (it was all just white up above) didn't help settle his nerves at all.

The only way out is up, I guess.

Scrabbling for purchase on the rough stone, the boy managed to wedge his fingers into a crevice. With a grunt, he began to pull himself up, but before he could go any further, a voice drifted down.

"Who are you?"

It was a warbled voice with different pitches and tones overlapping each other, making it impossible to place. Despite the ambiguity of it, there was an undercurrent of evil to it that made Sam's skin crawl.

I have a bad feeling about this.

Sam craned his neck to look up at the top of the well, where the hooded figure he had chased was leaning over the edge and peering down at him. The white light that suffused everything at the top of the well made the edges of his dark aura fade, but it didn't touch his hidden face at all. A ring caught
his attention, and Sam managed to make out a blue stone before the killer spoke.

"A kid. Or rather, someone masquerading as a kid," the killer hissed as he tilted his head. The hood didn't move at all, and his face remained stubbornly set in shadow.

Sam gulped, fingers tightening around the stone he was clinging to. Suddenly, he had a feeling that this was no regular dream, from the dead woman stuck in the well with him to his age.

*I've got to get out of here, but how?*

"Who are you?" he retorted, voice cracking (he hadn't gone through puberty yet at this stage). That didn't stop him from infusing as much exasperation as possible into his query.

The hooded figure simply stared for a second before he made a strange huffing sound. Sam realized after a few seconds of it that it was supposed to be a laugh.

*Oh fuck.*

"Me?" he asked as his hands went to pull back his hood. "Why, I am Death!"

The hood fell, and Sam instantly regretted any desire he had had to see past it.

A swirling mass of black resided where his head was supposed to be, pulsing and writhing with malevolent energy. There were no human features on his face at all, but with wide eyes, Sam watched as a slit appeared in the general area where a mouth should have sat.

*Shit.*

Sam's breath hitched as the slit expanded to create a gaping maw. He wanted to scream because the aura felt disgusting and evil even from this distance, but it was stuck somewhere in his throat. It was probably for the best, what with the rancid smell of the dead lady and the well. He was genuinely surprised he hadn't puked yet.

*Gotta get out, gotta get out, gotta get-*

From behind the hooded figure, a set of black arms that matched his inhuman head stretched up over him, fingers impossibly long and slender. They were so dark that looking at them against the pure white background made his eyes hurt. At this point though, his eyes were the least of his concern. His head was killing him, and if his gut twisted into any more knots Sam was sure he would puke, regardless of the Winchester self-control he'd been employing the whole time.

Sam instinctively knew it was the aura making him feel this way. Dean's made him feel protected and secure, Gabe's made him feel warm and content, and this one...this one made him feel sick and scared.

*If only Dean or Gabe were here.* Sam thought frantically as the hooded figure laughed his strange laugh, the sound bouncing around in his skull. He couldn't even move; he was so paralyzed by the disgusting aura.

A mental image of Gabe's aura came to mind, bright and golden and warm, and then Dean's green supernova of strength. The memories were pale comparisons to the real thing, but the brief thought of them managed to overcome the nauseating effects of the evil aura long enough for Sam to regain his mental faculties, if only for a moment.

*Neither of them are here, but that doesn't mean I still can't shake off this bastard.*
Sam slipped away from the wall, a renewed sense of determination overcoming the sickness the aura made him feel. He could do this, he wasn't powerless; he was smart and knew how auras worked-

Above him, the arms turned into tentacles and then shot down at him in hissing tendrils of black. The writhing limbs blocked out the white, leaving the well blocked in dark shadows.

*Smart's good, but moving right now would be good too!*

There was nowhere to go but down. Sam took a gulp of air and only hesitated briefly before diving down, the cold water swirling around him as he attempted to escape the dark aura.

... 

The murky water around him extended far deeper than it should have. There seemed to be no end to it, and it seemed the further he went, the darker it became. Sam supposed it made sense since he *was* dreaming, but how long was he supposed to swim? His headache had gotten even worse, if that was possible, evolving into some sort of a migraine that throbbed behind his eyes in beat with his heart.

*Books are in disarray. Crumpled pages dangle from damaged bindings, torn and ripped with no regard for the printed words they held. Some are stained with blood, crimson drops falling from a pale hand. Dead.*

He could sense the dark aura behind him, and Sam struggled to swim faster. The images flashing through his mind weren't helping. What the hell were they?

*Blue, worn carpet. A knocked over chair, a bumped table. Someone's heavy bag falls to the floor. She's dead, dead, dead.*

The pain in his head seemed to fall away with each flashing image. What was he seeing?


A tentacle brushed his ankle, the motion sending a stab of fear through his heart. The images were coming faster now as the water swirled around him, suddenly free of filth and silt.

*A duffel bag is unzipped. Inside is a laptop, and only that. Everything is static and color until a red flash drive hidden in the seam of the duffel reveals its secrets. Secrets, secrets, so many secrets.*

The water seemed to lighten in front of him, even as behind him it was shadowed by the tentacles still trying to grab him. Dark green was fading into a deep blue.

*Tires screech. The scent of rubber is strong as an engine roars. Sirens wail. A hand is tangled in his jacket, his feet dangling outside the door. Racing heart, pumping blood, and wild adrenaline. The chase is all there is.*

Sam's lungs were burning. Could he drown in his dream? He was running out of breath-

*Fire consumes all. Orange, yellow, the choking black smoke that clouds everything. Wood crackles and pops. A cry for help, a slumped body. Where was the exit? He knew this place.*

He couldn't feel the presence of the tentacles anymore, and the water was now blue. Just a little more-
Red eyes glared at him from dirty jackets.

Blue was fading into white-

A whiteboard is angrily wiped clean.

Was he swimming up?

The table is dejected; they have been rejected.

Or was he still going down?

Dark eyes glare beneath a furrowed brow, older than they're supposed to be.

The water suddenly gave way to open space, and Sam fell through space, images flashing by in sporadic bursts, too fast to comprehend properly.

Sapphire, gold, an evil stone. Were those voices whispering? It sounded vaguely familiar, ancient and full of power.

Twisted, you have it all twisted. A snap of fingers, a flare of gold eyes.

The ocean roars, the people sleep. No, that wasn't people, that was-

A familiar bedroom, long unused. Rough voice, he did it for your own good. I did it for you, I did it for-

Sam woke in the kitchen, facing the direction of the living room.

He blinked, almost convinced he was dreaming before deciding that no, he wasn't. He could feel the cool tile beneath his bare feet, and after checking his hands, found that he was nineteen again.

How the hell did I get in the kitchen?

The sky outside was gradually lightening, but it was still dark enough to let the college student know that it was sometime in the early morning. He was suddenly hyper-aware of the faint sounds of the city, combined with the gentle rumble of the heater somewhere in the wall and the buzz of the refrigerator behind him.

Shivering as the faint sheen of sweat cooled on his skin, Sam ran his hands through his hair and tried to figure out just what exactly happened.

Flashes of the monstrous aura from his dreams made his stomach twist with nausea, but he managed to hold back from throwing up. Just thinking of the slimy aura was affecting him, and the younger Winchester inhaled sharply before searching through his mind desperately for something else to focus on.

It was no surprise really that he chose to latch onto the mental image of his brother's aura. In desperate times, Dean had always been the one he had gone to, and the only person he felt he could truly rely on no matter what he did or was going through. Sure, they bitched at each other and sometimes failed the other, and they disagreed strongly on the subject of John, but they were brothers and close ones at that. When he was younger, Sam had been genuinely confused whenever he learned that people weren't close to their siblings, because he thought all siblings were supposed to be close. He had learned over time that his relationship with his older brother wasn't exactly the norm, probably due to the circumstances of their home life. After all, Dean wasn't supposed to know
how to cook full meals before he was 10, or give medicine and made sure he made it to school.

Thinking of his brother’s supernova aura helped Sam to calm down, and a few minutes later he was thinking much more rationally and didn't feel half as panicked as before. Already, much of the finer details of the dream were fading. Checking the time on the stove clock (it was 5:30; just great), the college student decided that sleep was a lost cause and that he might as well start the day with a cup of coffee.

As the coffee brewed, Sam made a bowl of cereal with some strawberries (Lisa was a true godsend) and sat on the breakfast counter with his back to the living room. The shadowed living room made him a bit nervous, as the dramatic shadows the furniture made reminded him of the dark tendrils that had tried to catch him back in the well. Really, the resemblance was downright creepy.

Rationally, Sam knew there was a distinction, but he still kept his attention away from it. He was also ignoring the instinct practically screaming at him to turn on as many lights as possible. Sam was not a scared 6-year old afraid of the dark and the monsters beneath his bed. He was fine.

The kitchen light was turned on a few moments later. He had to be able to see to make his breakfast, that's all it was.

Once the coffee was done brewing and he had finished his cereal, Sam returned to the conundrum his dream had presented, and the mystery of how he got to the kitchen.

He must have had a bout of sleepwalking, but Sam had never done that before to his recollection. Perhaps the intenseness of the dream triggered it? The last thing the college student remembered was doing his work at his desk, and suddenly he was out like a light.

All right, so I sleepwalked because of the lucid aspect of the dream. Maybe.

The dream itself was what really bothered him though. There was something almost...prophetic about the flashes of images he had seen while he had been swimming. They had gone by so briefly that Sam wasn't sure he even remembered all that he had seen, but something told him that they were all important in some way. But how? Already, they were fading; there had been so many, but some of them still stuck out at the forefront of his mind. He pushed them aside though, as there was another part of his dream that he was really worried about.

Sipping his coffee, Sam cautiously cast his mind back to the well, unconsciously tensing as the memory of the dark aura.

He wasn't sure of much, but he knew for a fact that somehow, that had been the killer and the same person he had chased a few days ago. He had been wearing the same gray hoodie and had the same ring on his left hand. Sam had managed to see the ring better in his dream and was pretty sure the blue stone was a sapphire. Why the ring was important was a mystery, but once again, Sam had a feeling it was...somehow.

The lady in the well was also a mystery. He hadn't been able to recognize her; she was so decomposed, but the glasses had stood out and felt vaguely familiar. How many people had bright green glasses frames?

Sam had been a kid in his dream as well, though he thought he knew the reason why for that. He looked quite different as a kid, mainly because he had been so short and skinny, and also because he pretty much wore whatever hand me downs he got from John and his brother. His pre-puberty appearance, along with his oversized clothes, led to him looking quite different than what he did now. It was the ultimate disguise, which meant that somehow, his mind had seen the need to hide his
identity from the hooded figure.

Maybe if he recognized me, he would have tried to kill me. After all, I don't think that well was mine.

A snort escaped Sam. He was assuming that his dream was actually real in some sort of manner and that the killer somehow was really in his dream.

That's ridiculous. That can't be possible...can it?

Sam shifted uneasily on the counter. He could see fucking auras around people, and Dean was insanely strong and fast. It'd be hypocritical of him to brush off something like this as impossible since he and his brother were living impossibilities. Still, something like this was hard enough for even him to comprehend and accept. Dreams that weren't just dreams?

"What're you doin' up?"

Sam nearly had a heart attack, and the only reason he didn't spill his coffee all over his lap was that he had managed to sense Kevin's sleepy aura just before he had spoken.

"Jesus Christ Kevin, don't do that!" Sam hissed as he turned to look at Kevin, who was leaning in the kitchen doorway. He looked rough with the dark circles under his eyes and his atrocious case of bedhead.

"Sorry," Kevin said as he yawned. "I thought your superhuman senses would've...would've told you I was here..."

He yawned again, and Sam smiled slightly. It was a well-known fact that he was practically impossible to sneak up on, even though various people had tried their best over the years.

"Want some coffee?" he asked, earning an affirmative grunt from his roommate.

'God yes. I have to go to campus so early today," he moaned, opening the fridge. "Three papers due by next week."

Sam hummed in empathy before snickering as Kevin did a visible double-take upon seeing the full fridge. He even stumbled back and gasped dramatically, a hand clutched over his heart.

"Is-is this food I'm seeing?" he gaped, rubbing his eyes as his aura flared in surprise.

"Yup. Lisa did us a solid." the younger Winchester answered, smirking at Kevin's astonished reaction. The boy had hung out with the theater kids for too long back when they had been in high school.

"She's an angel," Kevin uttered seriously as he took in the contents of the fridge, "A fucking blessing upon this earth. I might just get through this week."

"Going to the library? Cause if you are, I'll tag along," Sam asked as he finished the last of the coffee, and Kevin nodded as he pulled out some yogurt.

"It'll be good to have a study session. I plan on finishing at least one paper before my 8 A.M," Kevin said brightly before grimacing, "8 are so fucking brutal."

Sam frowned as his friend began to prep the coffee machine. That was now the second time Kevin had cursed, and while Sam wasn't concerned with his friend's use of foul language (he used it far too often to complain), Kevin only ever used it when he was extremely stressed.
"Where were you last night?" the younger Winchester asked, keeping a careful eye on Kevin's aura. It was now its usual forest green, intercepted with splashes of yellow that reminded Sam of sunlight filtering through a thick jungle canopy.

Kevin paused in his yogurt devouring, his aura turning a mottled shade of green that swirled anxiously around his head. His friend, unsurprisingly, had an aura that was most centered around his head. Sam figured it was due to his exceptionally bright mind.

But now he's trying to figure out whether he should lie or tell the truth.

"I, uh, was out," he started, his aura slowing down in its swirling a bit, "With friends."

There was no glaring lie within Kevin's less than confident sounding response, but the tell-tale colors changed slightly at the last part of his statement.

A half-lie. Which means he was people he may have seen as friends at one point, but it doubtful about now. Or the wrong kind of people that he may want to be friends with.

Sam didn't realize he was looking attentively at Kevin until his roommate squirmed and turned away.

"What's with you and your laser eyesight of truth?" he complained, throwing his scrawny arms into the air and nearly sending the spoon stuck in his yogurt flying, "You're like a-a bloodhound or something, but with conversations."

"Sorry," Sam apologized sheepishly, scratching the back of his neck with his free hand. He was usually better about the intense staring he did while reading people's auras, but sometimes he slipped up. "I'll drop it for now. But you know if you're in any kind of trouble, I can help, right?"

"Pshh, I'm not in any trouble!" the younger boy stated, brushing off his concern with a wave of his hand and a scoff, but his aura changed again, signaling another half lie.

Either in denial about his situation, or it's something that might get him trouble soon. Sam thought grimly. What have you gotten into, Kevin?

The conversation changed to other things (Kevin was pretty quick in evading any more invasive questions, and Sam let him) and the two students got ready for an early start to their studies. Sam had to admit, it sounded good to finally have a normal study session with his long-time friend. They hadn't had one since finals week, and even then their study sessions were more like them desperately cramming and quizzing each other while consuming large amounts of caffeinated drinks in an effort to stay awake.

By the time the two had finished breakfast and gotten themselves ready, it was about 6:30. The main campus library opened at 7:00, which gave them more than enough time to get to LU, as they were going to beat the subway morning rush which usually started at 8. Kevin had wrapped himself up well with his expensive coat and leather gloves, while Sam made do with his black army jacket and the layers of flannel beneath. He only bothered to put on gloves to appease his roommate.

"Why is it still cold?" Kevin asked in disbelief as they stepped out and almost slipped on a hidden ice patch on the sidewalk. "It's almost March!"

"Almost being the keyword," Sam grunted as he grabbed the Asian boy by his elbow to prevent him from face planting into the ground, "You know how Lawrence is."

"Bitter winters and sweltering summers," Kevin grumbled as they made their way to the station. Above them, the early morning sky was scattered with enough clouds to signal another upcoming
snowstorm. "I'm going to have to live somewhere more temperate than this hellish city when I graduate."

The younger Winchester laughed at his friend's grouchiness, and it seemed in the blink of an eye they were sliding their metro cards and boarding the train. Sam had forgotten how much time seemed to pass when he was with Kevin. He was just one of those kinds of friends, and probably Sam's best friend now that Jess wasn't around.

*Ugh, don't think about Jess.*

The subway journey passed about as pleasantly as a subway journey for Sam could get. The press of people in tiny subway cars was a disaster in the making for him, as all the different, conflicting auras washed over him and left him feeling disoriented and more than a little queasy, depending on how many strong auras were riding along to affect him. Over the years he had learned to block them out, or at the very least filter through what he saw and felt, but the subway was still a jarring experience at times. Puberty had given him another blessing in that his sheer size usually meant people shied away from him and gave him as much space as possible on a train car.

Kevin joked about this as the subway pulled away from the station, an age-old joke about Sam's size that was made pretty much every ride (Your shoulders have kept the good citizens of Lawrence away once again). Sam retorted with a joke about Kevin's own size and how he had to hold on to his elbow whenever they had to stand since he couldn't reach the hand holds comfortably (something that still made the Winchester laugh), and then they were cracking jokes while they skimmed their textbooks. While they rode, Sam kept a periodic watch on the other boy's aura and was glad to see that much of the stress had bled away, if only for the journey.

LU loomed above them in a collection of buildings as soon as they exited the station. While it appeared daunting (freshmen were known to have gotten ridiculously loss within it), the two had always been able to navigate it effortlessly. Between Kevin spending much of his time on campus due to his dedication to his studies (or, at least, he used to; Sam wasn't sure what he was doing anymore lately), and Sam's well-honed sense of direction (John had taught him far too much), the two knew just about everything there was to know about LU and its labyrinth-like layout. Shortcuts, unknown nooks, hidden paths; you name it, Sam and Kevin knew it. Therefore, they managed to cut about five minutes of the usual travel time to the library and got there just shy of 7:00.

The main library students used was called the Watercrest Memorial Library, or the WM for short, but a much more popular name to refer to it was the Wilkes Mausoleum Library, referring to the demonic head librarian, Mrs. Wilkes, who ran the place with an iron fist. Thousands of students over the years had felt her undeserved wrath over the years, and many souls had been crushed and laid to rest within the 3-story building; hence the mausoleum part of the title. Wilkes even had two cronies: another librarian called Mrs. Olsen that liked to patrol the aisles like some kind of predatory flamingo (she wore eye-damaging shades of pink nearly daily), and more recently, Marcus Hoffman, a grad student that acted as if he held some sort of authority since he became an assistant and walked around with a permanent stick up his ass. He also seemed to adore the ground the two Furies from Hades walked upon, something that the rest of the student body couldn't comprehend at all.

There wasn't anyone waiting outside, but that wasn't really a surprise. It was extremely cold outside, and Mrs. Wilkes was notorious about opening the library at exactly 7:00, regardless of who might be waiting outside or their level of need for the library and its resources. She also griped and bitched at whoever was waiting, as if they were somehow at fault for her having to open up. It got to the point where people just didn't bother showing up until at least a few minutes after 7:00 or even went to other, smaller libraries to bide their time (there were 6 important libraries on campus, but none as big or as varied in material as WU). This wasn't the only irritating quality about the obnoxious woman,
but it was the most pressing at the moment for the two friends, as it was barely 20 degrees right now, and they were cold.

"Wilkes should be walking up by now," Sam muttered in confusion as he stamped ice from his sturdy boots in the clear space the overhanging above them made near the door. The convenient overhanging also shielded them somewhat from the blustery wind, "Where is she?"

"Maybe she called in sick or something. That'd be a miracle," Kevin responded, leaning in to peer through the thick glass of the door, "Huh. I don't see her anywhere, and the main lights aren't on."

Sam frowned before coming up beside his friend and looking in as well. He was right; the main lights that overlooked the biggest check out desk that Wilkes usually commandeered was unusually dim, the only light coming from the skylights set in the roof. In fact, it seemed the only lights actually on were those illuminating the doors they were standing in front of and the space in between their doors and the second set that lead into the library.

"That's weird," the Winchester muttered before trying the door handle. It opened effortlessly, and the two friends looked at each other silently before shrugging and walking in. Sure, the situation was a little weird, as Wilkes was a constant presence in the library, but they both had work to do, and only a bit of time before their first classes.

Their breath frosted in the air as they stepped through the second set of doors, footsteps echoing on the marble of the large entrance area just before the main desk. The heat didn't seem to be on either, which drew a frustrated grunt from Kevin, who had prematurely unwound his striped scarf.

"What the hell's up with the heat? Does Wilkes want us to freeze to death or something?" he asked irritately, voice echoing off the vaulted ceiling before seeming to travel around the landings of the two floors above them.

Sam winced at the sound before holding out a hand, promptly stopping the younger boy with his arm as he began to look around properly.

Something's not right.

"Don't you find it strange that Wilkes or her cronies haven't shown up at all?" he asked, "And that nothing’s on? Wilkes always has those stupid heaters by her desk in the winter cause Olsen's bones get all creaky, but they're not on."

Kevin frowned before they both turned to look at the main desk, which was in the shape of a horseshoe. Not a single heater was on, even though Sam could see two personal ones sitting on either end of the horseshoe.

"You're right," the Asian boy whispered, dark eyes scrutinizing the desk, "But if Wilkes isn't here, then who's opened the library?"

On any other occasion, Sam probably would've brushed it off as unimportant. Obviously, Mrs. Olsen opened it, or the janitorial staff forgot to lock up when they came by to clean up. John's old teachings would've niggled the back of his mind, but they would've stayed there, and Sam would've gone on with his day.

However, Sam's last week and the case he had gotten caught up in had brought back everything he had been taught, and right now, his Winchester instinct was screaming at him to get Kevin out of the library, because something was wrong.

OK, think. Problems and possible solutions. What's off?
Where the hell was Wilkes? The lady practically *lived* in the library, and even if some other librarian had opened it up, they should've been at the front desk, especially Olsen in this weather. Which meant that someone that *wasn't* a librarian had opened up, and Sam had a feeling that someone wasn't going to be friendly.

*The killer struck first on campus. What's stopping him from doing it again?*

A chill ran down Sam's spine as he looked around the library with renewed perspective. If the killer was here, then so would be the dark aura. The aura practically rolled off him in waves; it was so powerful. All he had to do was locate it, but where...

There. By the very far shelves towards the back of the first floor, Sam spotted a faint trace of the malevolent fog drifting out from between two aisles.

*Shit.*

"What time is it, Kevin?" Sam asked very quietly, firing an intense gaze on his friend and gesturing for him to respond just as quietly.

Kevin blinked, confused before his dark eyes widened and he pulled out his phone, doing one better as he showed him the time on his screen. It was 7:01.

"What do you think's going on?" the younger boy whispered, clutching his phone like a lifeline.

"Look, I think the killer may have struck again," the younger Winchester whispered back, grasping his friend by his shoulders, even as he let his gaze flick around for any sign of movement. An unfortunate aspect of WU was the sheer size of it, which meant the killer could've been hiding anywhere if he was sticking around.

Kevin's dark eyes widened, his aura flickering with the first beginnings of fear.

"Are you sure?" he asked, the blood the wind had brought to his cheeks draining, "How do you know Olsen, or even, uh- what's his face, that kissass with the rat face? Hoffman! How do you know he hasn't opened the library up!"

Sam almost let out a snicker at Kevin's blunt description of Hoffman, but now wasn't the time. His friend was beginning to panic, so he quickly clapped a hand over Kevin's mouth and nose when his breathing became loud and shallow, gesturing for him to quiet down and to take deeper breaths. He waited until Kevin had regained a steadier breathing pattern before shaking his head and gesturing to the desk.

"None of their stuff is here," he pointed out, "Olsen has those extra eyes in the back of her head and would've been here by now. Hoffman likes to strut around, but he doesn't have the authority to open the place up."

The Winchester's eyes drifted to the dark aura, which was still hanging in the air like poison.

*He's been here, and recently. There's no trail from these main doors, which means he came and left through one of the numerous side exits, or...*

"Look, this psycho might even still be here," Sam said grimly, unconsciously falling into his old training as his stance shifted slightly and his breathing changed to allow for maximum efficiency, while still being quiet, "You wait outside while I have a look around-"

"Are you fucking crazy!" Kevin suddenly hissed, grabbing his upper arm. His grip was surprisingly
tight, "No way are we splitting up! That's the one thing you don't do, ever! I'm going where you're going."

"Kevin-

"Sam, with all due respect, I'll gladly take my chances with you. You're like, 6'5, and I've seen you pick up a grown man by the throat, not to mention you're built like a Greek god," his friend stated, gaze intense, "I'm way safer with you than waiting outside like-like some Rebecca from a lame horror flick!"

"Does Dwayne Granger from junior year really count as a grown man?" Sam asked, earning a huff of a laugh from his friend, but not much change to the panic overtaking him.

"He was bigger than me," Kevin mumbled.

Kevin's aura was a pale green with fear, but Sam could tell that the boy was going to stick to him like a shadow by the determined stripe of amber yellow. His friend was truly fearful something might happen if he waited outside, and Sam realized that something just might. The killer had proven to be elusive and completely ruthless; while Kevin may not fit whatever mysterious demographic he targeted if he believed Kevin saw him or was some kind of threat, Sam knew he'd kill him.

_Dammit. How'd my life ended up like this? We should both just walk out, but what if it's just my paranoia playing up and it's all for nothing?

"Fine, but don't let go of me. Step quietly, and if you have to say something or stop for some reason, tap my hand twice. If I tell you to do something, you do it, no questions asked. Don't touch anything either. Are we clear?" Sam ordered, earning an affirmative nod from the younger boy, who had gone progressively pale.

Linking their gloved hands, Sam led Kevin through the large, marble entrance area as quietly as possible, recalling more and more lessons with John with every step he took. His Winchester instinct was still screaming at him to get Kevin, who was untrained, a liability, and more importantly, an innocent, out of danger. Sam did his best to ignore it and instead give in to the desire to grab something to defend themselves with. He paused at the checkout desk and grabbed a hole puncher, earning a wide-eyed, are-you-fucking-serious? look from Kevin, who was gripping his hand hard enough to hurt.

Sam simply shrugged minutely back. The hole puncher was one of the largest blunt objects on the desk that he had spotted first.

The sound of a door opening behind them caused Sam to whirl around, shoving Kevin behind him as he raised the hole puncher before awkwardly putting it down as he realized who it was.

"Uh, guys? What are you doing?"

"Adam!" Kevin exclaimed happily, seeming to be relieved to see a familiar face. Sam didn't blame him, as he was secretly glad there was someone else here too and that it was Adam of all people.

Adam Milligan was in a special academic program that took place partially on campus, with the rest of his time spent at Southview High so he could get dual credits. Sam had first met him at Southview, but since he had been a senior and Adam a freshman, they hadn't spent too much time together, but lately, they had reconnected. He was a good kid and completely determined to become a doctor, but he wasn't a pretentious ass about it like some of the medical majors Sam had met. He was also one of the more level-headed friends he had, and Sam didn't use the term 'friend' lightly.
Sam quickly gave the blond boy a rundown of the situation, and he knew Adam wasn't going to brush them off, as his grey and blue aura became steely with seriousness. Adam was a bright kid for his age; he knew how Wilkes' schedule worked just like the rest of them, and how abnormal she, and nobody else for that matter, was nowhere in sight.

"What makes you think it's the campus killer though? There could be another reasonable explanation." Adam asked as they clustered near each other. The ice crystals the wind had whipped up crunched on the shoulders of his coat, and Sam brushed them off.

"Too loud," he said in response to the boy's questioning look before turning to glance at the aisle with the dark aura.

*I can't tell them that I can see auras, so how do I convince them?*

"He's struck before with Reynold, and we all know Reynold was an asshole," he pointed out, earning two affirmative nods from his younger friends, "Wilkes was 10 times the asshole that Reynold was, so if the killer would go after anyone..."

Adam's blue eyes widened minutely as the Winchester trailed off.

"You have a point," he muttered, rubbing his chin with a gloved hand, "But if it is the killer, we should probably go while we can and leave it to the authorities."

"Yeah, let's go, please," Kevin agreed fervently, "Let's be smart and not reenact the shitty plot of every horror film in the history of cinema by investigating!"

Sam sighed, running a hand over his face as he quickly considered his options.

Leaving was honestly the best course of action. Before, he could have protected Kevin just fine if they had stumbled across the killer, but factoring in Adam, who was only sixteen and even smaller than Kevin, his job would be tougher. Besides, Kevin had a point. They were just students, and investigating wasn't their job.

*Maybe mine, but not theirs*, Sam thought as he looked at the two teens looking at him expectantly.

"Ok, let's go-"

The ding of an elevator echoed loudly in the oppressive silence of the library, earning a squeak from Kevin and a flinch from Adam as the two teens nearly jumped out of their skins. Sam kept a calm exterior, but inside his chest, his heart skipped a beat at the sudden jump scare.

"Christ!" Adam exclaimed as they turned to look at the elevator, but from their angle, they could only see part of it, as the elevators were located in the entrance area space between the desk and the doors. It was specifically the one on the left wall, and Sam cursed as he realized he had completely forgotten about those.

"Stupid, stupid! Now what?"

"It's coming from the third floor," Sam breathed before taking a few steps forward. This allowed him to see the elevator fully from a distance, and he could feel Kevin holding onto the back of his jacket as they watched the display change from a glaring red '3' to '2' with another ding, "Adam, get behind me."

"Is he on the elevator?" Kevin asked in a pinched voice; his aura was trembling with fear, Sam could feel it, "Sam? Why the fuck would he be on the elevator?"
"Adam, get behind me!" Sam said louder, as the teen was still staring at the elevator, "What the hell are you doing?"

The blond boy's aura was like ice now as he drew a pocketknife from his jacket and flicked it open with a faint click.

_Oh great._

"Is that a knife? Adam, why do you have a knife?" Kevin hissed, "What are you going to do with that, _poke_ him with it?"

"Adam, get behind me for Christ's sake," Sam said forcefully, tugging the stupidly brave boy back by his hood and shoving him behind him (what the actual _fuck_ was he thinking?).

"I was thinking maybe I could intimidate him or something while you guys left," Adam muttered as he clung to the back of Sam's jacket with Kevin, earning a huffed laugh from the Asian boy as the '2' changed to a '1' with what seemed like the loudest ding yet.

"I think the campus killer has a bigger knife, dude, but kudos to your Gryffindor idiocy."

"I'm a Slytherin," Adam muttered as the trio waited with bated breath as the metal doors slid open.

_We really should've left by now_, Sam thought idly as he readied his hole puncher, _If John ever heard of this I'd definitely be hung out to dry._

It was empty.

"God bless America," Adam exclaimed as they all sighed with relief before looking closer at the elevator.

_Wait, no, there's something on the floor. Is that-_

"Is that one of Olsen's cardigans? It's pink! It is, isn't it? Does that mean she's dead?" Kevin asked frantically, and Sam immediately pushed the two younger boys back to the main desk. He had seen a faint trace of the dark aura on the pink heap of clothing, but just that. It was faint enough that Sam knew the killer hadn't just put it there; it had been there for at least an hour.

_Which means he set it up. And he's toying with us._

"It could be a diversion. We don't know where he is-"

The elevator on the right side of the library suddenly dinged, earning a cringe from Kevin as Sam whipped around to look at it.

_Shit._

"What if he's on that one?" Adam asked, aiming his knife at the elevator, and Sam swore before grabbing both of them by the arm.

"Ok, that's it, we're leaving," he said authoritatively, striding forcefully to the exit doors. This had gone on long enough, and he _didn't_ like being toyed with. They would let the proper authorities handle this while they waited outside or in one of the nearby buildings like good little college students.

Kevin sighed with obvious relief as they made their way to the doors, his aura growing steadily stronger as they approached their exit. Adam sounded a bit disgruntled as he put his knife away, but
Sam could sense the relief in his aura. He pushed the two teens in front of him as he kept an eye on the elevator.

It was almost comical when Kevin and Adam bounced off the door with twin grunts. He had nudged them a bit too hard towards the doors.

"I'm delicate, Sam!" Kevin whined good-naturedly as Adam glared at him.

"Whoops," Sam said, holding up his hands in apology.

The humor faded quickly though when they tried the door handle.

"Sam?" Kevin asked as he tugged at the door. His aura was quickly going from relieved to frightened.

Sam's heart plummeted as he stepped up to try the door, but it was well and truly locked.

He slammed a hand on the glass hard enough to make it rattle and earn a squeak from Kevin. Adam cursed beside him.

"Shit.

The doors on the left slid close as the elevator on the right suddenly dinged and began its countdown, the display switching to a red '2'.

"Can we pick a lock or something?" Adam asked, but Sam was already shaking his head.

"Whole system's electrical and hooked up to a computer, which means whoever locked us in is good with their tech. There's a special security key, but I don't know where they keep that," Sam said, gesturing to the door before stepping back, "Dammit!"

Adam grimaced, "Break the glass?"

"It'd take time, it's thick," Sam answered, "Thicker than it looks."

"We're screwed!" Kevin moaned, tugging at the ends of his scarf as Sam looked apprehensively at the approaching elevator and tried to come up with some sort of game plan (You're a Winchester for Christ's sake, use your head!). "We're screwed! We're gonna die fucking serial killer victims in a fucking college campus library! That's not how I want to go! We're-is that Alfie?"

The Winchester turned to look at the doors as Kevin practically threw himself at it. Even Adam pressed his face up against the glass.

"Alfie?" Sam asked, confused, and the two boys looked back at him.

"My best friend," Adam responded at the same time Kevin said, "Adam's best friend."

A boy hunched against the blowing wind was striding up the steps to the doors, his aura lavender, and mauve.

"Call him," Sam said bluntly, even as he fumbled for his own phone. Seeing Adam's friend had been the boost he needed, and now he had a vague idea forming in his head, "Tell him to get help. Security, campus police, anything."
"Alfie's dad is a police officer and patrols near here," Adam said as he tugged out his phone, "He can get here in like, five minutes."

"Do we have five minutes?" Kevin asked ominously as Alfie tugged on the locked door handle from his side and gave them a confused look, shoulders hunched against the bitter wind outside.

"What's going on?" he asked, yell hardly audible through the two sets of doors it had to travel through, "Why are the doors locked? Adam?"

Adam managed to dial, earning another confused look from Alfie as the blonde boy answered his phone.

"Alfie, we're trapped in here with the campus psycho killer, and we need help now. Call your dad! We don't know where the hell he is right now, and-fuck!"

The elevator doors on the right dinged opened, showing a familiar brown sweater vest tainted with the same faint amount of dark aura draped on the railing within.

Crap. Sam thought as he scrolled through the contacts on his phone, Hoffman too?

"Fuck, that's Hoffman's sweater vest, the ugly brown one," Kevin muttered before pressing himself against the door even more firmly, "Alfie, we're going to fucking die if you don't get us some help!"

"What's going on?"

A redhead had shown up now, dark green-blue aura standing out in sharp contrast against Alfie's bigger, but paler one.

"They're trapped with the psycho killer, Charlie," Alfie responded, voice muffled by the doors, "I need you to go get campus police!"

Good kid, Sam thought as he watched the blond boy point the redhead in the right direction, the girl taking off down the steps. Good fucking kid. I'll have to give him a hug later or something.

The Winchester returned his attention to his phone, picking the correct contact and tapping his foot as he waited with the dials, keeping a watchful eye on the whole library. He didn't want this dude sneaking up on them, but that'd be nearly impossible. Not only was Sam more aware of his surroundings, he could also sense the killer's aura. The psycho wouldn't be able to get within a good thirty-foot radius without Sam catching at least a whiff of his aura.

"Sam? What's up?"

He's awake. Good.

"Gabe, I'm locked in the campus library with Kevin, Adam and the killer," Sam started, hoping the sleepy man would catch on and quickly become alert, "He's freaking toying with us with the elevators, and I don't know where he is. All I have is a hole puncher for a weapon!"

Sam could practically feel the man's aura change through the phone. He heard sheets of paper shifting and the jangle of keys as something fell to the floor.

"I'm on my way. Stay calm, and if you see him, then run. Has someone called the police?"

Gabe sounded a lot more aware now, and something else beneath the hard, serious tone he had taken. Sam didn't have time to wonder what it was though; he was locked in a library with a
"They're on it," Sam said, glancing at the doors. No one else had shown up, but he was sure that would change soon unless the cold kept the students away. He hoped it did; he didn't want anyone else getting caught up in this.

*I should've followed my instinct and left when we could've.*

"I'm more worried about Kevin and Adam. They haven't been in a situation like this."

"And you have?"

*Crap.*

"The chase?" Sam said in a 'duh' tone of voice, even as he winced at his minor slip of the tongue. Training with John was *not* supposed to be common knowledge, "Where are you right now?"

Outside, the redhead had come back, nearly breaking her neck as she slid on a patch of ice. She was agile though and managed to right herself by grabbing a nearby trashcan.

"They're on their way with keys cause they can't access the system, but they were fucking asleep! It's gonna take them a minute!" the girl said. She looked vaguely familiar, but Sam couldn't focus on her identity at the moment.

"Can you do something, Charlie?" Alfie asked, and Charlie shrugged before rummaging into her bag and pulling out something that looked like a pager.

"I can try."

There was a pause from Sam's phone before the consultant responded in a disgruntled manner

"I'm in the Beetle right now, trying to get out of North Heights."

Sam closed his eyes momentarily as his stomach twisted before opening them (he had to keep an eye on the library). North Heights was a good ten minutes away from LU, and that was being generous. It was Monday morning, with still slippery roads from the previous day's snow, and Gabe trying to navigate.

"You won't make it."

"That's what the portable siren the LPD assigned to me is for, Sammy," Gabe responded jokingly, but the college student could hear the nerves in his voice. This time, he didn't have to dissect the tone. It was fear.

*For me?*

"Gabe-"

Alfie gasped loudly on the other side of the door, and Sam turned to them, feeling his muscles freeze as he took in their expressions as something simultaneously brushed against the back of his mind, a whisper of evil.

The two of them were backing up now, and Alfie's eyes had widened comically before he began yelling into his phone. Sam didn't have to hear him to know what he was saying, or have to see the pointing fingers and frantic gestures of Charlie.
He could feel the dark aura now.

"Fuck!" he swore, whipping around with Adam even as Kevin whispered, "He's right behind us, isn't he?"

That's so cliche, a part of Sam thought, even as the other part was telling him to get his shit together and do something.

Technically, he wasn't right behind them (Sam wouldn't have let that happen). He was standing on the other side of the main desk, shrouded in relative shadow since the lights still weren't on. Sam estimated he was a good fifty feet away, give or take. Still, he made for a terrifying sight, with his hood pulled low over his face and his dark aura swirling around him in a black arc of cold hate.

"Sam? What's going on?" Gabe asked from what seemed like a mile away, even though his phone was right by his ear. "Sammy?"

"Sam," Kevin breathed, scuttling towards him, and Sam let his friend move half behind him for protection as he stared down the hooded figure. Adam shifted to stand by his side, one hand shoved into his pocket and presumably holding his knife.

"He's here," the Winchester said roughly, not taking his eyes away from the murderer at all. "He's here, and-"

The killer tilted his head, the movement earning what sounded like a swear from outside, a whimper from Kevin by his side, and a sudden shift in mindset from Sam.

People talked about how, in life and death situations, they were either paralyzed by fear or suddenly gained a strange sense of purpose. Flight of fight, the age-old instinct that took over when an average person was confronted with a high-stress situation.

Sam, however, wasn't average. He never had been, and due to John, he didn't really have a flight or fight instinct. Winchesters, as John liked to put it, didn't let that pesky impulse control them and dictate what it made them do. Winchesters controlled it.

Things narrowed down to an extremely limited field as Sam's mind processed everything clinically, without a haze of heart-stopping fear clouding his mind.

There was repetitive pounding on one of the doors. Someone, probably Alfie, had grabbed one of the trashcans placed outside and was smashing it into the door, but the glass was far too thick to be broken easily (LU students had encountered that pesky little fact on many of the doors on campus), and they had to smash through another door to get in anyway. No escape or immediate help there.

The elevators were slow. Riding one was barely faster than taking one of the multiple sets of stairs the library contained, and there was an extremely good chance the killer could get to them before the doors slid shut. While it was a good idea to get on one and pull the emergency stop to get it stuck between two floors and wait until the police showed up, getting to one of the elevators successfully was too much of a risk.

Sam still had his hole puncher, his heavy backpack, and, oddly enough, a pocketknife to match Adam in his jacket pocket. John had ingrained that habit into them; to always have some sort of weapon. The only reason he had it in this jacket though was because he had accidentally left it in there a long time ago. A stroke of luck for him, because if he ever needed a knife it was definitely now.

Adam himself looked ready to succumb to the 'fight' instinct and shank the killer, but that wouldn't
help at all. Like Kevin had said, the killer's knife was probably bigger (along with his experience with it; he'd already killed two people that they knew of). He wouldn't be intimidated at all. Sam's eyes slid to the blond boy for a fraction of a second and was already surprised to see that the boy was already looking at him, a whole conversation in his eyes.

*Like how Dean and I used to look at each other during training.* Sam thought absentmindedly.

Sam tapped the messenger bag he had resting on his hip, then pointed subtly to the killer without looking at him. Adam tilted his head slightly towards the killer and moved his hand in his pocket; Sam shook his head and gestured to Kevin, earning an accepting nod from Adam. They both looked away, using their peripheral now as Sam tapped his hand against his pocket. Adam shifted the hand that was gripping his knife in his pocket in response.

*He understands. We both have knives, but it's a last resort since we have Kevin.*

Kevin was holding up well, considering how stressed and fearful he was, but he was weak. He hadn't been resting well, Sam could tell, not since last week when he had discovered the bloody lecture hall, and his breathing was already becoming a bit erratic from panic. Kevin wouldn't be able to keep up a sprint for long, which meant Sam had to take care of him.

From here, Sam couldn't see any sort of gun on the killer, but between the dim interior of the library and the fact that the desk blocked the lower half of his body from their angle, that wasn't saying much. Regardless, he was pretty sure the killer didn't have a gun. It wasn't his style, and he would've pulled it by now if he did.

*You're trapped in a library with a psychotic killer, two innocents, no proper weapon, and help on its way with an unknown ETA. What are you forgetting Sammy?*

The Winchester nearly shuddered at the sound of John's rough voice in his head, but he was already too far gone in the mindset, so he showed no external reaction to his thought process at all. John (or the John-voice in his head), however much he hated to admit it, was right. He had forgotten to take in the killer's aura.

While malevolent still, it was about as settled as something so monstrous could be. There was no sign of extreme anger, or the desire to kill. It was just *there*, settled and waiting patiently, like a curled up behemoth watching a lesser being with mild curiosity.

*Of course. He obviously has an agenda. If we're not on his hit list, then he'll debate whether or not to kill us instead of just doing it automatically.*

It was a shallow comfort, but Sam factored it in anyway.

"Sam, answer me!"

It had taken three seconds for the Winchester to take all of this in and communicate silently with Adam. Now, he had to buy a little bit of time while he got into position.

"The Enochian was an interesting touch," he said, raising his voice so it echoed around them as he stared down the killer, all the while shifting closer to Kevin. Beside him, he could already hear Adam slowly shifting the straps of his bag, "Does it have some sort of meaning to you?"

The killer said nothing, but his aura shifted slightly. Not in a way that boded trouble for them, but more like he was...curious.

*He wants to know how I know it's Enochian, but he's not stupid enough to speak. He doesn't want*
"Reynold and Cork were working together, right?" Sam asked suddenly, pushing the two boys behind him as if he wanted to shield them from him (and he did, but there was another reason), "And whatever's in the duffel links them. I know you left that on purpose."

"What are you doing, Sam?" Kevin hissed.

"Sam?" Gabe asked, still on the phone.

Sam kept his attention on the killer and his little monologue, even as he heard Adam get ready.

"What did Wilkes do to you, or was it, Olsen? Maybe even Hoffman? Which one did you kill this time for your mission?"

The killer remained silent, but it didn't matter. Sam hadn't expected a response, and Adam was ready.

Wedging his phone between his shoulder and ear, the Winchester transferred his hole puncher to a startled Kevin before grabbing the bag Adam had been slowly working off his shoulders the whole time. Sam had had to get the boy behind him so that the killer wouldn't notice, and was glad he had been big enough to shield the boy completely. His little ruse had worked like a charm because he had the heavy bag ready to go before the killer could even react.

"Give me your bag, Kevin!" Adam exclaimed, already working it off of Kevin, who was freaking out because the killer was now running down the surface of the desk, dark coat (that was different from the hoodie) rustling as his ring caught the light.

"I'm still alive Gabe, but you might want to hurry up," Sam said calmly before he threw the backpack at the killer.

It was just like the trashcan lid back in the alley. Sam had always had impeccable aim, and with his strength, the backpack turned into a black blur in the air, sailing true as it slammed into the killer's chest with what was probably fifteen pounds of textbooks and other school paraphernalia.

Good thing we're all nerds. Our bags are gonna hurt like a bitch.

He didn't make the mistake of assuming the killer was down and out for the count. Sam had learned from the alley that the killer was no punk physically; he may have looked more like Kevin with his physique, but appearances were deceiving. It wouldn't stop him for long.

Still, it was quite satisfying to see the killer fly backward from the force of the backpack and smash into an office chair with a clatter.

"All right, time to go," he muttered, grabbing Kevin and tossing him over one shoulder effortlessly, ignoring his friend's surprised protest and the muffled sounds he could hear outside, "Adam?"

Kevin's red bag went flying through the air, colliding with the killer's back just as he stumbled to his feet. It landed with an audible thump, and there was another clatter as the killer fell again.

"What do you carry in your bag Kevin, bricks?" Adam asked as he rolled his shoulders with a wince.

"I'll carry them around now if it takes down psycho killers!" Kevin exclaimed.

"Time to go," the Winchester muttered, grabbing Kevin and tossing him over his shoulder as Adam
pulled the knife from his pocket, "Give your phone to Kevin, Adam, and I hope you're good at running."

After the quick exchange, Sam and Adam sprinted past the main desk and the killer, who was obviously winded but recovering quickly, judging by the way he was getting to his hands and knees. Sam didn't look at him too long though, as even though he was keeping calm so far, the dark aura was already giving him a mild headache.

At least I'll be able to sense him coming.

From Sam's phone, he could hear the wail of a siren, presumably the one Gabe had. He could also hear car horns, and the screech of tires, which meant Gabe was probably driving like even more of a maniac than he usually did.

God help anyone on the streets between him and LU.

"I'm back," Sam said, finally returning to his phone and earning a relieved sigh from Gabe, "How far away are you?"

"Two minutes away," the consultant said in a tense voice, "Sammy, please tell me you're running."

"I'll split, check the side exits," Adam said, and before Sam could stop him, the blond had veered off down another aisle and was out of sight.

Dammit!

"Yup," Sam responded shortly as he weaved through the nonfiction aisles, trying to catch up to Adam, "Try not to run anyone over, yeah?"

"If anyone gets in my fucking way that's their problem."

"Sam? Alfie says campus police are at the doors now, and his dad. He also said the killer ran in the opposite direction from us. Why would he do that?" Kevin said nervously from over his shoulder, "Is it a trap?"

"He's not interested in us. He's leaving," Sam said grimly, "Give me my hole puncher."

Kevin passed him the office supply that was now one of their only weapons(Sam's knife was still in his pocket), and Sam did a quick shift of items. Kevin was draped over his left shoulder, so he transferred his phone to his left hand, keeping his grip on Kevin with his forearm while wielding the hole puncher with his right. During all this, he didn't slow down at all. Even with Kevin, he was still faster than the average person.

A sudden trail of dark fog made Sam nearly bypass an aisle entirely, but he realized at the last second that it was too faint to have come fresh from the killer. It was an old trail.

I either track down Adam or follow this.

Sam grimaced. He was quickly losing track of Adam's aura, as while it was impressive in size and color, the greys and blues blended well in the dim interior of the library. Assuming the killer had killed someone, this trail would lead to the body. So far, the hooded figure had shown crazy ingenuity in his crimes in not leaving behind any sort of forensic evidence, and he wouldn't want to risk getting any at the scene, or anywhere in the library really. Therefore, there was a strong chance he wouldn't run into the killer following this, and it'd be the best chance of keeping Kevin safe.
"You better be all right Adam." Sam thought before plunging down the aisle.

The Winchester followed the trail, which lead steadily into the heart of the library and towards one of the main clusters of computers WU contained. All the while, Kevin kept up a running commentary that made Sam want to simultaneously laugh and shush him.

"Alfie, I'm with Sam fucking Winchester and his holy hole puncher of death, I'm fine," Kevin said with a hysterical sounding giggle at his own pun, "Yeah, the big guy with the shoulders. I feel like a rag doll right now."

A short pause, "I don't know where Adam went. He ran ahead and we lost track of him, but I'm sure he's fine. He was ready to use his knife and shank the dude, who, by the way, is completely terrifying. He felt evil if that makes sense."

So Kevin could feel it too, which means this dude's aura is crazy powerful if regular people notice something.

"I'm here, Sam. This redhead got the door open somehow, and one of the officers has a key for the other. Where are you?"

"Uhh, non-fiction, dictionaries," Sam responded as he raced through the aisles. His breathing was a bit ragged (he was carrying Kevin after all), but overall, he actually felt...good. Must have been all the adrenaline coursing through his system.

Of course, as soon as he said this, Adam nearly gave him a heart attack when he burst out of an aisle perpendicular to their own.

"Holy fuck!" Adam said, lashing out his knife dangerously close to Sam's chest (maybe if Adam was a foot taller he'd be able to reach Sam's face).

Sam managed to leap back from the wild stroke, smashing his hip into the shelves.

Ouch. That's gonna bruise.

"Watch where you point that thing, dude!" Sam exclaimed, drawing a sheepish expression from the blonde.

"Sorry, but I saw the psycho duck out of a side exit through one of the conference rooms."

"You hear that, Kevin? Gabe, he's out of the building." Sam asked, and the Asian boy quickly began to relay the information.

"Unfortunately," Gabe hissed, "Get out of my way, LPD here! Christ, move! Jody, they're-"

Sam didn't hear the rest of the consultant's sentence, distracted by a blinding throb of pain that lanced through his head.

Books are in disarray. Crumpled pages dangle from damaged bindings, torn and ripped with no regard for the printed words they held.

Something crunched underfoot, and Sam came to a screeching halt as he looked down, Adam bumping into him with a grunt.

Beneath his feet were vandalized books, pages strewn all over the place and pulled from their bindings. Shelves laid bare as the books that once sat on them littered the floor.
"Sam, why have we stopped?" Kevin asked anxiously, "Books are the least of our fucking problems right now."

"I think it's going to become much more important in a minute, Kev," Adam remarked, coming to stand by Sam's side. His aura was shifting to dark shades of blue and grey as he looked around with sharp blue eyes.

Sam winced, clutching onto Kevin tighter as another throb of pain starburst behind his eyes.

**Some are stained with blood.**

The Winchester took a few hesitant steps forward, feeling his gut twist. The faint trace of the hateful aura had grown stronger, swirling around his ankles just like it did back at the crime scene where they had found Cork. The further he went, the more drops of blood appeared on some of the pages. There was also a faint whirring sound and the flutter of pages falling to the ground. A copier was on.

"This cannot be good," Adam mumbled, gripping his pocketknife harder.

"Sammy? Where are you? The bastard's gotten away I think."

Sam stopped at the corner, unwittingly letting Kevin down onto the ground as he dimly registered Gabe's words from his phone.

"Maybe someone else vandalized the library," Kevin said shakily, but his theory fell flat. They all knew it had to have been the killer.

They all looked at the end of the aisle ahead of them, and the corner that suddenly seemed to loom above them, before edging closer in a huddle. The aura was getting thicker, hissing slightly as it undulated across the floor.

"Please don't let it be a dead person," Kevin whimpered, clutching onto Sam, who was at the forefront of the huddled trio.

**Crimson drops falling from a pale hand.**

The first thing they saw was the hand as they peered cautiously around the corner of the aisle, outstretched from its pinned position on the wall. It was steadily dripping blood that pattered to the ground.

**Dead.**

Wilkes was pinned to a pillar just before the cluster of computers, right above one of the copier machines, which was spewing pages printed with symbols Sam knew had to be Enochian. There were only a few symbols painted above her head, which rolled to the side and showed the gaping slit made to her throat. Her arms were outstretched, pinned that way by a plank of what looked like rotting wood. The dark aura was everywhere on the scene, just like with Cork.

"Oh, God. It's a dead person." Kevin breathed, looking very green as Adam cursed silently.

**Blue, worn carpet.**

Sam felt his heart skyrocket as he looked at the floor before them. All the carpet near the computers was a well-treaded blue, worn from the feet of a thousand students.
Kevin stumbled sideways, trying to skirt the body and knocking over a chair in the process, hands reaching out to a table to steady his fall. The wooden table moved a few inches with a groan. Adam moved to help steady him, folding up his knife with a deft hand.

A knocked over chair, a bumped table.

"Sammy, what's going on? We don't see you anywhere."

The Winchester moved to help steady Kevin, swallowing heavily as the iron scent of blood washed over him. His bag fell to the ground in the process.

Someone's heavy bag falls to the floor.

"The computers," he managed to say past the growing constricting feeling in his chest, "We're by the computers. Wilkes is dead."

She's dead, dead, dead.

Wilkes was dead by the hands of the Enochian-writing killer, and Sam may had just foreseen it in his dream.

Not maybe. I did.

Dangling from her ear, the lenses cracked beyond repair, were a pair of lurid green glasses.

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

This chapter took such a sharp left turn from what I planned, but I actually like how it turned out, even if I now have to make adjustments to the chapters I've planned out. Luckily it shouldn't take too much effort since I only had the next two chapters solidly planned out. Whoops!

How did this chapter change so much? Glad you asked! Not only was the killer not supposed to make an appearance at all, it was originally just supposed to be Sam and Kevin discovering the body due to them walking to the computers to set up their little study session. After that it would have been the study of the crime scene, and etc. But due to two obstacles I encountered when writing, it changed.

1. How should the killer evolve? I felt that he should either become bolder or 'slip up' in some manner as we progress into the story since he's so crazy.

2. How do I go about introducing new side characters I want to add? I have a web of connections to weave after all.

Therefore, I now have Adam, Alfie, and Charlie to play with, all introduced here. Adam being knife happy was a bit random on my part, but that's for a reason *insert maniacal cackling*. I also have the psycho becoming just a bit more psychotic as well.

Also, I said it'd get long, but yikes this got long! I think all the murder chapters will end up being this way due to their nature. Apologies in advance if long chapters aren't your thing!

The next chapter will feature the investigation of the crime scene, along with the reappearance of our favorite ocean man(it's about time tbh). Until next week readers!
Chapter 11: The Birth of a Serial Killer

Watching the police process the crime scene was, in Sam's opinion, almost surreal.

The dark aura that permeated the whole scene flowed placidly around people's ankles, ebbing like some sort of black wave in an irregular, unidentifiable pattern. Bright flashes of light from the cameras burned spots in Sam's vision and seemed to make the fog almost burn into his vision. The fact that no one beside him could see any of this added to the extreme unrealness of the scene, not to mention the morbid irony in the fact that Wilkes, the head librarian, was set up in an overtly religious style in the very library that she ruled so terrifyingly when she was alive.

The killer was definitely trying to make a statement with the killings and succeeding. Sam knew that he wouldn't forget this anytime soon.

_The green glasses should've been a dead giveaway_, he thought in a daze from where he was perched on a chair facing backwards, his arms crossed loosely on the top of the chair as he straddled it with his long legs. _She was the only one that wore such hideous frames. Sure, Olsen had those pink reading ones, but Wilkes always had the ugliest frames that she switched out all the time. And the green ones were one of her favorites._

Wilkes's eyes were open, staring off down one of the aisles to the far right of the scene. Her head was tilted, resting on her right shoulder, showing the gaping slit in her throat that slashed it horizontally. Like Cork, she looked as if she'd taken a few punches, but unlike him, it wasn't nearly as severe. Her outfit, a frumpy cardigan, blouse, and flowery skirt, were all intact, right down to thick, sensible loafers on her feet. A lot of it was bloodstained though due to the symbols carved into her collarbone area.

_Same as Reynold_, Sam thought, examining the dead woman as clinically as possible to ignore the glaring fact that he had somehow _seen_ part of the events that had just occurred in his dream. _Did Gabe ever get the symbols on his chest translated? Did Cork have something carved in his chest too? He had been clothed at the scene._

She was also frozen or had been kept somewhere cold for a bit. He could tell by her gray pallor and the blue tint to her eyelids and thin lips. The theory that he kept them somewhere like a freezer was becoming more and more likely. Unlike Cork though, she didn't seem to have been cold for long, as her blood-stained hands still dripped (why were her hands bloody?), and she wasn't stiff if the way the analysts were carefully moving her limbs was any sort of indication.

_So she was dead in the well. He had already killed her by that point. There was nothing I could do for her. I didn't see her death, I just saw the discovery of her body. Along with a whole bunch of other images, I can barely remember._

Sam sighed and let his head drop onto his arms, hair flopping down to hide his face. This whole case had spiraled completely out of control, and he didn't know what to make of his convoluted dream. Seeing auras was one thing, but predicting the _future_?

"Sam?"
The Winchester looked up upon hearing the vaguely familiar voice to see a familiar duo standing before him in their dark blue uniforms.

"Gadreel and... Garth, right?" he said, remembering them from Cork's crime scene.

Gadreel nodded, while Garth looked pleased Sam had remembered who they were judging by the brightness of his baby blue aura. Gadreel's aura, which Sam remembered as being very settled, seemed to be a bit more out of sorts today. He couldn't really blame him though; one of the campus officers had puked somewhere by one of the computers when everyone had originally arrived.

"I just wanted to thank you for keeping Adam safe," Gadreel said seriously, the grip on his coffee cup tight. Sam noticed that his hand was also drifting over his holster, something that seemed to be an ingrained nervous habit, "Adam's my brother's best friend, and the two have become friends very quickly. When I got the call from Alfie that the campus killer had Adam and some others trapped, I thought we were gonna be dealing with a lot more bodies and that my brother would lose his best friend, until he mentioned you."

Gadreel looked completely serious and sincere as he said this, which caught the college student off guard.

"Me?" Sam asked dumbly before backtracking, "And wait, Alfie's your brother?"

"They're like half-brothers," Garth interjected as Gadreel nodded solemnly, "And I was with Zeke doing patrols. Soon as I heard you were with them, I think we both relaxed a bit."

"Why?" Sam asked, genuinely confused as he tugged on his fringe in embarrassment, "You don't even know me."

"Doesn't matter," Gadreel said in his gruff voice, his blue eyes focused on him with a faint curious air, as if he had seen something in Sam that didn't mesh with what he'd previously thought, "There's something about you that's very likable. You're a very easy person to trust, and you obviously have a very strong personal moral code you follow. If anyone would do their best to keep others safe, it's you."

"Plus, you're also super buff," Garth added, alleviating the tense mood with a sheepish smile.

"Garth," Gadreel said chidingly with a frown, earning a huff from the younger officer as Sam smiled at the interaction.

"That's very kind of you to say, but I just did the right thing," Sam said uncomfortably, "They were just kids, and they didn't deserve to go through that. It's sort of my fault really. I took too long to get them out."

Garth frowned, baby blue aura flashing with a streak of purple.

"You're just a kid too," he pointed out, "And it wasn't your fault. It was that-that psycho's fault, the one who did that."

The younger police officer gestured to Wilkes, who was being photographed with numerous flash cameras now, along with the strewn books laid out in a rough half-circle fanning out from the pillar and copier she was strung above.

"I think you did the best you could under the circumstances," he declared, jutting out his chin sharply, as if ready to argue with Sam if he denied it.
"Glad we agree on that, Garth."

The three men turned to see Gabriel with a drink holder in one hand, soft eyes fixed on Sam to match his aura. Judging by the windblown state of his hair, he had gone to one of the food halls on campus to get the Starbucks he was holding.

*So that's where he had gone off to,* Sam thought, something in him settling with the P.I's appearance. After he had discovered the body, he had been completely focused on making sure Adam and Kevin were OK while the EMTs arrived. Kevin had been especially shaken by the scene, and Sam was pretty sure his roommate had been in mild shock by the time the EMTs had arrived. Adam had been pale but in better shape, and it was decided that both boys were to be sent home, where police would later question them with permission from their parents. Both of the teens had been surprisingly reluctant to leave Sam, with Kevin practically plastering himself to Sam and refusing to leave, no matter how much coaxing everyone did (even Jody had tried). It had eventually taken a phone call from Mrs. Tran to get Kevin to leave. Adam had been sent to sit in a squad car a few minutes ago, something that the boy had also refused until Alfie was mentioned. In that half hour, Sam had been aware that Gabe was somewhere nearby, but he hadn't had time to do much more than exchange a long, meaningful glance with the consultant before he had disappeared.

"How you holding up, kiddo?" he asked, passing him a cup of coffee that he accepted with a happily murmured thanks, ignoring the fact that Gabe's thoughtful actions warmed him up before the coffee ever had a chance.

"I'm fine. Just thinking," Sam answered, propping his chin in one hand as he surveyed the crime scene. The dark aura was beginning to fade a bit at the edges of the scene that was marked off with tape, but judging by the uneasy shifting of some of the officers and forensic analysts, it was still strong enough for them to sense on some level.

*Like Gordon's dark aura Friday night, the one that triggered the bar fight. What the hell is going on in Lawrence?*

"What's so funny Garth?"

Sam looked over to see Gabe questioning the young officer, who was quietly laughing behind Gadreel. The man looking more and more disappointed in his partner's behavior, and Sam wondered how the two had been made partners anyway. Whoever had done it seemed to have an interesting sense of humor, as the two men seemed to be complete opposites in demeanor.

*Kind of like Gabe and I."

"The cup...the cup looks so small in your hand!" the officer managed to wheeze out.

Sam frowned before looking at the cup of coffee he held as Gabe began to laugh as well. Even Gadreel looked amused as the Winchester twirled the cup around with his long fingers.

"No it doesn't," he denied, even though it *did* look a bit small in his hand. It was a problem he encountered frequently; some things just looked ridiculous in his large hands.

"It does!" Gabe gasped, nearly spilling the rest of the coffee he had as he laughed uncontrollably. He obviously seemed to find it funny.

If it was anyone else (perhaps Dean), Sam would have already been grumbling and scowling, but Gabe's face was so bright and his aura so golden and lively that Sam didn't want to bring his mood now. Like this, the man was almost back to his happy-go-lucky self, and the Winchester was
desperate for some sense of normalcy, or anything to take his mind off of the bizarre occurrences that kept happening to him. Surely jokes would help?

"Just how big is your hand, Sam?" the consultant asked as he righted the drink container, still giggling.

"Big enough," Sam retorted before winking with a smirk, drawing another peal of laughter from Garth as Gabe began to splutter, clearly not expecting him to say that. His aura turned a faint pink with embarrassment, but as he began to rant about 'sexual innuendos' in his trademark dramatic style, Sam didn't let himself feel too bad.

"I see why you work with him, Gabriel," Gadreel quipped, cracking the first smile the college student had ever seen from the officer.

"It's Gabe!" the consultant whined, stamping a foot childishly, "I'm Gabe, you're Zeke, and Sam—well, he's got like twenty different nicknames."

"What about me?" Garth asked, sounding almost plaintive.

"You're perfect just the way you are, Garth," Gabe said seriously, passing the officer a cup of coffee in an apparent sign of appeasement for not giving him a nickname. Garth perked up, accepting the peace offer with a wide smile.

Sam felt a sudden throb of a headache, not as bad as the first few times, but still noticeable. He tensed, his first thought going to some sort of vision, but an image never flashed by. He sighed slightly in relief before taking a sip of coffee to hide his little moment, almost embarrassed that he had thought he was going to have some kind of premonition.

*If those vision things are real and going to continue, I'm going to have to figure out how it works exactly.*

"You ok, Sammy?"

A hand rested tentatively on his shoulder, and Sam relaxed automatically underneath the touch after only a brief moment of hesitation.

It wasn't that Sam was *horrible* with touch; he had learned to manage his distaste for sudden contact over the years in his journey for normalcy. He just detested sudden movements he couldn't see, and a hand to his shoulder just made him think of John, as he had always clapped one down; either in a rare moment of fatherly pride, or in the much more common painful grip of either 'behave yourself' or 'listen to me'.

Gabe's aura just felt so nice and bright though, flowing from his hand to stroke at his shoulder in soft swatches of color. It would be almost impossible to shrug the man's hand off, and besides, Sam didn't really want to.

"Just a headache," Sam responded distractedly, rubbing away the last of it with a hand to his temple. Gabe's aura was useful for that too, and if the man kept touching him for any longer, he was sure he'd get all bouncy and giddy like he had when he'd written his number on the P.I.'s hand, "Adam said he went out the side exit of a conference room, right?"

"Uh, yeah," Gabe responded, brow crinkling in confusion at the sudden query. His hand slipped off his shoulder, leaving the warmth and watercolor-faded traces of his aura, "That's one tough friend you have by the way. Followed the guy until he exited the building. A lot of the cameras are trashed, so that's the only reason we even know where he got out."
"No sign of him?" Sam asked, subtly rolling the shoulder Gabe had touched as he shifted in his chair to hide the movement.

*His aura is way too powerful. What's with all these weird, strong auras coming out of the woodwork?*

"None. He got away. Why?"

Sam shrugged, tugging on his fringe thoughtfully as he benched the aura subject for the time being.

Nobody had brought it up yet, but Sam was sure the killer's transportation was important. A food truck with a freezer would probably be the perfect answer, but Sam doubted the police had missed such a vehicle on campus. He also doubted that someone around his age would even have such a thing unless it was his occupation. No, he got around some other way, but how did he get around so inconspicuously?

*Maybe he has magic powers and can teleport wherever he wants. Or he transforms his aura into giant bat wings so he can fly off into the night.*

"We have to go get Adam home," Gadreel said, eyeing Garth as if he was a ticking time bomb. His look of concern was probably well deserved, as the officer already seemed to be a bit hyper from the coffee, "We'll see you around Sam."

"But hopefully not under these kinds of circumstances," Garth added, saluting him cheekily.

Once the two officers had left, Gabe set the drink holder on a nearby table and pulled up a chair. Setting it across from Sam so he could face him, he mimicked his seating style, though, to Sam's amusement, the man's legs had a far more difficult time achieving it.

"How do you do this?" Gabe muttered as Sam snickered at the consultant's struggle. Straddling the chair made it so that his feet touched the floor awkwardly instead of the college student's confident stance with his feet flat on the ground.

"I think you have to have long legs," he said with a cheeky smile, earning a pout from the P.I.

"I have long legs too!" he complained, sticking out one jean-clad leg to brush Sam's knee with.

Sam arched an eyebrow, and Gabe rolled his eyes before resettling his leg and propping his chin in his hand.

"Fine, maybe I don't," he muttered, glaring at Sam in mock hurt, "I make up for it with my sparkling personality."

"That explains so much!" the Winchester teased, snickering as Gabe grazed his arm with a punch in retaliation.

"So, what's going to happen now?" Sam asked as he took another sip of his coffee. It was almost unbearably sweet (he wasn't surprised; *Gabe* had ordered it), but coffee was coffee, and he needed something to drink if only to have something small and controllable to focus on, "This is his third kill, so doesn't that make him..."

"A serial killer?" Gabe finished, his playful attitude replaced with something more serious as he sighed, "Yeah, it does. Jody's outside trying to wrangle the media under control, but the evening news will definitely feature this whole mess. He'll go from psycho bath-salts dude to budding serial killer for sure."
"They won't put our names out there, right?" Sam asked, suddenly nervous. He didn't want to be caught up the media frenzy that would surely ensue once word of the serial killer got out. While Lawrence had a high crime rate, serial killers weren't exactly everyday things.

Gabe was already shaking his head.

"No, Adam and Kevin are minors, so they can't get their names anyway. Jody's just going to say 'three LU students' and leave it at that."

Sam sighed in relief. Not only would Dean completely flip out if he heard what happened, he also didn't really want anyone else worrying about him. Ellen was already worried enough about him, not to mention Lisa.

*If they find out about me encountering the killer, I'll never see the light of day again.*

"So, now that he's officially a serial killer, what's going to happen?" the Winchester asked, watching as Gabe's aura shifted through a cycle of subtle pastel colors before settling on something of a mix between frustration and determination.

"The LPD already had a mini task force set up for this case, but I expect they'll add a few more detectives now to respond to the eventual public demand. I don't think they'll call the FBI, at least not yet, since a couple of detectives on the force have serial killer experience," the consultant started slowly, frowning as he traced a finger absentely over the lid of his cup, "I...well, I'm not sure I'll be on this case much longer."

Sam nearly choked on the sip of coffee he had taken but managed to get it down the right pipe before he stared at Gabe in shock.

*Gabe off the case? What for?*

"What do you mean, off the case? Why would they do that, you're the best!" Sam exclaimed, gesturing with one hand as he ranted, genuinely confused, "You're the one that's gotten the Enochian translated! How are they going to do that without you?"

Gabe blinked at him, his aura reflecting his shock. Sam flushed slightly as he realized he had been a bit too vocal, as a few officers at the edge of the crime scene had glanced back to see what was going on. He ducked his head and tugged on his hair nervously, sipping his coffee in an attempt to hide his embarrassment.

"They'd be stupid to take you off the case," he muttered, still heavily displeased at the mere thought. Gabe, off the case? Just thinking it was crazy.

The consultant's aura flared with a strange set of colors too quickly for him to identify as he ran a hand through his swept back hair and gave Sam a small smile.

"It's out of my hands, kiddo. Jody warned me that I'll probably get the boot soon, since the higher-ups are confident a Detective Talbot will solve the case now that she's coming back from leave," Gabe said, his tone derisive enough that Sam knew he and whoever Talbot was had butted heads before, "I'll probably be officially off the case by the end of the week."

Gabe had tried to sound reassuring, but he didn't sound very convincing, and Sam's stomach twisted at the thought of the P.I not working the case. It made sense in a shitty way, as Sam had seen all the other active cases Gabe helped out on sitting on his table, and the golden-eyed man was, at the end of the day, only a consultant. Anyone from the department could ax him if they wanted to.
If he doesn't work the case, what does that mean for us?

"And then what?" Sam asked, lowering his voice as the thought quickly took over his mind. While the past week had been probably one of the craziest in his life (and he had plenty of memorable moments throughout his nineteen grueling years on Earth to choose from), it had also been one of the most enjoyable. He hated to admit it, but he liked the mystery solving and all the high tension action that happened, like the chase. Sam didn't want it to end so soon.

"What do you mean?" Gabe asked, and the Winchester licked his lips nervously before looking at his boots.

"Well, we work really well together. But that only happened because I originally helped you out with this particular case," Sam mumbled before scowling and taking a fortifying sip of coffee. He was normally an eloquent person, so he should be able to phrase this right, but Sam had belonged to a family that, if the conversation didn't involve training or some sort of order, was probably conducted through a series of grunts and vague gestures. The fact that he was a Winchester probably canceled out what little well-spoken aspect of his personality he had managed to develop and left him at a big fat zero on communication.

Thanks John, for teaching me to communicate with my fists more than my words.

Gabe tilted his head, looking momentarily confused before he seemed to understand Sam's conflict if the rapid ripple of pale orange across his aura was any indication.

"Sam-"

"Milton, stop socializing and get over here!"

The duo snapped their heads simultaneously to face Jody, who looked pissed off judging by her stormy, dark green aura. Donna was hot on her heels, peach aura swirling anxiously as she watched Jody in concern.

Sam wasn't sure if he was supposed to be relieved that Jody's arrival had effectively ended the quickly uncomfortable direction the conversation had taken, or nervous that Jody might just lash out at somebody. The lead detective looked extremely irritable at the moment.

Forget irritable. She looks three seconds away from tearing off the head of whoever needles her next, and if Gabe doesn't say the right thing, he's screwed.

"Just getting Sam's version of events," Gabe said quickly, even as he scrambled out of the chair. He seemed to sense that his survival was on the line, as there wasn't a single trace of teasing on his face, "Want some coffee?"

The consultant held out the drink holder, which still held a single cup, as a clear peace offering, a bright smile on his face.

Smart, Sam thought appreciatively, We might just live to see tomorrow.

Jody paused, scrutinizing the container before sighing and grabbing the cup to take a long sip.

Her aura immediately began to mellow out a bit at the edges as she drank, and Sam breathed a small sigh of relief before smiling slightly as Gabe visibly relaxed as well. It was obvious he was just as intimidated by the brunette detective, which was an amusing thought.

Gabe being intimidated by anyone just seems weird.
"Not bad," Jody said gruffly as Donna smiled happily behind her, also clearly relieved that her partner was in a better mood, "The news reporters are going crazy out there. Someone's leaked the fact that he's on a religious-themed crusade, and the names they're bouncing around...ugh."

The woman pinched the bridge of her nose as Donna took over.

"I think the most popular one right now is the Crucifier, since, well..." Donna trailed off as she nodded to Wilkes. They all turned to look at the dead woman, who was currently having an arm bent experimentally by a forensic investigator.

"Out of all the possible names, they go with the Crucifier?" Gabe asked, shaking his head in disappointment, "That's just trash."

"I don't think he's going to like that much," Sam remarked, earning the attention of the three of them.

"What makes you say that?" Jody asked curiously. She didn't seem too mad about his comment (Gabe was brilliant for appeasing her with coffee), so Sam did his best not to let himself be too intimidated by her. Still, he found himself shifting nervously under the weight of her presence. Her aura may not have been very big, but it definitely exuded an intimidating feeling.

"Well, in his first message, he refers to himself as Death," Sam started, fiddling with his coffee cup. "He did it in my dream too. 'I am Death'."

"And he's obviously lost in his delusion, what with referencing heaven and hell and all that stuff in his first message," he continued, gaining a bit more confidence, "He's so far into it that any other title to reference him isn't going to go over well. I think he'll see it as a slight against him, and he might do something about it."

The three of them stared at him for a moment, and Sam thought that maybe he had said too much before Gabe's aura flared with pride.

"Good thinking, Sam-a-lam," he said with a pleased grin, "You're right, this guy probably won't like it. He's obviously very particular about how he sets up the crime scene; it makes sense the same logic would apply to how he refers to himself and how he's perceived."

"What might he do if he thinks he's being insulted?" Donna asked, brown eyes wide at the implications, and Jody grimaced.

"Who knows. He's all about making statements, and he just might make another one," she said after taking another long sip of coffee, "We can't think about that right now though. Gabe, I'm going to need you to go over Wilkes, do your thing. Sam, I want to hear the events straight from you. A lot of the security footage is completely fried, and we only have a few partial shots of you and your friends from the main entrance cameras."

"Not even from the elevators?" Sam asked in disbelief.

"I don't know how he does it, but there's not a single image of him. Not even a shadow," Jody confirmed, "Now come on. We don't have much time left."

"Time?" Sam asked as they approached the crime scene. It had been marked off with yellow crime tape, and the copier had been turned off at some point, leaving strewn sheets of paper all over the place that coincided with the vandalized books that littered the floor. The books faded more and more from his view the closer they got to Wilkes due to the thickness of the lingering aura.
"Wilkes is thawing out, isn't she?" Gabe said, shrugging off his jacket and subsequently shivering, "That's why the heat hasn't been turned on?"

"Right as usual. The forensic buddies want to preserve her as much as possible for the time being," Donna remarked, grabbing a box of gloves. Sam wasn't really paying attention though, as he was a little more caught up in Gabe's shirt.

He hadn't realized it before, but he hadn't really seen Gabe much without his jacket off. There had been the visit at his apartment, but he had been wearing a button down then, and Gabe's apartment didn't really count. Now though, he was just wearing a plain white T-shirt that was wrinkled, as if he'd slept in it.

Makes sense. He did get here pretty fast when I called him. Sam thought as the consultant pulled on a pair of blue latex gloves and slid on some paper booties over his boots. Gabe's arms were just as gold as the rest of him, and there was an interesting tattoo of a snake eating its own tail on his bicep.

"Didn't know you had a tattoo, Gabe," Donna commented, and Jody snorted from where she was slipping on her own booties.

"He hardly ever goes without a jacket or sleeves. But why am I not surprised that you have one?" Jody asked, placing a hand on her hip.

"I was young and wanted one, jeez," Gabe muttered, getting strangely defensive as he tugged down the sleeve of his shirt in an attempt to hide the detailed inkwork, "Can't a guy live?"

"It's a nice ouroboros," Sam complimented, both to try and soothe Gabe and because he was genuinely intrigued by the tattoo. While he had a few of his own (all of them with long backstories), and seen lots of others, he had never seen someone with an ouroboros. "Did you get it for the interesting mythological symbolism, or because it looked cool?"

The golden-eyed man blinked before smiling curiously, his defensiveness fading away as his aura changed to a pastel hue of nostalgia.

"I liked the idea of rebirth and infinity in my youth," he explained, shrugging, "Plus, a snake eating its own tail seemed cool, so I guess it was both."

"And here I am with a crappy little heart on my ankle I got when I was drunk," Donna quipped, making them all laugh. "Well, I guess I'll start off questioning you, Sam. Can you tell me what time you got here?"

Sam began to retell what happened, starting with how he and Kevin had arrived just before seven and found the library suspiciously open.

"Wilkes always opened it at seven?" Jody asked as she ducked beneath the crime tape. The aura swirled around her ankles momentarily before being repelled a bit by her aura, but it was nothing like what Gabe could do.

"Always," the college student confirmed, "On the rare occasion she wasn't there, it'd be her best friend in evil Olsen."

He paused as a thought occurred to him. The fact that it hadn't occurred to him earlier made him feel a bit stupid, but then, there was a lot going on.

"Where are Olsen and Hoffman?" he asked, "Are they missing, or...?"
"Campus security located Olsen in one of the staff rooms of the main building," Donna said, pulling out a little notepad(it seemed all detectives did carry around something to write it), "Hoffman is being tracked down now as he didn't answer his phone, but they haven't gotten to his apartment yet."

"So he could be the next victim," Jody mused as she sidestepped strewn papers and books, "Makes sense. Reynold was older, Cork was younger. Wilkes was older, Hoffman is younger."

"It won't be Hoffman," Gabe stated absent mindedly as he gazed at Wilkes. He hadn't moved from where he had ducked beneath the crime tape, but his aura traveled ahead of him to dispel the last of the poisonous aura. Sam watched it carefully, just in case it turned into the strange humanoid creature like it had at Cork's, but nothing changed, except for the sudden settling of his stomach and the disappearance of the faint pain behind his eyes.

*Right, the killer's aura causes headaches too,* Sam thought, grimacing slightly at his forgetfulness. So much had happened within the past 12 or so hours that he was struggling to keep track of it all. *If my prophetic dreams stick around, then I'm going to have double the amount of headaches.*

"Why not?" Jody asked, sounding a bit miffed that her hypothesis(which was pretty interesting actually), was denied so quickly.

"Just have a feeling," he responded before looking at Sam, "Tell me about them. Wilkes, Hoffman, Olsen. What were they like?"

"Uh, well, Wilkes was the head librarian, and she enjoyed the position a bit too much," Sam started, watching as Gabe nimbly navigated the debris on the floor. With each step he took forward, the more the dark aura receded, like a backwards flowing bank of fog. "She was always kicking people out for the slightest reasons, and if you didn't get kicked out, you were harassed until you wanted to leave anyway."

"And the seven o'clock thing?" Jody asked, circling around the copier machine to make space for Gabe. The consultant was examining the machine with interest, picking up one of the printed copies to skim.

Sam snorted, shoving his hands into his pockets.

"She was extremely punctual about everything, no exceptions. It was just one of her many nit-picky habits that grated on everyone's nerves."

"Olsen is probably one step below her in the hierarchy," he continued, thinking back on his multiple experiences with WU's notable staff, "Older, super skinny, with these gnarled hands, but she's got super senses. She's usually the one that sniffs out supposed troublemakers, while Wilkes handled it. Always wears some kind of pink, and always walked around the library, even though she always complained about whatever bone was plaguing her that day."

"So the pink cardigan in the elevator led you to believe it was hers," Donna said, her pen moving a mile a minute.

"And the sweater vest was Hoffman's. He adores the two librarians a lot, like borderline creepy," Sam said with a slight shudder, "Everyone always said he was a whipped dog for them because he always did what they said without question. He's also an unapologetic snitch."

"Which is why Hoffman isn't next," Gabe said as he pulled out a pen and poked Wilkes in one of her chubby cankles(what was with him and poking corpses with pens?).

"Because he's a snitch?" Donna asked, looking up from her notes in confusion.
"If he held the librarians in such a high regard, the killer would want to make him suffer by killing both of them first before killing him," Gabe announced, turning to look at them. His face had slipped into business mode, eyes glinting with thoughtfulness as he gestured with his pen. "And we can assume he'll eventually go after Olsen and Hoffman due to the items of clothing in the elevator."

Sam caught on quickly, "Since Olsen is still alive, Hoffman won't be the next victim."

Gabe beamed at him, pointing at him with his pen, "Exactly, Sammo. Donna, you might want to make a note to put Olsen and Hoffman in some kind of protective custody if possible or put a watch on them, but focus on Olsen. Also, you're going to want to question both of them seriously."

"Why?" Jody asked, turning to look at them curiously from where she had been examining the panel holding Wilke's outstretched arms.

"Sounds like the three of them had an... interesting dynamic going on," the consultant remarked, "And since we know the killer goes after people that are major assholes that probably did something to him, we'll have to find out what exactly our two remaining members of our library squad might've done."

"Interesting dynamic?" Donna echoed before her nose suddenly wrinkled, "Oh, gross, Gabe!"

"What?" Sam asked as Jody grimaced.

"No, keep him innocent!" the blonde exclaimed as Gabe began to open his mouth, but it was too late. Sam had already gotten past his blank moment and caught on.

"Ugh, gross, Gabe!" the Winchester said, shaking his head to try and get rid of the awful mental images(ew, ew, ew). "I swear, if you're right about it being anything like that, you're going to have to buy me a coffee to make up for my mental scarring."

"But I already brought you coffee," Gabe pointed out, smirking as Jody berated him for ruining Sam's 'innocence'.

"Another one," the college student said in a deadpan voice. He took his coffee very seriously.

"Is it just me, or do these crime scenes give you guys the heebie jeebies?" Donna asked with a slight shudder.

The joking mood faded as they all considered the blonde's question seriously. Sam just examined the others curiously, noting their reactions carefully.

Quite frankly, it wasn't supposed to be possible for any of them to sense the killer's aura. Sam had observed over the years that most people couldn't feel anything at all when it came to auras, and what little they did sense just seemed to come from a gut feeling, or the weird little sixth sense humans possessed that told them someone was staring at them when they weren't looking, or that someone was possibly lying. That same sense was a deeply ingrained, faint thing that wasn't very reliable, or consistent, and while powerful ones such as Dean's sometimes garnered a reaction (he just has a presence about him, you know?), Sam had concluded that in the end, people were oblivious to auras.

"It does feel weird," Jody said slowly after a moment of consideration. Her brow was crinkled slightly, forest green aura swirling in thought, "Maybe it's the religious aspect to it, but it feels kind of like a haunted house, and you're waiting for something to leap out at you."

"Or evil," Gabe said ominously, all of them looking at him as he gazed back with serious golden
eyes.

First Ben, now Gabe. Sam thought with a shiver, evil's in Lawrence.

"So what happened after you entered the library with Kevin?" Donna asked after a few tense seconds, flashing a smile in an attempt to lighten the mood as they got back on track.

Sam continued on with his story, getting more and more attention as he went from nearly being spooked by Adam arriving, to the elevators scaring them, and how when they went to leave, the doors were locked.

"Oh my goodness, dear! And that's when he showed up?" the blonde detective asked as Jody stepped closer, obviously wanting to listen over inspecting the body. Gabe kept poking Wilkes every now and then with his pen as he circled her like a hawk, but Sam could tell he was listening by his tilted head and attentive aura.

"Yeah," Sam said, swallowing heavily as the killer appeared in his mind, "He was wearing a long, dark coat this time..."

He went on to describe the killer and his relative position in the library, noting that he didn't charge them directly and didn't seem interested in killing them.

"I distracted him by talking about the Enochian and stuff while Adam got his backpack off," Sam said, fiddling with his hands as he realized the two woman were practically waiting with bated breath. Even Gabe had come to listen, clutching the crime tape as his aura shimmered with worry.

"Why his backpack?" the consultant asked, gold eyes wide, and Sam smiled sheepishly as he rubbed the back of his neck.

"So I, uh, could throw it at the killer."

There was a pause before Jody suddenly began to chuckle softly, placing her hands on her hips.

"That's why those boys' bags were near the main desk," she said, dark eyes sparkling with mirth. It was an odd sight, seeing the normally firm and business-like woman amused, "I thought maybe they were ditched so you guys could get away faster, but you threw them!"

"How much did those bags weigh?" Gabe asked incredulously.

"They looked hefty," Donna remarked.

"Well, I threw Adam's and while the killer was dealing with that, Adam managed to get Kevin's off, and he threw that at him when he began to get up," the Winchester explained.

The brunette detective sighed appreciatively, "That must have been one hell of a throw."

"So, after you threw the backpacks, you ran with Kevin and Adam into the library," Donna said, flipping a few pages, "Zeke's brother Alfie said the killer went a different direction, and we confirmed that he did exit through a side door in a conference room. A few partial footprints in some slushy snow, but nothing substantial. Adam split up from you guys to follow the killer and also confirmed he left through the conference room. Before he left, he also said that the killer had been muttering under his breath."

"Muttering what?" Gabe asked, perking up considerably as he leaned forward slightly.
"Uh, he said, and I quote, 'some weird, freaky chanting in some ancient language'."

"Enochian," Sam and Gabe said at the same time before they both looked at each other.

"Speaking it *has* to be a lot harder than just writing it," the Winchester said, ignoring the shiver that ran down his spine at the simultaneous way they had come to the same conclusion. It was an easy conclusion to make after all.

"Definitely," Gabe affirmed, ducking underneath the crime scene tape, "Maybe he has a better grasp of the language than we first thought. I've taken one of the papers to get translated, Jody."

"Sounds all right," the woman said, waving a dismissive hand, "Any theory as to why her hands are bloody? She's the first victim with her hands like that."

The consultant sighed, "I have a few, the most prominent being that it's some kind of literal symbolism of the phrase 'blood on your hands', or maybe 'caught red-handed'. If that's the case, then it's a hint to what she may have done to anger him."

"Caught red-handed," Sam murmured, looking at the dead woman. Wilkes didn't look back, her glassy gaze tilted away. From here, she strongly resembled many images of a crucified Jesus, and Sam wondered if the killer had tried to emulate that on purpose. "I don't know, that one sounds more plausible for some reason, even if it's more vaguely represented."

"What could she have been caught doing then?" Donna asked, voicing the now number one question.

"Is there a Gabriel Milton here?"

They all turned, drawn out of their thoughts to look at the waiting officer with a radio in his hand.

"That's me," Gabe responded with a curious look. Sam also looked on curiously, wondering who could want the consultant.

"Sir, there's a Castiel Novak waiting for you outside. He says it's important."

Castiel looked tired on his perch on the bench, an oversized tan trench coat wrapped tightly around his frame to ward off the chill of the Monday morning. The bench was one of many along this particular path that led to a side entrance of WU, one that Sam was familiar with. Lots of students used it in an attempt to avoid Wilkes and her cronies. This side entrance boasted a covered walkway that extended maybe ten feet beyond the door, and Castiel had picked one of the most sheltered benches underneath the metal walkway in an attempt to evade the worst of the blustery wind.

"I translated the rest of the pictures you brought me," he said bluntly, pulling out a folder from within his coat. His aura was resplendent in the pale morning sun, though Sam thought it looked a bit more stressed than it had the first time he had met the man. There were more lightning bolts this time, and while it was a mesmerizing phenomenon, it was also quite telling.

_Maybe the case has him stressed out, or the Dead Eyes._

"Anything stand out?" Gabe asked as he accepted the folder, his own aura glowing to rival Castiel's. At this proximity, the two men's auras brushed, though they didn't repel each other, like how Gabe's repelled the dark aura. If anything, the colors seemed quite content to coexist, though Sam noticed they didn't mix.
Maybe two powerful auras just naturally don't mix with each other.

"His writing has gotten neater and more accurate with each scene," he started, gravelly voice sounding husky with what sounded like sleep, "The message painted above Reynold was very short and to the point. 'Here stands a devil. Not even they can avoid Death'."

"A devil? And they?" Sam asked.

"Yes, a devil," Castiel confirmed, sighing, "I assume there's probably a few more on his list with his usage of 'they'."

"So that was the second message. What was carved on his chest?" Gabe asked as he flipped the manila folder open.

"Just the word devil."

"And Cork?"

"The word 'blackmailer' was carved into his chest," the blue-eyed man responded, "His message was longer. Third paragraph down on the first sheet."

"'The second half of the damned partnership has been dealt with. No one can blackmail Death. With the blackmailer's demise, the first blow to Hell has been initiated.'" Gabe read out loud.

Blackmailer. Did Cork try to blackmail the killer then, or is he just referring to what he did in general? And Hell...why does Hell keep popping up?

"Hell's mentioned again. Didn't he say something about heaven and hell clashing in his first message?" Sam asked, before a piece of the puzzle suddenly clicked for him, "What if that's his mission?"

"What do you mean?" Castiel asked, tilting his head, and Sam stepped back a bit so he could see both men, his hands gesturing as he tried to explain his thought process.

"Think about it! He's killing people that wronged him, but what if he has a-a broader view on things? What if he's trying to spark a war between 'heaven' and 'hell', whoever or whatever they represent, by going on this killing spree?"

Both men stared at him, and the Winchester shifted uncomfortably on his feet, unsure if he'd gone and been too presumptuous. That fear dissipated though when Gabe's aura flashed brightly.

"You're saying it's a series of revenge-based killings that simultaneously act as a trigger to whoever he's trying to make a statement too. It'd explain the theatrics of the murders, along with the Dead Eye's increasing interest in the Enochian, and the victimology all in one," Gabe said while sending a meaningful glance to Castiel, who pointedly looked away at the mention of the gang, "Sam, you're fucking brilliant."

The college student flushed slightly at the praise, scuffing the toe of his boot on the ground.

"Cas, I've got another message for you to translate," Gabe said, pulling out an evidence bag from within his jacket. It was one of the copies of paper that had been scattered on the floor, "Don't take it out of the bag. I'll send you some pictures of Wilkes too."

"It's Castiel," the man automatically corrected as he accepted the bag, "She's really dead?"
Sam snorted quietly (it seemed Gabe had already been busy with the nicknames), as the golden-eyed man nodded.

"Really. Knew anything about her?"

Castiel frowned before shrugging nonchalantly, his eyes already skimming the paper.

"Just that she was a very... difficult woman to be around. I'm glad much of my schoolwork sources can be found in the history department's collection of resources," he responded distractedly, "That, and she and Olsen were rumored to be very close."

"Close?" Sam asked, almost fearing the answer, "Not like..."

"Sexually? I'm afraid so," Castiel said frankly, "No one's ever been able to confirm it though."

"I need brain bleach. Isn't Olsen like eighty? That's just wrong," Sam moaned, rubbing his temples as Gabe snickered beside him, "And you can stop laughing because now you owe me coffee."

"Do you think Wilkes could've had any gang affiliations?" the consultant asked as he tucked the folder into his bag.

Castiel pursed his lips before looking around. His aura changed to reflect his suddenly cautious demeanor.

"This is something that I heard from my sister. She learned this by accidental eavesdropping apparently. People always forget she's there," he explained as he leaned forward slightly, the lapels of his coat escaping to flap slightly.

Sam nodded understandingly, thinking of the slight girl. While Hannah's aura was easily distinguishable, the girl herself tended to fade into the background.

"She said she overheard Wilkes and Olsen talking a few months ago in WU," he started, clasping the evidence bag tightly in his hand to keep it from blowing away, "Apparently, Wilkes' husband, who's been incarcerated for a number of years, was supposed to go on parole at some point."

"What was he in jail for?" Gabe asked.

Sam found himself leaning forward too, an idea already forming in his head. He just needed Castiel to confirm it.

"Armed robbery with two others, all of whom were rumored to be affiliated with a gang, though Hannah never overheard which one."

Gabe leaned back, a wash of satisfaction overtaking his aura, and Sam chewed on his lip thoughtfully as the wind picked up and grabbed at his clothing.

So Wilkes was connected to a mystery gang through her husband. Reynold and Cork were most likely working together, with Cork possibly selling test scores and giving the profits to a gang as well.

"Any idea how long Wilkes' husband had been in prison for?" Sam asked, and Castiel shook his head.

"Whatcha thinking, Sammo?" Gabe asked, shutting the folder the blue-eyed man had given him shut to protect it from the wind.
"The Dead Eyes popped up around five or so years ago," Sam said, mind already racing through possibilities, "If he's been incarcerated for longer, he can't be a Dead Eye, but if it was before that time frame..."

"He could be a member of the Dead Eyes. But I find it doubtful the killer could've known him since we've pegged him as around college-age more or less." Gabe remarked, "He'd have to be a teen at the time at his very oldest."

"Unless he knew Wilkes' husband growing up, but it does seem doubtful there's a real connection there. Maybe he just detests gangs?" Sam theorized.

"That's a definite possibility," Castiel interrupted, holding up the evidence bag slightly, "Listen to this. 'All of hell's demons and monsters won't be able to stop me. Red eyes seek me out, but they won't be able to find Death.'"

"How did you translate that so fast?" Sam asked, both stunned and impressed by the man's speed.

"It's only part of it," Castiel admitted, though he seemed pleased by his response judging by the increase in the lapis lazuli shade to his aura, "But I do think I am an expert in the language."

"Red eyes. The symbol of the Dead Eyes is a red eye," Gabe said, snapping his fingers, "He knows they're looking for him."

"But they won't be able to find him," the Winchester said, interpreting the last bit of the portion Castiel had translated, "He's evaded the police successfully so far, and while the Dead Eyes may be more insistent and, er, unlawful in their search efforts, he sounds pretty confident he won't be found."

"Unless he wants to be," Gabe finished, gold eyes gazing at Sam, "He has a mission, after all."

"Does that mean Hell is represented by Lawrence's gangs?" Sam asked, suddenly feeling his gut tense, "Cause if that's the case, then that means this guy is trying to start a gang war!"

"How bad would a gang war get here in Lawrence?" Castiel asked, blue eyes seeming to bore into Sam's, and the college student shivered. The history major had an intense gaze and didn't seem to be afraid of staring at people so intently.

"Bad," the Winchester admitted, tugging on his fringe anxiously, "It's not just the Dead Eyes that lay claim to the city. There are other gangs, and while they've been settled for the most part these past couple of years, tensions are so high that if you push the right buttons on the right gangs..."

"All out chaos," Gabe finished, the brightness that had filled him upon filling in another piece of the quickly complicating puzzle that was the case dimming significantly, "But what does the guy gain by starting a gang war out of all things?"

"If he really hates gangs, then whatever gang casualties that ultimately occur would probably satisfy him," Sam said grimly, "And he's psychotic enough that anyone caught in the crossfire will probably just be acceptable sacrifices to him."

They all paused at the gravity of Sam's statement for a moment before Castiel suddenly stood, hunching his shoulders slightly against the wind.

"I really hope you solve the case soon," he stated, husky voice matching the frigid, gusty atmosphere around them. Like a rocky shoreline maybe, with a gray sea and matching sky, though the man's aura still remained a brilliant conglomeration of blue, "I'll help out with what I can for what it's worth, but I'm afraid translating the deranged messages he leaves behind is only a small part to it."
"You're still a big help anyway," the consultant said firmly, "Are you sure I can't work out some sort of protective detail for you? The Dead Eyes aren't exactly friendly."

Sam watched carefully as Castiel's aura cycled through a few interesting shades of blue, the lightning bolts suddenly flaring white before the man's aura settled somewhat.

A faint smile crossed the blue-eyed man's face, probably the first the Winchester had seen, and the sight caught him so off guard that he nearly missed what the blunt man said.

"No thank you. I'm perfectly safe at the moment. Rest assured, the Dead Eyes won't get any translations from me."

"This is about your safety too, Cas," Gabe insisted, a flicker of worry and frustration crossing his aura, and Castiel shook his head.

"I'll be fine. Besides, I have a feeling the police department will be much more busy in the coming days dealing with the ramifications of this latest killing. He's become a serial killer now, yes?"

"Unfortunately," Gabe muttered, visibly shivering as he hunched his shoulders against the wind, "Christ, it's cold out here. You headed back to the history department?"

"I have some archives to go through," Castiel said in the way of a response, and the consultant nodded.

"Sam, you need a ride home?" Gabe asked, and Sam blinked before nodding.

"Guess there's no class today," he muttered, and Castiel tilted his head.

"Supposedly not until Wednesday apparently, but I have personal work," he stated before checking the time on his watch, "My absence will be noticed soon. I should go."

"Wait, Castiel, your protection," Sam said, grabbing the man's shoulder as he suddenly remembered what had been nagging at him ever since Gabe had visited his apartment.

What had Gabe mentioned that Castiel had said? That he had 'protection'?

"Is he by any chance my brother?" he asked, lowering his voice and ignoring the cool sensation that washed over his hand like a wave when he touched Castiel.

If I ever see the ocean, it'd probably feel like this.

The Winchester knew he'd hit the mark when the man's eyes widened a fraction before darting off to the side.

"Look, if Dean's protecting you, fine," Sam said, even as he felt a twist of worry in his gut (Dean had CIP and could be impulsive at times; anything could go wrong), "but do me a favor? Don't mention anything to him about me being involved in this case? I assume since he hasn't ranted to me about it yet that you haven't said anything-"

"No, I haven't," Castiel said, bowing his head a fraction, even as his aura was cut through with the odd white lightning bolts, "I assumed your...association with the case and Gabe was something he didn't know about yet, and he strikes me as a very over-protective type."

"That's an understatement," Sam muttered, earning a raspy chuckle from the history major.

"Yes, that's quite accurate. I think he's regaled me with a little over a dozen stories about the 'Sammy'
from your shared childhood," he said with a trace of amusement in his blue gaze,"But your secret is safe with me."

The college student breathed a sigh of relief before mentally making a note to tell Dean for the hundredth time to keep what he liked to call 'Sammy' stories to himself.

"Right. Thanks for that. At least I understand your confidence now. He's no wimp," Sam said with a relieved sigh before stepping away.

Castiel nodded once in acknowledgment with that faint smile of his before turning and walking away, his tan trench coat billowing as he made his way back to the history department.

"What was that all about?"

Sam turned slightly to see Gabe waiting a few steps away, eyes slightly narrowed as he obviously tried to make sense of the interaction.

"Castiel's protection," the Winchester responded, being deliberately vague. He didn't want to implicate Dean, even if he had a feeling Gabe wouldn't exactly slap handcuffs on him, "He'll be fine. He's in good hands."

"So it's a someone," the consultant stated, and Sam nodded.

"A good someone. Don't stress about it so much, it'll give you frown lines," he responded, reaching out to smooth Gabe's crinkled forehead with a thumb.

The consultant practically went cross-eyed trying to see his hand, earning a chuckle from Sam as he stepped away.

"Come on. Aren't you going to give me a ride?" he asked, watching the blooming pastel colors on Gabe's aura with curiosity. It was strange, but the colors were almost...fond.

Wonder what that's all about.

The P.I blinked before suddenly grinning, his aura finally settling on its usual golden and ivory.

"Yep. Let's get you home, Sammy."

________________________________________

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Can you hear that? That's the sound of me frantically scrambling to salvage what few remaining plot points I have left. SOS, send help!

Anyway, besides the fact that I no longer have a solid plan to follow(improv, here I come!), what do you guys think? I threw in Cas, and if you squint there's a slight reference to some budding Destiel, and then a tad of Sabriel. Gabe getting kicked off the case was definitely a stroke of genius, and will be our current little time crunch the characters face. Cause catching the killer just isn't enough.

Mwahahahaha!

Also, super sorry for grammatical errors in this chapter and those previous. My sis proofreads, but sometimes things slip by us both and I've noticed a few while going through previous chapters.

I'm about to wrap this up, cause it's late and I'm kinda tired. I've been considering writing another story, but not until I get maybe 20 or so chapters into this one cause I don't want to neglect Chromaticity. Tell me what you'd like to see, cause I have a few ideas! No cheesy high school AUs
though, cause let's face it, there's a bunch of those. Give me something you've always wanted to see done that you've never seen before.

And that's that. Short this time, but you're here for the story, not my lengthy author's notes. Next chapter I might ramble on a bit for those of you that like my talking lmaoooo. Until next week readers!
The Absence, and Return, of Heat

Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 12: The Absence, and Return, of Heat

The apartment was quiet and dark upon Sam's arrival, which was a welcome relief from the chaotic events of his morning. He was developing a painful headache, and all he wanted to do was collapse on his bed and try to sort his thoughts out before they became even more jumbled within his skull.

Dumping his bag somewhere in the entrance hall and toeing off his boots, the tired college student yawned loudly before stumbling to his room, unwittingly leaving behind a trail of outerwear that he shed haphazardly. Sam would have been appalled if he had been completely aware of what he was doing, but after the conversation with Castiel, the adrenaline high he had been riding ever since he'd walked into the library had finally crashed. The ride Gabe had given him had passed in a doze, along with the ride up the elevator to his apartment. One little hallway to his room would hardly register in his current state of mind.

With a long sigh, Sam fell onto his bed, ignoring the accompanying shriek of his metal bed frame and the sag of his mattress. All that mattered was that he was now horizontal, and since Ellen had so graciously given him the day off, he had the rest of the day to himself. Or, himself and his thoughts.

No rest for the wicked, and broke college students who attempt to solve serial killings in their free time.

Sam groaned into his pillow before rolling over, throwing a forearm over his eyes as his head protested the movement.

He, Sam Winchester, could somehow see the future.

After letting the thought sit for a few minutes(and possibly falling asleep for a few more; it wasn't like he was in any rush to work this out), the Winchester sighed and finally decided to accept it. Hell, he could see auras, so the idea wasn't too far fetched. In any other scenario, he might've even found it kind of cool (besides the weird side effects that apparently came from it), but the specific images he was seeing made the whole ability a lot less exciting. Somehow, he could see things linked to the case and even dreamed about the killer himself and his next victim. Sam had no doubt that's who the terrifying 'Death' character was in his dream from last night, and he shivered at the mere thought of the evil aura that accompanied the mystery man. But how could he use his bizarre dreams and premonitions to help out with the case, if they were any sort of help at all?

Rolling onto his side to face his desk, Sam reached for the nightstand and fished out a bottle of aspirin, dry swallowing two pills before continuing with his internal thought process.

Figuring out how to utilize this new development was going to be more problematic than the actual visions themselves. Seeing the future? Fine, whatever, it was strange, but Sam had led an extremely strange life when he had been younger, and he was used to adapting to whatever might be thrown at him. Normal people would probably be freaking out or calling their psychiatrist right now, but he had already(mostly) accepted the idea and the consequences it entailed. Now it was just figuring out how he could use his brief visions and dreams to benefit the case without sounding like a complete wacko, or even worse, somehow implicate himself with whatever knowledge he may 'see'. He had seen enough TV and read enough books to know that the protagonist was always stupid enough to
give themselves away when they used their new power for good, and he wasn't going to be one of them. No, he had to remain completely anonymous and unassuming with this.

Rubbing his temples, Sam managed to prop himself off, shrugging off the last flannel he had on as he reached for his phone. He had a call to make, one that he probably should've made earlier, but in his defense, he was pretty sure he had fallen asleep in Gabe's car. All he could remember of that particular ride was that the man's aura had been very warm and that they had possibly blown through a red light. The latter wouldn't have surprised him if it did happen; Gabe was an incredibly risky driver.

"Sam?"

"Morning, or, er, afternoon Mrs. Tran," he said after glancing at his bedside clock and finding it was just shy of noon (when did that happen?), "I know I'm probably one of the last people you'd want to hear from right now, but I just wanted to know how Kevin's holding up."

The Winchester braced himself for a heated rejection, as Mrs. Tran was well known for taking the safety of her only son very seriously, only to be taken aback when the woman chuckled.

_Huh?_

"Oh, Sam, you're such a smart boy, but sometimes you're a complete idiot," she said in a fond tone that took away the bite of her words, "I don't blame you at all. How could I? If anything I should be thanking you, because I don't know what would've happened if you hadn't been in the library with him."

"But-"

"Ah, ah, no buts," she tutted, and Sam could practically hear the frown in her voice, "Kevin was going to go to the library regardless today, and if he had gone alone like he had planned, I don't know what could've happened to him. The point is, you saved my son, and it's no one's fault except for that demented killer. You know they're calling him the Crucifier on the news? Ridiculous!"

Sam winced at the moniker. The killer would not like that one bit, he just knew it.

_He's too caught up in his delusion. I hope he doesn't keep up with the news, because if he sees that..._

"Yes, about that, have the police questioned Kevin yet?"

"Oh, they left maybe half an hour ago. A pair of women, very understanding of the situation. Apparently, they know you?"

"Yeah, Jody and Donna. They're good people," Sam remarked, thinking of the detectives, "Can I talk to Kevin, or...?"

"He's asleep now, but I'll tell him you called. He was quite hung up about the fact you stayed behind. I think I'll keep him here until classes start back up again, he's so stressed."

"I'll keep up with the apartment," Sam reassured, feeling guilty regardless of what Mrs. Tran said. Kevin had always been more prone to stress, and stumbling on not one, but two crime scenes probably wasn't doing any wonders for his anxiety. Sam could count more than a few instances in which he had had to calm his old friend down from an impending panic attack over the years.

"He'll be back to the apartment by Wednesday I think. I'll make sure rent's handled this month since it's that time again."
"That's not necessary Mrs. Tran-"

"It's the least I can do dear, especially since I have a feeling you've been getting more use out of it than Kevin these past few weeks. You just focus on what you need to do and I'll handle the payments. I'll tell Kevin to call you as soon as possible. Stay safe, Sam!"

"Mrs. Tran-" Sam started, only to be greeted with the dial tone.

The Winchester sighed, setting his phone down with a faint smile. He wasn't really sure what he had expected; Kevin's mom had always had a mind of her own, and once she set out to do something she was dead set on getting it done. There was no way he could persuade her to let him handle his portion of the rent, so he decided to just try and let it go.

*First Lisa with groceries, and now Mrs. Tran with rent. Am I going to be paying for anything this month?*

After plugging his phone in to charge(he had *definitely* learned his lesson about that with Ben), Sam forced himself out of bed and backtracked the path he had taken to his room until he had collected each discarded item. Ending at his school bag, he picked it up and tossed it onto the living room couch before moving into the kitchen and automatically preparing the coffee machine. He had thought out what he wanted to do for the moment(and napped), and now it was time to work.

Sam knew that people perceived him as a workaholic. It had grown from him being a diligent student(and a teacher's pet to his peers) to him practically living and breathing his studies, all while he worked himself to the bone at the Roadhouse. While it was probably unhealthy(just about everyone made that comment one or twice to him at some point), Sam simply knew no other way. John had raised him early on that work equaled success, and while John's idea of success was far different than Sam's, the principles he had learned as a child still applied. Work was essential, and if you wanted something in life you had to work for it. It was probably one of the very few things Sam could agree on with his father, and if there was one thing he didn't necessarily hate about his father, it was his work ethic. When the man wasn't drunk out of his mind, he was almost always doing something to keep himself busy.

*Did I just think about John in a positive way?*

The Winchester shuddered, shoving away every thought of John vehemently. Dean's persistence with the 'John' subject must have rubbed off on him more than he had initially thought.

For the next hour, the college student simply focused on his assignments, catching up on some things he should've done while he had been out chasing killers with Gabe. Granted, he wasn't too far behind, but he would definitely have to adjust his schedule in the future to account for the fact that he now had a new, time consuming past time.

*I can definitely cut back on reviewing my notes since let's face it, I don't really need that. And maybe bring my laptop on rides with Gabe?*

He had just finished and submitted his paper for his Civil Procedures class when it hit him. A sudden wave of tiredness, as if he'd been drugged, but that wasn't possible. It was most likely the adrenaline crash, but he didn't think he should feel *this* tired.

"What the hell?" he murmured, swaying as in front of him, his laptop screen suddenly went white.

Swearing, he reached out to it, thinking of all the work he'd had that he may or may not have saved(he was sure he had, but it was always good to double-check), but he was already falling to the
The roar of an ocean greeted Sam. He was standing on the edge of a sheer cliff, white surf pounding against jagged boulders below. There was nothing but the cliff and the steely sea, which expanded endlessly before him in a sweep of blue-gray that reflected the flat slate of the sky. At the edge where they met though, he could see great clouds swirling and forming; white and blue swirls dragging themselves across the wide space before them and disturbing the blankness of the sky.

"Where am I?" he asked, looking down at his feet. They were much smaller now, and Sam realized he was eleven again. He wiggled his toes experimentally and saw them move through the worn fabric of his sneakers.

He was instantly put on guard, as he had met the killer in the guise of his eleven-year old self, but something about this dream felt...different. There was a faint ominous vibe, but it didn't feel like the one his last dream had held. This place, while stark and bleak, felt... safer than the well, and he had a feeling that the killer wouldn't be making an appearance in this dream.

"Huh," he said, holding out his small hands to study, but he was distracted from his new age by the rustling of plants.

Whipping around, he saw strange green plants crawl across the flat expanse of the cliff he was standing on, vines overturning small rocks and burrowing deep into the gravelly earth to take root. They were all different shades of green, and Sam followed their path to the edge of the cliff. From the tendrils, flowers he had never seen before bloomed in pearly, nearly transparent furls of petals, uncurling delicately and waving violently in the sea wind. Despite how fragile they looked, none of them broke off or flew away, so they must have been more resilient than they appeared.

Curious, Sam crouched down and reached out a hesitant finger to a nearby flower. Up close, he could see shades of blue shimmer across its surface, so faint that if he hadn't gotten down to look, he wouldn't have noticed.

Hoping nothing bad would happen if he touched it, Sam nudged a petal gently. It quivered beneath his touch, but it didn't do much else, so he deemed the strange dream plants safe, at least for the moment.

"They're beautiful, aren't they?"

The voice nearly startled Sam, but he knew who it was, and besides, he couldn't be startled, even in his dream.

"Dean?" he asked, turning around in bewilderment.

His older brother was standing maybe ten feet away, hands in the pockets of his leather jacket. He looked younger, maybe fifteen or sixteen, but his aura was as brilliant as ever, apple green shades spreading in an unrestrained arc of color that brought life to the desolate cliff. The plants seemed to stem from him, extending from the place he stood to fan outward in a trail of growth. He watched as his brother's eyes slid to the sea for a moment before returning to him.

"Have you figured it out yet?" he asked, green eyes bright against the bleak landscape they were in.

Sam shook his head, confused.
"Figure out what?"

Dean shifted, spreading his hands to gesture around them with a smile. He looked content and youthful, which was odd considering the fact that he was only 23. Had Dean really aged that much in such a short amount of time? Or was it just Sam's perception of him?

"Dreams are important, Sammy," he started, tilting his head to look at the sky. The clouds were steadily approaching, bringing a stronger wind with them, "They were when you were younger, and they still are now, even if you don't remember."

"Remember what?" the younger Winchester asked, growing more and more confused. Why was Dean being so cryptic? This wasn't like him at all; Dean hated beating around the bush with things, and always did his best to be as straightforward as possible.

Maybe this isn't really Dean.

"The Enochian," his brother said, suddenly changing the subject as he shoved his hands back into his jacket, "Doesn't it seem familiar to you, Sammy?"

"Familiar? Why would it look familiar?" he asked, furrowing his brow, and Dean smiled as if he was in on a joke Sam didn't understand.

"You've seen it before," he said as the plants whispered around him in their travel across the ground, "A long time ago. A very long time ago, a time that we don't remember anymore."

Sam stared at his brother for a moment before shaking his head slightly.

"Are...wait, that's not really you, is it Dean?" he asked, suddenly put back on guard as he stared at the figure mimicking his brother.

Who is it?

"Does it matter?" Dean responded, shrugging as he began to walk towards him. The plants moved with him, like a dog trailing their master, "Though in response to your question, no, not really. Dean can't get here yet."

"Get where? Who are you then?" Sam asked, backing up instinctively from the Dean imposter.

"What your mind needs. No one else. You wanted Dean, so here I am. Think of me as your subconscious," he said distractedly, his gaze drifting to the sea, which seemed bluer than it was a minute ago, "Odd. We've never seen an ocean before, have we?"

Sam watched 'Dean' carefully but turned to look out to the sea with him. Now they were both at the edge of the cliff, looking out to the changing scene before them. The sea was definitely turning a lot more blue, and Sam watched as the flowers stopped growing at the edge of the cliff, seeming to waver before the plunge. The clouds loomed before them, and while they flashed with blue light hidden deep within them, they didn't seem to be storm clouds.

"Dad did his best," 'Dean' said suddenly, rocks spinning through the air and cascading below to the surf as he scuffed his foot in the ground, "You know that, right?"

"No he didn't," Sam said, frowning at his brother, or whoever it was. For now, he'd just talk to him as 'Dean', if only to make life easier. He was already stuck in a lucid dream; might as well go with the flow, "He-we were raised as warriors or something, instead of the kids we should've been! What was the point? To fight bad guys like some-some weird vigilante heroes?"
"Saving people, hunting things. The family business," 'Dean' quoted, and Sam rolled his eyes at the old Winchester family motto John had always said whenever Sam questioned their purpose during training.

"Criminals aren't the only bad guys out there Sammy," his brother continued, bending down to pluck a flower. The younger Winchester watched as the flower turned a solid, cerulean blue intercepted with bright veins of icy blue that resembled lightning bolts. The blue was the same shade as the lights within the clouds, "There are always worse things. People so truly evil and twisted that there's no humanity left in them. Monsters of people, stuff that makes the robbers and drunks we took down look like saints."

'Dean' glanced at him, spinning the flower thoughtfully in his deft fingers. His eyes had darkened, and so had his aura. It was now more teal, the yellow within dimming to just a faint outline around his body.

"And then there are the things," he said, the wind nearly snatching his words away, "Dad did his best to keep those from us, but those things are coming anyway."

Sam shivered at the certainty in Dean's voice.

**What things? What is he talking about?**

"Things like...like the killer? Death?" he asked tentatively, hunching his shoulders to brace himself against the now roaring wind.

'Dean' nodded, holding the flower up to eye level before releasing it. They watched as the wind took it out to sea, petals spinning dizzingly as it was swept away.

"You've always been the smart one, Sammy," he said with a wry smile, "Keep your wits about you. You'll need them."

"You're smart too," Sam retorted, voice cracking against his will (stupid pre-pubescent body). He scowled at Dean's responding chuckle before continuing, "Just 'cause you never bothered with school doesn't mean anything. You don't give yourself enough credit. You never have."

'Dean' shrugged and sighed before reaching out to ruffle his hair, an action he did quite frequently when they were this age.

"Eh, I was always meant to keep you safe, Sammy," he said with an easy grin before suddenly stepping away, a serious look overcoming his face.

"Bad things are coming," he said, the vines suddenly shriveling around them into dried, brown husks. The flowers shrank and curled in on themselves as around them, the wind became much more chilly, "I'll do my best to keep you safe, Sammy, but I can only do so much when we're apart like this."

"Apart? We're not apart," Sam protested, but 'Dean' was already shaking his head, his feet carrying him to the edge of the cliff. His leather jacket flapped like wings around him, and Sam suddenly realized how big the jacket was on him; how big it must've been when they were this age. Had Dean really looked like this when they were kids?

"That night, with John," he said sharply, sending a cold shiver down Sam's spine, "We've been apart since then. We all have. You have to fix it."

"Fix it- no! Why me? None of that was on me!" the younger Winchester cried, feeling a hot wave of
injustice sweep over him at the thought of the huge fight that had ended with him severing his ties with John, "He's the one that practically disowned me!"

"He never disowned you. The man has made his mistakes, and alcohol is probably his biggest, but it needs to be fixed before it's too late." Dean warned, a shower of rocks raining down to the now deep blue sea below. The clouds had arrived, great towering ones that rumbled and groaned as they were swept forward towards the cliff. Now the landscape was growing wilder as it turned blue, waves so high that the sea spray was now soaking them.

"Too late for what?" Sam asked, feeling a sense of foreboding wash over him, but 'Dean' was already distracted.

"Look at the ocean," he breathed, the wind ruffling his cropped hair, "Isn't he beautiful?"

"Dean-wait, he?" the younger Winchester asked, but it was too late.

'Dean' stepped over the edge with a giddy grin, taking with him the last of the plants and what seemed like half the cliff. Rocks crumbled and fell, and the waves roared as they splashed up, swallowing his brother from view. Sam might've screamed, but he couldn't hear himself at all. It was just him and the now blue ocean, everything roaring so loudly that he could barely think-

... 

Sam's eyes flew open, momentarily confused at the distortion he was looking at before he realized he was underwater. A stream of bubbles escaped him, rising to the choppy surface he was beneath as his hands stretched out to either side, colliding with a smooth, white surface. He panicked for a brief moment, but realized the water wasn't that deep, and so pushed himself up.

"Fuck!" he gasped as he broke the surface of the icy water. His limbs trembled as he looked around wildly, sending droplets of water flying from his soaked hair. He coughed up water, eyes streaming as he struggled for air.

Water sloshed over the edge of the tub he was in, splashing to the already soaked floor. Sam reached a hand to the tap, which was roaring with running water, and shut it off with a numb hand. His teeth chattered as he shivered violently, everything he had bruised in the past few days aching fiercely from the cold. His hip hurt from where he had ran into that shelf at the library, and the side of his face that had been bruised Friday ached too.

Still coughing, Sam scrambled out of the bathtub, more water sloshing over the edge as he fumbled for a towel. He nearly slipped and cracked his head open on the slick tile floor, but managed to right himself by grabbing the shower curtain. Unfortunately, the shower curtain didn't hold for long, and it came down with a rip, along with the rod.

He cursed as the whole thing crashed into the tub, sending up a splash and a cacophony of thuds as the rod took down half the bottles inside. Soap and shampoo bottles rained down, and the Winchester let go of the handful of curtain he was still clutching helplessly, fingers twitching with cold.

"Oh God," he said, staring at the tub for a moment before looking around the bathroom, the lights burning into his vision(had they always been so bright?). Light spots burned into his retinas as he fumbled around the bathroom, and he winced as he rubbed his eyes, forcing them to adjust to the light.

Sam caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror after the spots in his vision had faded, and simply
stared. His hair was plastered to his head, the dark circles evident under his wide eyes. Water dripped off of him, soaking him to the bone. He could see a bruise forming on his hip, mottled black and blue, and then the faded one on his face that was hidden by the shadow of his cheekbone, barely visible anymore but still aching.

He shivered, and his reflection mimicked him, his expression akin to a deer lost in headlights. The dark pentacle on his chest stood out like a stain on his skin, and his reflection's fingers brushed over it. Sam looked down at his hand before shivering again and clutching the towel he had grabbed tighter.

_Dad did his best to keep those from us, but those things are coming anyway._

Sam was glad the bathroom was next to his room, as it only took him a few stumbled paces to get to his room, and more importantly, his phone. Hardly noticing the growing puddle he was leaving on the carpet or the fact that he was naked and holding the towel uselessly, the Winchester scrolled through the contacts on his phone with a shaking hand. He nearly snapped the charging cord when he unplugged his phone, but he was too out of it to care. All he knew was that he needed Dean because Dean would know what to do. He always did, ever since they scraped their knees on the sidewalk when they were kids to the petty criminals they took down together in their teens.

The last shred of Sam's rational mind stopped his thumb from hitting the dial button.

_I can't call Dean. He'll come, all right, but then he'll smother me for the next week, and try to crack my head open with all his invasive questions._

Sam inhaled a shaky breath, chewing on his lip before deciding not to call Dean. His older brother was too overprotective and explaining the whole 'seeing the future' thing wouldn't go over well, especially when sleep-walking was quickly becoming a worrying side effect. Dean would rant and rave and try to get him some help, but Sam just knew no hospital or medicine could help. This was like his ability to see auras; no one but essential people could know or help.

But if Dean couldn't know about this, then no one could.

Sam tossed his phone onto his bed momentarily before finally scrubbing himself down with the towel, shivering and shaking as he did so. He had no idea how the water could be so icy, but it felt like he had gone swimming in the Arctic circle like some demented explorer.

The whole dream had been extremely unsettling. Not terrifying and horrendous like his last one, but it wasn't exactly pleasant either. Between the depressingly bleak landscape the dream had started with, to the way Dean had acted in his dream, the whole thing had left him feeling cold and on edge, though the cold could've easily come from the bathwater.

A sudden burst of frustration had Sam snapping the towel like a whip at his nightstand before he sat down on the bed heavily, cradling his aching head in his hands as he struggled to figure out why this was happening to him. He was completely wired like he had injected caffeine into his veins, and thinking was hard when his skin was crawling with the need to get up and **move**. He was so cold though, and all he wanted to do was get warm-

Gabe.

The college student was already dialing the man's number before he was even aware of it, but he couldn't bring himself to end the call. Just **thinking** of the consultant's warm aura was enough for him to feel a bit better.
"Hey Samsquatch, what's up?"

"Gabe?" he asked, tongue suddenly tying itself into knots as he tried to come up with the best way to phrase his desire without giving away the fact he had somehow sleepwalked into a bathtub and nearly drowned himself.

Yeah, that wouldn't go over so well.

Gabe seemed to sense something was wrong though because his voice sounded different as he responded.

"Hey, what's wrong? Are you OK?"

"I, uh, I don't know," Sam said, trying to stop his teeth from chattering as he wrapped the towel around his waist with his free hand (being naked wasn't helping him at all), "Can-can you come over? Wait, I don't even know what time it is..."

Sam looked around for his clock and found it lying on its side for some reason (maybe when he grabbed his phone...?). It was nearly ten o'clock, which meant he had slept through the whole afternoon.

Great. So much for homework.

"That doesn't matter, Sammo, I'm on my way. You don't sound so good. Nightmare?"

The Winchester ran a hand through his wet hair, at a loss for what else to do.

"Yeah, uh, something like that," he murmured, looking around his room a final time before shaking his head, "No, no, not a nightmare. Just...come over, please?"

"You're definitely worrying me here kiddo, but I'm coming. Just stay put, yeah?"

"Yeah, ok."

It took Gabe twelve minutes to get to Sam's apartment. The college student knew because he was keeping a sharp eye on his phone, and his wired brain was keeping track of everything while he cleaned. By that time, most of the mess in the bathroom had been taken care of. The tub was restored to order, the shower rod and curtain returned to their rightful place, and the floor was mopped up. Sam worsened his headache doing it, as the bright lights of the bathroom hadn't done him any favors, but the important thing was that everything was now clean and didn't look like the scene of a near drowning.

Almost feels like cleaning a crime scene.

Sam sighed as he stared at the empty tub. For some reason, he felt almost guilty doing it, like he was hiding something bad, but it wasn't like he had committed some sort of sin or anything. He had just...well, he wasn't really sure what he had done exactly.

The doorbell signaled that Gabe had arrived, and Sam nearly tripped rushing to answer. He realized too late that it was probably bad to answer the door with just a comforter draped over his shoulders and his boxers (he wasn't sure when he'd gotten underwear on, but it was a good thing he had), but he was already pulling the door open, and there was Gabe.

Finally.
Gabe looked as if he'd gotten caught in some rain, judging by the wet umbrella by his side, and Sam wondered if it had rained at some point while he had slept, or sleepwalked. Then he took in the man's aura, gold and ivory shades driving away all sorts of thoughts from his mind.

"Woah, Samsquatch, what's going on-"

Sam practically dragged the consultant inside, shutting the door and sliding the deadbolt in one smooth motion as he used the other to nudge Gabe towards the dark living room. The man's aura was already reaching out in waves of warmth that pulsed up his arm, and it took all of his self-control to not cling onto the man like some kind of creep.

Get a hold of yourself, Winchester. Just let the man in and talk.

"I'm cold," he said bluntly, still shivering slightly. His hair was also still wet, a fact that Gabe took notice of pretty quickly as he made his way to the couch, which was still set up from the work Sam had been doing before he'd fallen asleep.

I sleepwalked all the way from the living room to the bathroom, just to turn the tub on and nearly drown myself. Christ.

"Why is your hair wet?" he asked, moving some of Sam's school things out of the way, "What's this? Kiddo, what's with the-"

"Quiet. My head hurts." Sam said, turning the entrance hall light off. Now it was mostly dark in the apartment, save for the kitchen light and the city lights peeking through the living room curtains. He could still make out Gabe's golden eyes in the shadows though, fixed on him and the silhouette he cut against the entrance of the living room.

With most of the lights off, Gabe's aura came forward and shone, swirling around him in confusion, but magnificent regardless. More importantly, the man was warm, and Sam found that he could no longer resist.

Fuck it, I called him over for a reason.

Plopping down on the couch, Sam wrapped the comforter tighter around his shoulders and lined himself up so he was sitting as close to Gabe as possible; their shoulders and thighs pressed together. Like this, the man's aura felt like a heater, his body heat only amplifying the feeling.

The golden-eyed man stiffened for a brief moment, and Sam sighed, making to move away. He was probably being very weird and forward right now, and he could probably absorb the man's restorative aura from a distance.

I really need to stop forgetting that I'm the only one that can see auras.

He was stopped by an arm that suddenly snaked out to drape across his shoulders and tug him in closer, warm fingers gripping his shoulder as he heard Gabe shift to face him better.

"You're so cold, Sam. What happened?" he murmured, his warm aura settling across him like a second blanket as the man pushed a wet section of hair out of his eyes.

Gabe sounded concerned and curious, but most of all, supportive. He could hear it in the man's voice and feel it in his aura. Sam had always been good at sensing people's intentions, and right now, it seemed all the consultant wanted to do was help.

Sam blinked before darting his arms out and clinging to the man, his comforter hiding his face as he
sniffed back sudden tears. He wasn’t sure why he was on the verge of crying, but it was making an already embarrassing situation even more mortifying.

Get it together Winchester. Let go of Gabe and come up with a rational excuse for your irrational behavior so you don’t take up any more of his time.

He found though that he couldn’t let go of Gabe, and after a brief stunned moment, the man didn’t seem to want to let go of him either, as his arms wrapped around him and held him as tightly as he could in their awkward position on the couch.

This close to Gabe, Sam felt the effects of the man’s aura instantly. He instantly relaxed, and the warm golden colors chased the cold that had lingered from his dream away until it felt like he was sitting in an incubator or something. The consultant himself was warm too, his body heat doing it’s best to warm Sam up.

They sat like that for an indeterminable amount of time before the Winchester pulled away slightly, surreptitiously scrubbing a hand over his face (he hadn’t cried, it was just in case) as Gabe cleared his throat and ran a hand through his swept-back hair.

"Sorry," Sam muttered, picking at the upholstery of the couch awkwardly, and Gabe reached out a hand to stop him, using the other to tug the comforter to cover him better.

"What would you be sorry about, Sam-a-lam?" he asked, smiling comfortingly, "You obviously needed a hug, and I'm guessing I was the closest person available?"

You were the person I wanted to see most.

Sam shrugged awkwardly, shivering slightly as he wrapped the comforter around himself tighter. Gabe's aura had chased away the worst of the cold, but he still felt a bit chilly.

"I couldn’t call Dean. He, uh, doesn’t know about my little escapades with you," he said with a faint smile, "He's way too overprotective too."

The Winchester ducked his head and bit his lip before looking up at the consultant. In the semi-dark like this, his eyes stood out the most, and Sam stared for a moment before glancing over at the coffee table, where his laptop sat.

"You were the next person I thought of," he admitted, brow furrowing a bit, "I'm not really sure why. Maybe because I can actually talk to you about case stuff."

"I." Sam paused, eyes darting to the light in the kitchen before fixing on Gabe and suddenly making a decision as he looked at the consultant’s patient face. A person who was hardly ever patient with people, or came off as a listener, but yet here he was late at night, waiting earnestly for Sam to speak his mind.

It brought to mind that time they had eaten pizza, and Sam had felt the intense urge to speak his mind without reserve and know that he was being taken seriously. That all his doubts and worries wouldn’t be judged or analyzed heartlessly. That if he asked Gabe for help, he would help, but if he didn’t want to, the man would be perfectly content to simply listen.

The man’s aura washed over him, persuading him to speak, and Sam felt his qualms lighten under the sly onslaught of soothing colors. This was Gabe’s hidden ability; what made him so charismatic and persuasive. Beneath his chatter and easy going nature was this. He somehow managed to entice people to open up by simply being. If he hadn’t known that auras didn’t register to normal people, he’d have thought Gabe was somehow manipulating his aura to do it.
Maybe he had only known Gabe for a week, and it went against everything Sam had learned in life regarding trust and friendships, but sometimes, once in a blue moon, he could make an exception.

"It started last night," he started, gazing into the man's golden eyes, "I fell asleep at my laptop, and woke up in the kitchen."

Gabe simply sat and listened as Sam told his story haltingly. It was probably the stilllest and quietest he had ever seen the P.I, and while it seemed strange, seeing the man so uncharacteristically quiet, it also felt right in a way.

Sam didn't tell the man of his visions or his cryptic dreams though. He wasn't quite ready for that yet, and he didn't want to make himself look even crazier than he already must have seemed. He simply told Gabe that his dreams were weird and that he could barely remember them.

"And then I woke up in the tub," the college student finished, tugging on his now damp hair, "Which explains this, and the fact that I'm freezing because the water was cold-what are you doing?"

Gabe had shrugged off his jacket and tossed it to him before standing and grabbing the throw blanket on the armchair.

"Trying to get you warm," he answered practically as he draped the blanket over Sam's head, drawing a muffled protest from the Winchester, "You got linens stored somewhere or something?"

"Second door from the entrance," Sam answered as he tugged the blanket off before shaking his head, "I don't need it though."

"You're still shaking," the consultant responded as he walked down the hall, "Wrap yourself up and get comfortable on the couch. I'll make you something hot to drink. When was the last time you ate?"

Sam thought back, chewing on his lip before he sighed and scratched his neck sheepishly.

"This morning," he mumbled.

Gabe came back with a stack of blankets, a look of disbelief on his face.

"Okay, scratch the hot drink, you need a whole meal. Is there something I can work with, or should I just call out...?"

Sam shook his head, standing and stretching his sore muscles.

"No, Lisa brought me some food yesterday," he responded, ignoring Gabe's protests as he grabbed his laptop and set it on the breakfast bar. he had schoolwork to do, and even though he'd had his harrowing experience in the bathtub, he wasn't tired at all. He'd slept most of the day away after all.

"Lisa...Ben's mom, right?" the consultant asked, eyeing Sam before seeming to decide to let it go as he began to drape blankets around him.

"The one that you thought was my baby momma, yes," the Winchester responded with a teasing grin, earning a playful punch from the golden-eyed man.

"It was an honest mistake," he grumbled, pouting, and Sam grinned.

"Uh huh. So what do you plan to whip up for me, Chef Milton?"

Gabe glared at him one more time before entering the kitchen.
"Dunno, but I'm a great cook," he said with a flashy grin as he opened the fridge.

Sam snorted, propping his head in one hand as he turned on his laptop with the other, "Your fridge says otherwise."

Gabe looked over his shoulder, and the Winchester gazed back coyly before smirking as the consultant broke the mini staring contest.

"Ok look, just because most of it was either sweets or take out doesn't mean I can't cook. I just...don't have the time to make homemade meals. But I'm damn good at it!" he explained, gesticulating with his free hand as he pulled out ingredients with the other. "I think sandwiches should do the trick."

"You don't have to cook those though," Sam quipped, and Gabe scoffed.

"Hot sandwiches are always better than cold ones, Mr. Winchester," he retorted, "Now, you get your law degree while I cook."

A comfortable silence fell over the kitchen, but Sam could tell that Gabe was working himself up to another conversation by his aura. The Winchester knew it would probably be about his sleepwalking or any one of his many issues that the consultant might have taken notice of, but he couldn't really bring himself to care much. He was too warm and relaxed right now in Gabe's presence to get too worked up.

"You know sleepwalking is kinda bad, Sam." Gabe started as he pulled out a pan from the cabinet.

"No shit, Sherlock," Sam said, taking the bite out of his statement with a cheeky smile when Gabe turned around, "But what am I supposed to do about it?"

Gabe sighed, leaning against the counter momentarily as he ran a hand through his hair.

"I'm not really sure," he admitted, "I think for the moment, just keep track of how often it's happening, and tell me if it happens again. Have you ever sleepwalked before?"

_Dreams are important, Sammy. They were when you were younger, and they still are now, even if you don't remember._

"No, never."

The golden-eyed man nodded, and Sam cocked his head, eyes narrowing as he examined Gabe's hands. He hadn't noticed before, as the P.I's sleeves had been covering them, but now that they were rolled up he could see the smudges of color on them.

"You have paint on your hands," he pointed out, curiosity peaked. He remembered the unfinished painting he had seen in Gabe's apartment and wondered if the man had been busy on a piece when he'd called.

Gabe looked down at his hands before blushing slightly and chuckling nervously as he reached for the tap.

"That I do. Whoops!"

"You paint?" Sam asked, hoping the man would open up a bit about his secret hobby.

Gabe's aura cycled through a dizzying amount of colors before that tell-tale flash of green appeared.

"Eh, not really," the man responded casually, drying his now clean hands, "What are you working
Sam leaned back a bit, ignoring the strange sense of disappointment as the other man's lie. He wasn't really sure why he felt so disappointed; Gabe didn't have to tell him anything he didn't want to. Maybe it was because Sam had opened up a bit and let Gabe in on something he could have easily kept hidden, and the consultant obviously didn't want to reciprocate.

*It's not that big of a deal, idiot. Just let it go, and maybe he'll tell when he's ready.*

"Just some papers," Sam responded vaguely, clearing his throat as he returned some of his attention to his laptop.

He could feel Gabe's eyes linger on him for a moment before the man moved away back to the stove. The silence that fell over them this time was a little less uncomfortable but didn't last nearly as long due to the enticing aroma that soon suffused the kitchen.

"What is that?" Sam asked after a few minutes of trying and failing, to ignore the smell of cooking food and the sizzling of whatever Gabe had going on in his pan.

"Food?" Gabe retorted, glancing back over his shoulder, and the college student shook his head as his traitorous stomach growled.

"That smells fucking amazing. What did you put in the pan, ambrosia and the nectar of the gods or something?" he asked incredulously, craning his neck to see what exactly Gabe was doing.

"That'd be bad for you unless you're some kind of demi-god," the consultant said with a grin and waggled eyebrows, "Are you Percy Jackson?"

"Nope, but I've been called an Adonis before. Does that count?" he asked nonchalantly, keeping his gaze fixed on his laptop.

Something clattered to the floor, and Sam looked up to see Gabe cursing as he bent over to pick up the spatula he'd dropped.

"You good?" Sam asked, struggling not to laugh as an obviously flustered Gabe rinsed off the spatula. His aura was tinted peach now, and Sam finally laughed as the man fumbled and dropped the cooking utensil again.

"Fine, I'm fine," Gabe said in a strained voice, tossing the spatula into the sink as a lost cause, "Let's just get you fed."

A minute later, one of the best sandwiches Sam had ever seen in his life was set in front of him, toasted to perfection and accompanied by what looked like a cup of cocoa.

"Lisa bought hot chocolate?" Sam asked, blinking at the marshmallows that floated on top of the frothy drink, and Gabe smiled as he crossed his arms and leaned on the counter.

"She bought you quite a few things Sammo. Go on, tell me if it's good."

Sam eyed the sandwich for a moment, then glanced at the consultant, who was practically bouncing on his feet, before mentally shrugging and taking a bite.

"Holy shit," he mumbled around his mouthful because it was actually really good.

"It's good?" Gabe asked, and Sam nodded vigorously as he took another huge bite.
"Mhmm," he moaned before swallowing, "How'd you do this man?"

"Growing up in the system taught me to be a lot more self-sufficient," Gabe responded easily as he walked around the counter to sit next to Sam, "Cooking was one of those things I picked up easily."

Sam looked at the consultant, who was fiddling with his fingers as he spoke. His aura had changed to something a bit more serious, and he looked slightly tense. Speaking about his past was obviously something he didn't like doing, even if it was just a vague reference to it.

"Dean and I were the same growing up. Or, well, Dean was," Sam said casually, trying to set Gabe at ease by adding his own piece of his past to the conversation, "He did a lot of cooking growing up, and now he's really good at it."

Gabe turned to face him more, tugging down his sleeves as he mulled over what he'd been told.

"Did...well, who did you grow up with, if you don't mind me asking," he started, "Your parents, or...?"

"Just my dad," Sam said before his face twisted at the word 'dad'. He hadn't called John that since before the fight, "He...he wasn't abusive. A disciplinarian, yes, and he definitely had some less than normal ideas when it came to child-rearing, but..."

The college student paused, sipping his beverage as he thought back to John.

The man was, quite frankly, a mess of contradictions. Sam could think back to happier times in his childhood when he and Dean had been pretty normal for the most part. Besides the constant traveling that they did and the obvious hard labor jobs John took upon himself in those days, they had been fine. John had seemed to care then, even if they avoided Lawrence like the plague back in those days.

It all changed sometime when he was 6 or 7 though. Something happened to make John colder, but for the life of him, Sam had never been able to figure out what. His memories from those times were hazy at best, but it just seemed like a switch was flicked. Suddenly, responsibility was thrust upon them, and the new dynamic that still existed today was established: John as the hard-hearted patriarch, Dean as a soldier and the older brother who was to constantly take care of Sam, and then himself as the younger son who needed constant supervision. Training started not long after that, for Dean at least, and John had turned to the bottle as they finally returned to Lawrence on a more permanent basis.

_He never disowned you. The man has made his mistakes, and alcohol is probably his biggest, but it needs to be fixed before it's too late._

"Sam?"

A warm hand jolted Sam from his tumultuous thoughts, and the college student offered Gabe a sheepish smile.

"I'm not really sure what to make of him, actually," he murmured, furrowing his brow, "you know, I had a big blow up argument with him before I started college, and I haven't spoken to him since. Dean's been trying to get me to talk to him again, but..."

Sam shrugged before chuckling wryly and sipping his cocoa. It was thick and tasted incredibly sweet and nothing like what the packaged stuff should've tasted like. Gabe must've spiked it with a heap load of sugar or something.
"I'm just dumping all of my problems on you, Gabe. Sorry," he apologized, only to have his hand grabbed suddenly.

"You called me for a reason Sam. Talk about whatever you want," the consultant said resolutely, squeezing his hand slightly as he gazed at him with his vivid hazel eyes.

The two simply gazed at each other for a moment, their hands still linked together, before the silence was broken by a ringtone Sam was quickly becoming familiar with.

"Mother of-fuck!" Gabe hissed, letting go of Sam's hand as the college student pulled away awkwardly, realizing that he had been staring at Gabe for the better part of a minute.

"Donna, while you're a pure and good woman, I am ready to annihilate you right now," Gabe answered in a low voice.

Sam sipped his drink to hide his smile at the dark look on the consultant's face.

"Yes, it was a bad time! No, just go ahead," Gabe sighed before his face turned more pensive as he listened.

"Really? And they can't crack it at all?" he asked, aura brightening with curiosity, "Right, I'll be there."

Gabe hung up and looked at Sam, who was already saving what little work he'd gotten done and draining the last of his cocoa.

"What are you doing?" the consultant asked.

"Coming with you. That was about the case, right?" Sam asked, wiping away his milk mustache. There was no way he was staying in his apartment if he could somehow help out on the case.

"Sam-

"Look, there's no way I'm going to sleep right now, and school's canceled until Wednesday, so all I have tomorrow is a night shift," the Winchester explained, "So I'm coming with you."

Gabe stared at him for a moment with a calculating look before he nodded.

"Ok. All right, fine, you can come along. Make sure you actually put on some pants, Watson, or should I say, Adonis?"

The consultant's eyes drifted downward as his aura flashed a cherry red, and Sam looked down to see that he was still wearing just his underwear beneath the layers of blankets that had been draped over him.

Damn. Forgot about that.

"Whatever," he grumbled, feeling his ears burn hot as he tugged the blankets tighter around him. He also pointedly ignored Gabe's snickers as he walked off to get changed, and the cherry red he had seen in the man's aura.

Definitely didn't see that correctly.

Two minutes later, Sam was bundled up and ready to go, dragging Gabe out of the kitchen and away from the mess he was cleaning(I can handle that Gabe) and towards the front door.
"Aren't you forgetting something, Sammy?"

Sam paused halfway through undoing the deadbolt and glanced back at Gabe, who smirked and gestured to the last bit of the sandwich he had made that was still sitting on his plate.

"Oh fuck!" the college student said, running back to grab the sandwich before impulsively grabbing a beanie he spotted on the coffee table and shoving it onto his head. His hair was still damp, and he didn't want to catch a cold or anything.

"Let's go!" he said, grabbing his school bag and laptop (he was forgetting just about everything) before hustling Gabe out the door. A feeling of excitement was washing over him, and as they walked towards the elevator side by side, Sam realized that this part of solving the case wasn't so bad. The anticipation of figuring out another clue without necessarily being put in life-altering danger.

_No wonder he gets so excited whenever he gets a call. This is actually kind of fun._

Sam fought back an indulgent smile as Gabe ran ahead to practically punch the 'down' button, gold eyes bright as he paced restlessly in his wait for the elevator.

Yeah, this wasn't so bad at all.

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_AUTHOR'S NOTE_

Woah, I am so sorry you guys! I know I'm late with this chapter, but I really thought today was Saturday until I checked the date and nearly had a heart attack. Last week my routine was thrown out the window, and I lost track of time completely, including what day was what lmaooo. On a completely unrelated note, for those that remember the A.P studio class I mentioned way back when, I got my score today and got a 5!

Anyway, now that my excuse is out of the way, on to the little things I wanted to mention. I switched this chapter up a bit, as it was originally going to include what they're actually going out for, but I cut it short so that not too much would be crammed in together, and I just loved the Sabriel here too much to make their moment short and simple like I'd planned. Therefore, now this chapter is largely Sabriel development, with a liberal seasoning of angst to combat the very fluff moment on the couch. It's all about balance, my dear readers. That, and I think I'm better at torturing characters in various ways than letting them have soft, lovey dovey moments. Oops.

The chapter title also came from a thing I saw about cold just being the absence of heat, and I was like, well, that's it. The rest of the interpretation is up to you ;)

I realized my pacing might be going a little slow as barely a week has gone by in the story and we're already at 12 chapters now, but I wanted to address both the actual progression of the case along with the character's emotional developments (and other progression) throughout the story. A lot of times I see stories do one and kinda rush the other, if that makes sense? Plus I did tag this as slow burn, and I wasn't kidding when I tagged it like that lmaooo.

Also, now that I've regained my sense of purpose with this story, I've been giving serious thought to starting a new story once Chromaticity is on sturdier footing. I've gotten a few suggestions, though the one from TamIsMyFather (your comments always make me simultaneously laugh and actually think about my story, so shout out to you) about a heist AU has really caught my attention. I wonder if there are any already out there. If you've read one for Supernatural, comment or something cause like seriously, a heist AU!
Anyway, my long author's note is over(hallelujah), I got this chapter up, and now lucky 13 is in the works. Until the end of this week(?) guys!
Chapter 13: One Tuesday Later

Sam had always known where the main headquarters for the LPD was in Lawrence. He had seen it numerous times in his travels through the city, though he had to admit he'd never really spent much time in the downtown area of the city. Located deep in the heart of Lawrence, it was an intimidatingly large brick building several stories high, its clearly aged appearance made more prominent by the newer buildings on the street. Nevertheless, it obviously held pride of place, as it took up a whole street corner and even had its own parking garage due to the sheer amount of people that worked and passed through the place.

"This is probably going to sound stupid, but...why exactly are we here again?" the Winchester asked as Gabe pulled into the parking garage and parked sloppily, nearly clipping the corner of someone's bumper.

"You came all this way without even knowing what we're doing," Gabe chided, and Sam shrugged sheepishly as the consultant shook his head and smiled indulgently, "They've finally finished examining the contents of the bag you found at the second crime scene. The only thing inside apparently is a laptop, and it's completely encrypted."

"Did it belong to Cork?" Sam asked as they exited the Beetle and made their way to the elevator.

"That's the assumption. I have to admit, I'm not sure how much help I'm going to be since tech isn't my area of expertise at all, but I'm sure we'll figure something out."

The elevator was dingy and had seen better days, with one of the lights flickering in the corner and a variety of stains on the worn carpet, but as soon as Gabe stepped in, his aura filled the space and illuminated it. He pressed the down button, and the elevator buzzed accordingly before starting with a grinding, rumbling sound.

"Down?" the college student asked curiously, and Gabe hummed, leaning against the back of the elevator by his side.

"Forensics are mostly in the basement," he explained, "I don't suppose you know anything substantial regarding computer systems?"

Sam thought back to the old days, where he had been the one to hack into security feeds when they took down the bigger fish in the criminal sea. He had been relegated to the computers because not only was it safer, he was also the best at it. Still, he hadn't done much beyond that, and there was only so much he could learn from both the internet in those days and John.

"Not really," he said, deciding to fib slightly. It wasn't even that big of a lie really. He hadn't hacked anything in years, and his limited skills were probably very rusty.

The elevator doors slid open with what sounded like a painful hiss, and the duo stepped out into a tiled hall that was just as dingy as the elevator they had just left. There was a faint scent of mold in the air, and the once white tiles were covered in scuff marks and whatnot, cracked and even missing in a few places. It was a far cry from the impressive forensic setups shown on TV, and Sam decided
that was the grim truth between reality and fiction as they made their way down the hall.

"Not pretty, is it?" Gabe said as if reading his mind.

Sam sidestepped what looked like a dead cockroach and grimaced, "Not exactly. Do you come down here often?"

"Hell no, I try to avoid it as much as possible. The air alone dries out my skin, and I need to preserve my beauty," he said in a faux serious voice, batting his lashes as he gestured to his face.

Sam snorted before smirking, deciding a bit of teasing was in order, "Are you sure it's the air that's the problem?"

Gabe gasped dramatically, and the two bickered jokingly back and forth as they navigated through the twisted maze of the LPD’s basement. It reminded Sam of the back corridors of the history department, except those were much more preferable to these ones. For one, the history department actually had heating and didn't stink as much. He was also sure there wasn't nearly as much exposed ductwork and pipes in their ceilings as there was here.

The hallway narrowed suddenly and sloped sharply downward. Above, the lights grew more spread out and sparse, buzzing and casting long shadows. The chilly air dampened a bit, and Sam shifted uneasily as he looked around.

"If I didn't know you, I'd say you were taking me down here to kill me or something," he said as he eyed a particularly massive cobweb spun in what looked like a sealed doorway, and Gabe chuckled. Their arms brushed periodically as the walls closed in.

"I would never, Sam-a-lam, but it is quite suspicious looking down here, isn't it?"

"That's an understatement," Sam muttered as they turned what felt like the hundredth corner. Even with his innate sense of direction, he was having a hard time keeping track of what path they were taking, and he wondered how far underground they were now.

Just when Sam thought they'd walk all the way down to Hell itself, they finally stopped in front of an open doorway, where three people were huddled around a familiar duffel. The room was small, cramped, and dimly lit by the glow of a computer screen. There was just a table in the middle, a messy desk pushed up against the opposite wall, and numerous shelves on either side. Sam recognized Jody and Donna, but before he could register anything else, an image flashed across his eyes.

A duffel bag is unzipped. Inside is a laptop, and only that. Everything is static and color until a red flash drive hidden in the seam of the duffel reveals its secrets. Secrets, secrets, so many secrets.

The image was gone as soon as it came, leaving Sam feeling slightly disoriented as he entered the cluttered room with Gabe. Judging by the strong sense of deja vu, he had seen this before. He felt the pit of his stomach drop as he took in the duffel bag sitting on what seemed to be the only clear space in the room and the laptop beside it. The screen only contained bars of light and dark, like a barcode, and looked almost brand new.

Exactly like my vision.

If Sam had needed any more confirmation(which he hadn't really), this was it.

"Sammy, this is Frank Devereaux, one of the computer experts for the LPD. Frank, this is Sam, my new working partner," Gabe introduced.
Frank Devereaux was a man with graying hair and square glasses that looked as if he didn't leave his workroom much. Besides the badge clipped crookedly to his shirt showing his occupation, he didn't look like a typical office worker at all. His button down was open over a white undershirt, and there was a good three day's worth of stubble on his jawline. His aura was an interesting shade of dark orange, but beyond the odd color not too noticeable at all.

"Pleasure," the man said distractedly, not even looking up from his computer. Sam didn't take too much offense, as he could tell by the man's aura that was completely absorbed in his work.

"It's good to see you again Sam," Donna said before anything could get too awkward, flashing a smile from her position on Frank's right. On Frank's left, Jody took the time to shake his hand, a hint of approval lightening her aura.

"You're quite dedicated to the case, aren't you?" she asked, brown eyes regarding him curiously.

"I suppose," Sam responded vaguely. It was obvious the lead detective's mental wheels were turning, but he couldn't figure out why, so he decided to change the subject, "What's up with the computer?"

"Some fancy kind of encryption. If this was your murder victim's computer, he locked it up to the nines. There's no way I can hack into this without the key program." Frank muttered, scratching his chin as he typed something.

The computer screen changed to a blank white screen before whining in protest and cutting off to black suddenly.

"See? The only positive thing is that nobody goes to this much trouble to encrypt their computer unless they have something to hide." he pointed out, adjusting his glasses.

"You keep mentioning this key program. What is that?" Donna asked, seeming to be disconcerted by the roadblock they'd come across.

Sam stepped back slightly as Gabe moved closer to the laptop, his aura tinged with intrigue. He chewed on his lip, debating his options as Frank began to go into technical details about what exactly the laptop was doing.

He knew that the flash drive had to be the answer, but how did he go about bringing that to their attention? It was obvious they hadn't found it yet, and it'd look really suspicious if he somehow managed to find it within a few minutes. He had found the bag for Christ's sake, so he had to go about this carefully before he implicates himself somehow.

This is so complicated. Why couldn't I just stick with seeing auras?

"Plain English for the ordinary folks, Frank," Gabe interrupted, and the man sighed before gesturing to the now off laptop.

"The key program is essentially that, a key. There are dozens of different encryptions on this computer, and it'd take me forever to unlock each and every one of them individually, not to mention all the Trojan horses and whatnot I've encountered already. The key program is something that can unlock everything at once, like a master key. It should be on a flash drive or external drive or something."

"But there was no flash drive in the bag," Jody said with a frown.

Sam chewed on his lip before deciding that now was as good a time as any to step in.
"Here goes nothing."

"It should be in there," he said, drawing their attention, "The killer wouldn't leave just the laptop for no reason, not if he wants us to know what's on it."

"Maybe he didn't know it was encrypted so heavily?" Donna asked, and Sam shook his head.

"No, he'd have to have known. This guy doesn't do anything by halves," he said, looking at the duffel, "May I?"

Donna and Jody looked at each other before shrugging, the blonde detective handing him the bag.

"What are you thinking, kiddo?" Gabe asked, a strange glint in his eyes as he watched the college student unzip the bag.

"This was Cork's bag," Sam said, gesturing to the card with the now dead student's name and information to locate him that was tucked into a label holder inside one of the pockets, "It's also an old bag. Most people don't bother with a label card like this unless whatever they keep inside is valuable or important to them. It's possible that Cork could've kept the flash drive on him or somewhere separately, but what if he wanted to carry both things together?"

"He'd put it in in a pocket then. But we checked all the pockets," Jody said, crossing her arms in frustration.

"Cork was secretive about how he went about his test scores business," the college student said distractedly as he made a show of examining the bag, "Kevin said he was a hard person to find, and I'd bet Cork was extremely paranoid he'd be caught. Why encrypt his laptop so heavily? Therefore, he wouldn't have kept the flash drive in any old pocket. What if his laptop was confiscated?"

"There's a hidden pocket of some kind?" Gabe asked, catching on quickly as he leaned in to watch as Sam turned the bag inside out.

The Winchester felt a noticeable lump along one of the seams of the bag and smirked triumphantly as he tugged out his pocket knife(good thing it was still in his jacket pocket) and fished out the red flash drive through the narrow slot that had been sewn alongside the seam.

"Bingo," he said, holding up the object.

For a moment, everyone stared at him before Frank suddenly snatched the flash drive from him and stuck it into the computer while booting it up simultaneously.

"How did you do that?" Gabe asked incredulously as the other three crowded around the laptop.

"Educated guess," Sam muttered, and the consultant gazed at him for a long moment before suddenly beaming and nudging him with his shoulder.

"Good job Sammy. Are you sure you're meant to be a lawyer?"

"Pretty sure," the Winchester replied, but he blushed regardless at the praise.

"We're in!" Frank said as the laptop went to a home screen before multiple tabs suddenly popped up, some with green computer code against a black background, and others showing charts of some kind, "And holy crap."

"What?" Jody asked, and the computer expert began to search through the mess of open tabs on the
"A lot of these look like answer keys to tests, which confirms that he was selling them," Frank started, "There's also correspondence with some fellow classmates on prices and whatnot, and he wasn't being cheap. Hell, he must have pulled in a grand a week with his sales."

"A grand a week?" Donna asked incredulously, and Frank nodded.

"At least, which isn't too surprising given the large capacity of LU. Though where the money goes is the question," he mumbled.

"He doesn't keep all of it for himself?" Gabe asked, and Frank shook his head.

"No, a good chunk of it seems to be deposited into a separate bank account, though for who is still a mystery. Give me a minute," he said, fingers flying across the keyboard.

"What if it's a gang? Kevin did say that Cork was supposedly working for one." Sam asked as they stepped away a bit from the table. There wasn't much room, as Frank's workspace seemed to be hardly much more than a glorified closet, and there were shelves upon shelves of various electronic parts cluttering the space, along with a mess of papers at the man's desk and an overflowing wastebasket.

"Maybe the Dead Eyes," Gabe mused before pulling out his black journal. The only light in the room came from the laptop, which cast eerie shadows against the consultant's face, "Or some other gang. It could even be Reynold if the two were working together."

A sudden thought occurred to Sam, "Did anyone ever talk to Olsen and Hoffman?"

"Aye, I did," Donna said, interjecting suddenly as she walked around the table, leaving Jody to whisper with Frank, "Olsen confirmed that not only did she have a relationship with Wilkes, Hoffman was also included on the...action."

"They had threesomes?" Gabe hissed in disbelief, and Sam shuddered in revulsion.

"Now you owe me two coffees," he said, shaking his head (that mental image wasn't going away any time soon), "What about their clothing?"

"Signs of break-ins at their respective homes, but cameras caught nothing," Donna said, "This guy is slippery. All we have to go on is the description you've given us, along with your friends."

"Anything on the autopsies?" Gabe asked, and Donna smiled before handing him a flash drive.

"Kind of ironic, isn't it?" she said in regard to the flash drive, "I put all the reports on there for you, except for Wilkes, as she's pending. I think the biggest thing you should know is that apparently, Cork was killed before Reynold."

"Before? But Cork was set up after Reynold," Sam in confusion.

"What's the time difference?" Gabe asked, and Donna shrugged.

"Less than two hours for sure, but somewhere around an hour," she said, "Both suffered blunt force trauma, but while Cork was killed by his, Reynold ultimately died from the throat cut."

"Wait, so you're saying they were both killed around the same time, give or take a few hours?" the Winchester asked, and Donna nodded.
"Yep, and since there were no signs of a struggle at either Cork's dorm room or Reynold's house, the actual murder took place in some other location."

"So he knocks them out, then gets them to a specialized place where he then drains their blood and puts them on ice?" the consultant mused out loud, twirling the flash drive through his nimble fingers, "This changes a lot though. We thought Reynold was the first, but if they were killed around the same time...Let's see, we found Reynold Thursday night, and Cork Friday night. Wilkes was supposedly set up something this morning. He's on a fast timeline."

"But the lecture hall was painted up sometime Wednesday, maybe even Tuesday night," Sam pointed out, "Which means that Reynold and Cork were killed sometime then, but they weren't set up until a few days later. No one reported either of them missing in that time?"

"Negative," Jody suddenly interjected, "Though when we checked with faculty, they said that Reynold had emailed them Tuesday night saying he was sick and taking an indeterminable amount of time off to recuperate. Since he was a bachelor no one thought otherwise. He had been in class that day, which means he was killed sometime Tuesday night along with Cork. The autopsy report matches that."

"Cork disappeared for periods of time frequently according to his roommate," Donna added, "The roommate didn't think much of it until people began showing up to their room asking where he was. Apparently, no one was getting the test scores they paid for."

"Killed Tuesday night, then put on ice so that he could set them up when he wanted to," Gabe mumbled, writing in his journal, "When was the last time Olsen and Hoffman saw Wilkes?"

The two ladies exchanged glances before Jody responded, "Saturday night after they had some fun apparently. Nothing seemed to be off with her, though whether or not she was killed Saturday is something we'll have to wait on the autopsy for. Apparently, she never contacted anyone on Sundays."

"A small portion of the money was deposited weekly into a bank account one Stanely Reynold was the holder of," Frank announced, "There's another bank account that I can't track yet since it's an offshore account, but a lot more money goes into that one."

"Some for Reynold and some for the gang," Sam muttered as Jody went back to hover over Frank.

"If Reynold was already dead, then who e-mailed the faculty?" Donna asked, peach aura swirling, "The killer?"

"He can somehow wipe security cameras and managed to lock all those doors at the library, so I wouldn't put it past him," Jody responded, "I'm still hounding the security office on campus about how exactly that happened, but they're being extremely unhelpful right now."

"A lot of them don't really do anything productive," Sam commented, "They probably have no clue themselves."

"Great confidence in the system, kiddo," Gabe said dryly, and the Winchester shrugged.

"I'm just speaking the truth. It's a pretty well-known fact on campus that if something happens, it's better to rely on the LPD for help than campus security. And I never had any faith in the system to begin with."

"Can't blame you, Sammy."
"You two should get home," Jody said firmly, "Frank's going to need some time to go over the contents of the laptop thoroughly, and we're still waiting on Wilke's autopsy report. Especially you Sam, you look rough. Is that the bruise you got from the killer when you chased him?"

The college student ghosted a hand over the side of his face and nodded, "It's not so bad, but I guess we should head out. Gabe's driving is atrocious enough without having to navigate Lawrence at night."

"Hey!" the consultant protested, punching his arm, and the other three laughed as Gabe began to whine about Sam's insult to his 'amazing' driving skills.

"Oh, I should also warn you now Milton, Talbot's going to be back sometime tomorrow," Jody said with a grimace, "I don't know what she's going to do, but the higher-ups are giving her a lot of leeway with the task force."

Her aura showed she clearly didn't like this Talbot chick (who was she? She'd been mentioned in the library before, hadn't she?), and even Donna looked miffed at the thought of the mystery detective.

Gabe himself simply smiled and thanked Jody for the warning, seeming to act nonchalant about the whole thing. Sam could tell though that he was anything but, and he had an uneasy feeling in his gut. It seemed like everyone was expecting Gabe to be kicked off the case, and soon.

*I hope that doesn't happen.*

Back in the Beetle after nearly getting lost in what Sam now dubbed as the LPD's serial killer hallways (seriously, why was their whole basement so creepy?), Gabe turned a bit more serious. The buzz his aura had gained from all the new information they'd learned settled as he shifted in his seat, obviously contemplating something.

"You know, Sam," he started, face hidden in shadow as they pulled out of the parking garage. Even nearly past midnight, Lawrence was still awake, though there wasn't nearly as much traffic downtown as there usually was during the day, "We can still be friends after this case if you want."

Sam looked over at Gabe, who was clutching the steering wheel in a far tighter grip than his usual dangerously slack hold.

*Is this the tail end of the conversation we started in the library?*

"Really?" he blurted out before he could stop to think (great way to not make yourself look like an idiot, Winchester), and Gabe glanced over at him before smiling, his aura brightening substantially.

"Yeah, really. Why not?"

The Winchester shifted in his seat and shrugged, fiddling with a zipper on his bag. He was suddenly thinking back to the library, where he had tried to convey his thoughts before and failed epically.

If Gabe could somehow manage to bring himself to start the conversation up again, then Sam could get his thoughts across without messing up.

"I don't know, I thought maybe after this case you'd just kind of...move on? Since I wouldn't be able to help you out with it or anything, and you said yourself you like to travel a lot, so maybe you'll want to leave Lawrence after this," he mumbled.

Gabe stared at him for a second, and Sam was torn between telling him to hurry up and answer and to keep his eyes on the road. The consultant looked away just before he could tell him off though.
His aura was contemplative now, swirling with thought around the man. If it weren't for the fact that his aura didn't seem too frazzled or taken aback at all, Sam would've been nervous.

"I couldn't find a better Watson in Lawrence," the P.I announced after a minute, "And about the traveling part...I'm not going anywhere anytime soon, kiddo."

Sam stared at the consultant for a second before grinning, feeling strangely euphoric at Gabe's words. It would've definitely been a moment if half a second later the P.I hadn't skidded wildly into a turn.

The rest of the drive was much more light-hearted, and by the time Sam was dropped off once more at his apartment, he found that he was reluctant to go. Unlike him though, Gabe looked beat, so he let the man drive off after exchanging goodbyes, watching the yellow Beetle from the curb until it disappeared around the corner.

Back in his apartment, Sam simply stood in the living room for a moment, mulling over what he'd learned.

Cork and Reynold had known each other and probably worked with each other by selling test scores. Reynold had never struck Sam as the kind of person to do something like that, but then, lots of people would do just about anything for a little profit. That unknown bank account probably belonged to a local gang, maybe the Dead Eyes, who Wilkes' husband may or may not have been a part of. Cork had been killed before Reynold but set up after him. Wilkes had actually been in a weird threesome relationship with Hoffman and Olsen.

The Winchester shuddered (he'd never get that mental image out of his head) before moving into the kitchen to finish the dishes. There was no feasible way he could possibly sleep tonight, but he had a night shift at the Roadhouse tomorrow (or technically today; it was past one o'clock now), and he wanted as much sleep as possible.

After cleaning the last of the dishes, Sam went to his bedroom and searched through the nightstand until he emerged with a bottle of sleeping pills. He'd never used them much unless he was suffering from extreme insomnia or needed to go to sleep quickly when he couldn't afford to roll around in bed for an hour hoping sleep would come naturally. Tonight, he knew it'd either be taking the pills or staring at the ceiling for the next three hours before he finally drifted off.

Sam ran a finger over the lid of the bottle. It had also occurred to him that maybe if he used a sleeping pill, he wouldn't sleepwalk.

_Maybe, maybe not. I've already sleepwalked once today already, so maybe I won't now._

Knocking one back with a mental shrug, the college student shed his clothes and fell into bed, asleep within a few minutes.

When he woke in the morning, he discovered that he hadn't moved at all.

... By the time Sam showed up to begin his night shift at the Roadhouse around five, he was feeling pretty good. Not only was the case progressing somewhat due to his help in finding the flash drive, he had also gotten a lot of schoolwork done earlier that morning. No one had called or texted him that morning, and he took full advantage of having the apartment to himself without any distractions. Kevin was a great roommate, but sometimes, Sam just preferred working in a space by himself.

The only blight upon his day was probably the brewing storm. While Sam liked snow, it was obvious it was going to turn Lawrence into a nightmare to navigate over the next few days if the
amount of salt being laid down was any sort of measurement. People were already getting caught in
traffic jams, and the general mood on the streets was that of irritation. It seemed a lot of people were
sick of the snow by this point, and it affected their auras significantly.

Entering through the back door, Sam hummed happily under his breath as he stamped the slush free
from his boots, the blast of warmth that enveloped him only increasing as he walked past the steamy
kitchen. Judging by what he could see and hear, there was already a decent amount of people inside,
so he decided to hurry and clock in as quickly as possible.

That plan got derailed as soon as he stepped into the employee room and saw Meg peering into the
mirror, dabbing at a bruise n her cheek with makeup.

*Smeared makeup. Hands wringing themselves as painted lips speak, dark nails chipped. A metal
chair scrapes across a floor. Smoke lingers in hazy wisps. Paranoia. Trapped.*

"Shit," he muttered under his breath at the vision, reeling back slightly at the intensity of it(it was sort
of like having double vision), "Meg?"

The dark-haired waitress spun around, eyes wide as she dropped the makeup sponge she was using.
There were faint tear tracks running down her face, smudging her eye makeup, and she looked as if
she hadn't slept in a couple of days. Her aura was probably the worst of it though. It was barely
purple at all, and was so small it was barely there.

"Hey, just relax," he said soothingly as she clutched her make up bag, "What happened?"

Meg stared at him for a second before her gaze darted away, her hands fumbling with her makeup as
she went back to viciously dabbing foundation over the bruise.

"Nothing," she said in a surprisingly steady voice, but her hands gave her away, as they shook so
bad her sponge nearly wobbled up of her grip again.

"Shit. Benny had a point."

Sam sighed quietly before grabbing two of the metal folding chairs, feeling a sense of deja vu as he
dragged them across the floor.

"Sit," he suggested, gesturing to one the chairs as he sat down heavily in the other. His gut was
twisting uncomfortably, because now he could see another set of bruises on her neck in the shape of
fingers, "And tell me what happened."

Meg scoffed derisively, but she paused before looking at the chair doubtfully.

"I'll listen to whatever you have to say," the Winchester said gently, and Meg's eyes darted towards
the door before she stared at him.

"You're a fucking idiot, you know that, right Winchester?" she asked as she sat down on the edge of
the seat, and Sam shrugged before spreading his hands.

"I've been told."

The waitress sighed before running a hand through her unkempt hair, tangling it further as she
tugged anxiously.

"Look, I already know it's bad," she said, gesturing to herself and the bruises, "I'm not an idiot, ok?
But I can't just leave."
"Why not?" Sam asked evenly, already thinking of that truck driver with the muddy aura from last week that had picked Meg up.

_I swear to God if it was him..._

"Kyle is..." Meg started before lowering her voice, wringing her hands (just like in his vision), "He's a thug. A Dead Eye, and a ...kind of important one too."

Sam froze mentally but made sure to keep his face as open and easy as possible.

_Benny was fucking right, Meg's caught up in some gang shit. And with the Dead Eyes to boot?_

"Do you think he'll hurt you if you try to leave?" the waiter asked calmly, reminding himself to keep a level head and to focus on Meg, who was growing more and more skittish in her chair.

She nodded shallowly before reaching for her purse, fumbling for a cigarette and lighter.

"I feel like such an idiot!" she hissed, clicking the lighter until she got a flame. Sam let her, even though Ellen frowned upon smoking in the break room (he figured just this once was all right), "Things in the gang were really tense the last couple of months, but I thought it was just the new deals they were making until I walked in on Kyle watching the news. He was on the phone with one of his bosses I guess, and he sounded pissed."

She inhaled deeply when she finally got her cigarette lit, and the smoke seemed to help, as her aura got a bit more purple.

"It was one of those segments on the Crucifier or whatever running around," she said, exhaling a stream of smoke through her nose. To Sam's credit, he didn't flinch when some of it hit him. Wouldn't be the first time he was around smokers, "Which I thought was weird, until Kyle started talking about him, saying that they couldn't find him yet, and then they mentioned Enochian!"

Meg seemed close to tears, which was startling to Sam, as he didn't think he'd ever seen the girl so emotional before.

"How do you know about Enochian?" he asked, which seemed to be the wrong thing to ask, as she suddenly broke down.

"Cause of Cas! I told Kyle about Cas, and that's why they're going after him now!" she said, standing so quickly she knocked the chair over.

_Cas? Wait, she knows Castiel?_

"Wait, Meg, calm down," Sam said, picking up her chair as the girl began to pace around the room, rubbing frantically underneath her eyes, "How do you know Castiel?"

She whipped around, looking startled as she unconsciously tapped some ash loose on some lockers.

"I-we grew up together in another town," she replied, sounding caught off guard, "You know him?"

Sam blinked, taken aback by Meg's admission. She and Castiel had _grown up_ together?

_Well, I didn't expect that of all things._

"Yeah, he's translating the Enochian for the police," he said, furrowing his brow, "He also doesn't seem to be too concerned about the Dead Eyes though, so I think you should cut yourself some slack, even though I'm not sure..."
"I was telling Kyle about Cas one time, and I mentioned that he specialized in dead languages. I guess I must've mentioned Enochian at some point. Cas was always really obsessed with it," Meg said as she sniffed, walking slowly back to her chair, "I didn't think they'd go after him though!"

"No, you couldn't have," Sam said as he encouraged her to sit down again, "You're not an actual member, are you?"

She shook her head, and the Winchester nodded.

"All right, so let me get this straight. Your boyfriend, er, Kyle, is a Dead Eye and probably told his higher-ups about Castiel. For some reason, they want the Enochian the killer is leaving behind translated, and Castiel is the best way to do it. Can you think of any reason why exactly they're so interested?"

Meg shrugged, sniffing again. Sam reached into his bag for some tissues as she spoke.

"Someone's apparently hired them to get Cas, and they're getting frustrated because they haven't reached him yet," she said, mumbling thanks as the waiter handed her some tissues, "But not because of the murders on the news. There are other messages being left around town for lots of gangs."

"What, like graffiti or something?" Sam asked, and she nodded.

"Stuff in gang territories, or tagged on vehicles and known houses where they hang out," she said, blowing her nose, "Ugh, that's so gross. Anyway, a lot of the gangs are getting antsy now because they don't know what any of it says, but they know it must be important if this guy's killing and leaving behind the same shit at the scenes."

"Any idea who hired the Dead Eyes?" he asked, and Meg shook her head.

"Just someone bigger than them. All I know is that the gangs want this to get straightened out before they put some new drug on the street."

"Drug?"

Meg nodded, tapping the red-hot end of her cigarette against the chair.

"Yeah, I don't know any details though. It's supposed to be some crazy potent shit though," she said, seeming to come back to her normal self as she dabbed at her smeared eye makeup, "It doesn't help that Trent's dead too."

"Trent Cork?"

"Yeah, that Trent," Meg said, eyeing him shrewdly, "You knew him too?"

Sam shook his head, "I know a guy working the case. What did you know about him?"

"He owed one of the Dead Eye leaders some money when he was a freshman, and he started paying it off by selling test scores. Then he got good at it, and the Dead Eyes didn't want to let him go. He brought in too much profit," Meg explained, "That's also another shitshow. His laptop's missing."

The waiter leaned back in his chair, watching as Meg reached for her makeup bag and began to try to fix her appearance.

This is crazy. Cork really was working with the Dead Eyes, and now they're worried because his laptop's gone and can be traced back to them. And what's all this about a new drug?
"How close are you to Castiel?" he asked suddenly, causing Meg to pause in her reapplication of eyeliner.

"We were best friends up until graduation," she said slowly, "Then I got into some bad shit when I came to Lawrence. Between that and the fact that he got a partial scholarship to another school out of state, we kinda fell apart. When I told Kyle about him...man, I must have been high or something. It was a while ago, and I really didn't know Cas was back until maybe a couple months ago? We haven't talked at all though."

Sam nodded, watching as the waitress's aura began to grow more and more violet, albeit at a slow pace.

**Anything's progress really at this point. Should I tell Castiel about her?**

There was a knock at the door, and they both turned to see Benny standing in the doorway, holding a dish rag as he studied them.

"I thought I smelled cigarette smoke. What're you smoking for Meg..." he began to ask, only to trail off as his eyes slid to her neck.

Sam watched as Benny's face went through a range of emotion, along with his usual settled aura. The typically deep blue went even darker and began to move in agitated waves around him for a brief moment before he seemed to regain control of himself.

"Who did that?" he asked genially, gesturing with his hand to Meg, who tugged at her neckline.

"Kyle," she mumbled, and Benny stared for a moment before he nodded and tucked the dishrag into his apron.

"Right. You're coming to stay with me," he announced, his voice pleasant, but leaving no room for discussion, "After my shift's over, we'll get your things. Sam, I trust you can stay quiet for now about this?"

"Yeah, of course," the waiter automatically responded, even as he watched Benny with a wary eye.

Sam had never seen the cook mad, or rather, *really* mad, but as he watched him lead Meg around with a gentle, but dominating hand toward her locker, he decided that Benny was probably terrifying when angry. It was obvious through the man's peaceful facade that he was mad, and Sam shivered as the cook's aura wrapped around him in tight swatches of blue.

Meg was definitely in good hands, of that Sam had no doubt.

The whole situation with Meg was probably the most dramatic thing that happened on Sam's shift. Throughout the night, he saw Benny talking with Ellen, and then Ellen speaking to Meg briefly in the hallway. He didn't think either Meg or Benny had told Ellen all the details, as he knew Ellen was a spitfire when she was mad. Meg herself was almost back to normal as she worked, her bruises covered up for the moment with makeup. She exchanged acidic comments with Anna, and if Sam hadn't seen her in the employee room, he'd have thought nothing was amiss.

The doorbell jingled sometime around midnight, the loudest sound in the now mostly quiet restaurant. Sam looked up to see shades of gold filtering through the gray blues of the Roadhouse and smiled as he looked farther to see Gabe hurrying towards the counter.

"It's cold as balls out there, Sammy!" he exclaimed as he slid into a seat, tugging off his gloves as he shivered.
"Good thing you managed to make your way here. Is it as bad as it looks?" the waiter asked, nodding to the flurries of snow whipping past outside, and Gabe nodded.

"The Beetle did not like the snow at all," he remarked, tugging down his hood to reveal messy golden hair, "Mind getting me a cup of joe, kiddo?"

"Already on it," Sam said, moving to the coffee station to whip the consultant up a hot beverage.

"You're a blessing, Sam," Gabe said fervently once the waiter returned with the promised drink, and Sam smiled in response before sliding the sugar away from the man's outstretched hand.

"It already has enough," he said quickly, ignoring the consultant's pout as he nudged the cup towards him, "Go on, try it."

Gabe gave him a doubtful look before taking an experimental sip of the coffee, humming immediately as his aura blossomed in happy shades of ivory.

"Good?" Sam asked, and Gabe practically beamed at him, gold eyes shining.

"Great!" he corrected, "You'll have to make my coffee from now on, no exceptions."

"I suppose it's better than you trying to give yourself diabetes with all the sugar packets you usually dump in your coffee," Sam remarked, ducking to avoid the glove thrown at him a moment later.

"Hmph," Gabe huffed, turning his nose up haughtily as Sam reemerged from behind the counter.

"You threw a glove at me!" Sam exclaimed as he threw it back at Gabe, hitting him square in the nose and nearly causing the man to spill his coffee.

"And you threw it back, so now we're even," Gabe said, smirking as he regained a better grip on his cup.

Sam stared for a moment before shaking his head and glancing at the clock.

"I'm going to clock off as soon as you finish. Ellen said I could go whenever since it's snowing-hey slowdown!"

Gabe mumbled something intelligible as he drained his cup, and the waiter stared in shock as the consultant slammed the now empty cup down, wiping his mouth with the other.

"Done. Let's go!" he said, tugging his wallet out as he shooed Sam away with the other, "Go get your stuff and we can be out in five."

Sam stared for a moment longer before shaking his head in disbelief and tugging off his apron.

Gabe had technically finished his coffee, and Sam was in the mood to go home.

The wind blew fierce as the duo stepped out, and Sam immediately grabbed Gabe by the shoulder when the man began to tilt alarmingly.

"You all right?" Sam asked over the wind, and Gabe blinked before laughing, the sound carried away by the storm.

"I nearly got blown away!" he yelled, still laughing, and Sam shook his head before readjusting his grip on the smaller man and positioning himself as a windbreak. Gabe grabbed a handful of his jacket as they stepped out into the lot, and Sam led them towards the Beetle, avoiding the potholes and icy patches that he knew liked to form in times like this.
"In, get in! Holy crap!" Sam said, laughing as Gabe struggled with his door.

"I can't!" Gabe exclaimed, and Sam rolled his eyes before hurrying over to the driver's side and tugging the door open with a yank, fighting the wind as he hustled the consultant inside.

Gabe was giggling when Sam got in, and the Winchester shook his head at the man's antics, leaning over to start the car for him.

"You good?" he asked, and Gabe nodded as the engine started.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm good. I haven't been blown away like that since I was a kid," he said, turning on the wipers.

"It happens in Lawrence," Sam commented, buckling his seatbelt as they pulled out of the lot, "Be careful. You're already a wackjob behind the wheel, and I don't want to die."

"Noted," Gabe said as they began the journey back to Sam's place. They were going a tad faster than Sam would've liked, but at least they weren't careening out of control yet, so the Winchester would just cross his fingers and hope for the best.

"So, how was your day, kiddo?" Gabe asked after a few minutes of relatively quiet, but safe driving.

Sam looked up from his phone, thinking idly that the question sounded strangely...domestic before answering.

"Pretty normal up until I got to work," he responded before sitting up a little straighter, "Then I ran into Meg in the employee break room..."

He told Gabe just about everything that Meg had told him save for the actual abuse part (he didn't want to out Meg like that, even if he knew Gabe would stay quiet if he asked him to). The man's aura reacted accordingly to each new piece of information Sam presented, though he stayed quiet. Sam could tell that he was focusing on driving for the most part, and he waited patiently for the man to make a left turn before Gabe spoke.

"So now we have confirmation that Cork was working with the Dead Eyes, not to mention that the killer probably is trying to spark some kind of gang war," Gabe said, gold eyes narrowed slightly in thought, "I'll have to see if there's any of this graffiti left so I can get it to Cas. Did Meg mention any specifics about this new drug?"

Sam shook his head, "No, she just said it was supposed to be some super potent stuff."

"Damn. Maybe the narcotics department will know more. I think tomorrow-"

Before Gabe could finish his thought, he suddenly yanked the steering wheel to the left. Sam caught a glimpse of something in the headlights before they were sliding around a corner, almost fishtailing across the slick road.

Sam threw one arm out in a subconscious protective gesture against Gabe's chest, using his other hand to nudge the steering wheel carefully the other way (yanking it would just make things worse). After a few heart-stopping seconds of skidding through the ice, they came to a stop against the curb, bumping it hard enough to dislodge ice from the roof of the car.

For a moment, they simply sat and watched the windshield wipers work before Sam heaved a giant sigh of relief. They had stopped in a parking spot of all things, and they hadn't even hit the car parked in front of them, so he took it as a win.
"Christ that was close.

"Are you all right, Gabe?" he asked, looking over at the consultant, who was still holding onto the wheel and looking down at his arm with a shocked expression on his face.

"Uhh..."

"Oh, whoops," Sam said as pulled his arm away and scratched the back of his neck, "Reflex."

Gabe stared at him for a moment before he seemed to snap out of his momentary shock.

"Are you all right?" he asked, eyes wide.

"Yeah, I'm fine. What were you trying to avoid?" Sam asked, and Gabe shrugged, cheeks turning pink a bit as his aura reflected his embarrassment.

"A cat."

Sam stared for a moment before bursting out into laughter. It was probably on the hysterical side, especially when Gabe joined in, but the whole situation was absurd. They had almost crashed over a stray cat after all.

"You nearly crashed the car over a cat?" the Winchester asked in disbelief, and Gabe shrugged, wiping at his eyes.

"Sorry? But we lived, didn't we?" he said, gesturing to their relatively whole state, and Sam shook his head.

"You're fucking crazy," he stated with a grin, and Gabe grinned back, eyes alight as his golden aura flared around him.

"I guess I am," he said as he began to maneuver the car back out onto the road. The Beetle seemed to protest the movements, but soon they were back on course, albeit at a much slower pace than before, "Not a word of this to anyone, Sammy."

"My lips are sealed," Sam said as he mimed locking his lips and throwing away the key, earning a skeptical look from the consultant.

Luckily, they were only about five minutes away from Sam's apartment, and the rest of the drive passed uneventfully. Unfortunately, by the time they arrived, the snow was falling so violently that visibility was nearly non-existent. Sam couldn't see how Gabe could get all the way to North Heights in these conditions, and judging by the consultant's expression, he didn't have much faith in his driving abilities either.

"Need a place to crash for the night?" Sam asked before he could chicken out or think things through properly.

Gabe tore his eyes away from the wintery weather outside to look over at him, his expression one of surprise.

"I-you don't have to do that kiddo, I think I can make it home," the consultant said hurriedly, and Sam shook his head with a scoff.

"You nearly crashed your car to avoid a cat, there's no way you'll make it to North Heights like this," he said bluntly, "It's better if you just stay for the night if only to preserve your life."
"Right," Gabe said distractedly before shaking his head slightly, "No, Sam, really-

"Nope, come on," Sam interjected, reaching over to grab the keys from the ignition before Gabe could react, "It's just me since Kevin's still with his mom, so it'll be fine."

With that, Sam exited the car, not bothering to wait for Gabe. He knew that this was probably the only way to get Gabe to follow, and he smirked when he heard a car door slam through the blowing wind.

**Sam 1, Gabe 0.**

Gabe dragged his feet, pouted, and in general acted very disgruntled as they made their way up to Sam's apartment, but the man's aura gave him away. Sam watched with mild amusement as the man's colorful aura contradicted the sulky act he was putting on. It was obvious he was in some sort of way pleased at the turn of events, though the Winchester couldn't figure out why. Gabe's place was *much* nicer, and Sam could already feel a pang for sympathy as he thought of the P.I sleeping on the sad, saggy couch.

Sam's thoughts switched to other things however as soon as he stepped into his apartment.

"Jesus Christ, it's cold in here Sammy," Gabe remarked, and Sam blew out a frustrated breath as he stomped towards the thermostat.

"Fucking heater," he muttered as he pushed the button up as high as he dared. Nothing rumbled on like it should've, and Sam sighed, resting his head against the wall.

"Dammit. Good thing I have a backup," Sam remarked as he opened the coat closet and pulled out a space heater.

"Does this happen often?" the consultant asked, trailing after Sam as he moved into the living room.

"Sometimes, though it tends to get hotter than colder," the Winchester responded absently as he plugged in the heater, "There. Let's see, the shower's down the hall next to my room, and there's a smaller bathroom next to the coat closet. Kevin's room is the one with the shut door. Beyond that, I think that's about it."

Gabe shivered as he plopped down onto the couch, tugging a nearby blanket over him as the space heater glowed orange.

"You want something to eat or drink?" Sam asked, and Gabe shook his head as he toed off his shoes and pulled up his legs.

"Nah, I kind of feel like just sleeping," the consultant admitted as he yawned loudly and shivered, "I had a long day."

"All right, I'm going to take a shower. Help yourself to anything you need."

When the college student came back from the bathroom, he could hear running water from the second bathroom. He grabbed some more blankets from the closet and set them out for Gabe, along with one of his pillows. The space heater was moved a bit closer to the couch, and despite Gabe's denial for food, Sam could tell by his aura that a snack wouldn't be remiss.

"How can you walk around like that?"

Sam looked back at the consultant, who had walked into the kitchen with two blankets draped
around his shoulders. He looked down at his long sleeve shirt and jeans and shrugged.

"I've never had a problem with the cold. Besides, I'm pretty used to it," he replied nonchalantly as he held out a bag of chips, "Still sleepy?"

Gabe's face lit up, and the duo went to situate themselves on the couch. Sam noticed that the consultant didn't seem to mind close proximity, so they sat side by side in the middle, which was coincidentally where the couch was most saggy. Gabe nearly toppled over when Sam sat down, and the college student had to shove the man over so he wouldn't get sucked into the upholstered trap.

"You really need a new couch Sam-a-lam," Gabe commented as he tore open the bag of chips, and Sam snorted as he grabbed a blanket and wrapped it around himself.

"Can't afford it. Besides, it was a pain in the ass to get this one through the door. There's no way I'm getting this one out again and getting another one up."

Gabe hummed, tucking his knees under his chin as he gestured to Sam's bag, which was sitting on the coffee table.

"Still have school work?"

"Not really. It can wait," Sam answered, more focused on Gabe's aura. Sitting on the couch like this with him meant he was far warmer than he normally should be. Not even the space heater could compare to what the man's aura could produce.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" Gabe asked, crunching on chips at a pace that convinced Sam the man had been hungrier than he'd let on.

"Laundry and crap like that. It's my day off from both school and work," Sam said, running a hand through his hair.

Gabe's face lit up as he turned slightly to face him, his aura curling around him in lightening shades of yellow.

"Really? How do you feel about meeting for lunch or something, if you're not too busy?" the man asked excitedly before clearing his throat, "To discuss the case, of course."

Sam tilted his head, observing as the man's aura flashed with an interesting shade of orange that came and went too fast for him to interpret.

"Sure, we can have pizza again. I'll warn you now though, there's a small chance I might end up getting dumped with Ben again, so don't freak out if I show up with a kid."

The consultant chuckled, "Duly noted. What does Ben look like?"

"His mother," Sam said dryly before pulling out his phone and showing the man a picture, "Say hello to the greatest nephew on Earth."

Gabe coo'ed and aww'ed over the pictures Sam showed him because he definitely had more than a few on his phone. He'd have been lying if he said he hadn't spent a good ten minutes extolling the virtues of his nephew, but judging by Gabe's aura, he didn't seem to mind at all.

"So that's Dean?" Gabe asked, pointing at the green-eyed man tossing Ben over his shoulder, and Sam nodded.
"Yep," he smirked as he saw Gabe's expression, "Oh, you can say it. He looks like a Ken doll, doesn't he?"

"Does he model or something?" the consultant asked in disbelief, "Do Winchesters just have naturally good genes, cause this is ridiculous!"

Sam snickered at the man's flabbergasted expression, "Dean's definitely the 'hot brother' of the family. But don't worry, there aren't any more siblings to give you a heart attack."

"Okay, one, you're both hot," Gabe started in a completely serious voice, "and two, thank God because I'm not sure I can handle anymore Winchesters."

*Gabe thinks I'm hot?*

Sam stared at the consultant (he thinks I'm hot?), but Gabe didn't seem to find anything wrong with what he'd said, with his interest moving on to the various textbooks and other literature scattered around the living room.

"Ever thought of a bookshelf, kiddo?" the man asked with an arched eyebrow, and Sam rolled his eyes.

"They're fine on the floor," he responded, pushing away the idea that Gabe might actually find him hot, and why it seemed to bother him so much for a later date, "If you think this is bad, you should see my room."

Gabe's eyes lit up as he grinned, obviously keen to the idea.

"Why not? C'mon, you've seen mine, so I get to see yours!" he said, leaping off the couch, and Sam arched an eyebrow even as he smiled indulgently at the man's behavior.

"What are we, twelve?"

"Perhaps," the man responded with a wink, and Sam sighed before leading the man down the hall. Here, since there was no space heater, it was much colder, and he could hear Gabe shiver as he pushed open his door.

"Welcome to my hovel," Sam said with a sweeping gesture of his arm to his now more or less tidy room as he turned on the light, "Take your time, no need to rush."

"I like it," Gabe proclaimed as he stepped in, blankets dragging behind him as he looked this way and that, "It feels like you."

"Feels like me?" the college student echoed, amused. It almost sounded as if Gabe was the one who could feel auras in this scenario.

Gabe shrugged, a contemplative look on his face as he took in the sad bed in the corner where Sam's feet hung over the edge, the desk piled high with books and papers, and the sole plant that Ben liked to drown in water whenever he got the chance.

"It looks like a room you'd live in," he said, smiling at the Batman figure that Sam had taken out of the drawers. The Winchester blushed as he realized what the man was looking at and cleared his throat awkwardly.

"It's nothing special," he commented before a sudden idea popped into his head, "If you want, you can sleep here. I can pull in the space heater and it'll be warm in no time."
Gabe turned to look at him, gold eyes wide.

"Oh, no, Sam, I couldn't," he said, "I'll just sleep on the couch, it's fine."

Sam shook his head, his mind already made up.

"No, it'll be fine. I actually fit better on the couch than in my own bed honestly," he said with a reassuring smile, "So just get in bed already. It's almost two."

The consultant looked over at the clock on the nightstand, aura swirling in thought before he finally relented with a sigh.

"All right, if you say so," he said, sounding doubtful, and Sam gently nudged the man towards the bed. Sometimes Gabe could be stubborn and argumentative, and he was glad that for once, the P.I had put up minimal resistance.

"I do. I'll be right back."

In the living room, the first thing Sam noticed was the way Gabe's aura seemed to have lingered. It reminded him of the same effect he'd seen back in the man's apartment, but on a much smaller, fainter scale. Traces of gold curled around the couch and the breakfast bar, and a pastel trail led down the hall. It made the usually very neutral (unless they had raucous visitors like Dean) living room a bit brighter, and Sam took in the sight for a moment before remembering what he had come for.

"Shit," he swore, quickly unplugging the space heater. He really needed to get a hold of himself. It was just an aura; bright and bold and very warm, but an aura nonetheless.

Gabe was sitting cross-legged on the bed when he returned, his jeans tossed onto the back of Sam's desk chair. The Winchester snorted at the sight before dumping some blankets on the obviously cold man and plugging in the space heater.

"My hero," the consultant quipped as the space heater glowed orange, and Sam bowed before straightening and tugging on his fringe.

"That should do the trick. If you freeze to death after all my efforts, then I don't know what to tell you." he joked.

"Uh, rude," Gabe said with a fake frown, and Sam rolled his eyes before toeing the carpet, suddenly feeling awkward.

Well, you've offered your bed up to a guy you met last week, whose aura will probably stick around for a week; an idea that you're not completely against. So yeah, this is definitely a moment to feel awkward.

"I, uh..." he started before shaking his head minutely, "If you need anything, just wake me up, I'm a light sleeper."

"I'll be fine, kiddo," Gabe said softly with a smile before he suddenly frowned, "Will you be okay though? What if you sleepwalk?"

Sam cursed himself mentally. He'd almost forgotten about that. He had the sleeping pills, and while he was sort of sure they worked (did last night count?), he didn't want to just pull them out in front of Gabe.
"Well, if I do sleepwalk, I'm pretty sure you're not supposed to wake me," he said with a faint frown (he'd have to research the intricacies of sleepwalking in the morning), "Beyond that, I'm sure I'll be fine."

Gabe hummed in acknowledgment, his aura still looking a bit unconvinced before the duo gazed at each other for a moment. Sam was leaning against his door, somehow strangely comfortable in his position, while Gabe had made a makeshift cocoon out of the various blankets he'd given him.

The consultant broke the silence first by clearing his throat slightly and shifting. Sam blinked before realizing what he was doing and smiling bashfully as he glanced away.

"Good night, Sam," Gabe said softly, and Sam nodded before reaching to turn off the light.

"Good night, Gabe."

He shut the door quickly before he could say or do anything idiotic, sighing once he was on the other side.

It was ridiculous, but somehow, Gabe managed to bring the idiot out of him whenever he was around. Granted, the man seemed to draw various reactions out of people whenever he was around, but Sam felt like he was somehow the only one that got nervous and fumbled around the man like some kind of...

I need sleep. Sam thought to himself as he walked down the hall. Sure, he had gotten way more than usual last night, but if his thoughts were becoming so ludicrous, he obviously needed more.

The Winchester shrugged off his jeans and collapsed on the couch with a yawn, ignoring the way it sagged beneath him in favor of tugging up a few spare blankets. Faint traces of gold settled down around him, lulling him into a placid state. Thoughts of the case and Gabe drifted away as he shut his eyes. Tomorrow was his day off, and he'd get to have lunch with Gabe, so what was there to stress about?

Hmm, how about everything for a start?

Sam pushed that traitorous thought away and firmly shut his eyes. At this point, he'd almost take sleepwalking over listening to his thoughts. Almost. He could still remember waking up at the bottom of the tub, completely unaware of his situation.

Gabe's aura was doing the trick though, and he could feel himself slipping further and further away from awareness. It was sort of like how Dean's aura felt whenever he'd woken from a nightmare and couldn't sleep, but fundamentally different. Dean's had been brotherly and familiar on every level; Gabe's was less so familiar but just as potent, and it felt more like...

Before Sam could finish that particular thought, he fell asleep.

____________________________________________________________

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Sooooo, it's been two weeks...whoops? Please don't kill me!

In my defense, writer's block hit me out of nowhere and this chapter didn't want to come out at all. The first week I just had major doubts about my whole story and writing style, and then this past week I had senior photos, and let's just say I didn't look forward to those. If anyone's ever had a photo session when you hate taking pictures, you know what I'm talking about. I couldn't even focus on writing, but then last night the dam finally broke and I got the last 2k or so done.
To make up for my absence, not only is this chapter a nice 10k, there's also lots of Sabriel moments. Besides that though, this isn't really my favorite chapter, but meh, I wanted to get back to updating. I think it's all the dialogue I had to write; dialogue is so not my forte lmaooo. I'm just glad I managed to power through and get it done.

About Meg and Cas, I always found their relationship interesting on the show, so I made them friends here. Rest assured it's strictly platonic though! I've been waiting since the beginning to properly introduce this, so let me know what you think!

Also, with this chapter we've hit 100K! It's pretty wild considering this is my first fic, and this story is nowhere close being done! It doesn't even feel like 100K to me tbh, but that's probably because I have so much more planned and I'm not really thinking in terms of word count.

Update next Saturday, probably, if life doesn't throw anything else at me. Until then readers!
Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 14: Yellow Eyes

Sam had a strange sense of deja vu when the sound of a phone ringing managed to wake him up from the strange darkness he was in.

It wasn't his ringtone though, oddly enough. He frowned, eyes still shut as he rolled towards the sound of...music? Before he could roll all the way over and fumble in the general direction his nightstand should've been, he felt empty space beneath him and paused, throwing out one arm to catch himself just in time.

"What the hell?" he murmured, finally opening his eyes to find that not only was he sleeping on the couch for some reason, but that a very nice phone that didn't belong to him, or Kevin for that matter, was ringing, specifically playing 'Heat of the Moment'.

Oh.

The dark fog in his mind (A remnant of a dream? He couldn't seem to remember now) burned away as he realized that A) Gabe had stayed over, B) He must be sleeping in his bed, and C) Someone from the police was calling, as Gabe seemed to use that ringtone for mostly work.

"Crap," he muttered, scrambling off the saggy couch as he reached for the phone. He wasn't sure why the LPD, specifically Jody from looking at the screen, would be calling at...5:47 A.M, but it had to be important.

Jogging down the hall (or fast walking five paces for Sam; it wasn't a big apartment), he opened the door before he thought twice, and nearly stumbled back in shock.

His room was completely filled with Gabe's aura. He knew it shouldn't have been surprising, since, between the sheer size of it and the small scale of his room, it was bound to happen, but it was still disconcerting to see his room illuminated by warm, sleepy shades of gold and mint, and the man responsible for it curled up in a ball in the very center of his bed, nearly invisible under the covers.

The colors flowed off of him and swirled around in a sheen, making his usually dull and slightly depressed looking bedroom look almost likable.

Like this, my room doesn't look half bad.

Sam took a deep breath, and then another before he stepped in. He turned on the light first before reaching out a hesitant hand towards the curled up figure.

The phone stopped ringing as his hand ran over tousled blonde hair. Sam smiled faintly at the softness of it before he pulled the assortment of blankets down, just enough to shake the man's shoulder. It took a good 30 seconds to interrupt the soft snores, and Sam shook the consultant slightly harder as Jody began to call again.

It must be really important if she's still trying.

"Gabe, wake up!" Sam whispered, reluctant to wake the golden-eyed man up rudely, but he was also getting antsy about Jody's call. He didn't want to answer it himself for a variety of reasons, which
meant that Gabe had to wake up.

"Wassit, hmmm," Gabe mumbled incoherently, rolling over to face Sam as he tugged the covers over his head. His eyes were still firmly shut, hair half covering his face and the other half sticking up. Sam would’ve found it funny if it weren’t for the fact that Jody was still insistently calling.

"No, wake up you idiot," the Winchester hissed, tugging the blankets down again, and Gabe frowned deeply as he groaned, his aura flashing a faint orange in irritation.

"Nooo," he groaned, and Sam rolled his eyes before shoving the phone between Gabe's ear and the pillow.

That seemed to do the trick. Gabe's eyes flew open at the sound of the ringtone, and he cursed colorfully, sitting up and answering in a heartbeat.

"Yeah?" he answered with a sleep hoarse voice, and Sam stepped back before leaving, golden tendrils of Gabe's aura tangling around in limbs in soft wisps as he walked back into the living room and sat on the couch.

Running his hands through his hair, Sam yawned and fell back against the cushions, ignoring the creak beneath him as he looked up at the barely visible ceiling.

_Gabe is in my apartment. When did that even happen?_

Sam frowned, still looking at the ceiling as he tried to piece together last night's event. He had been at the Roadhouse, where there had been that situation with Meg, and then Gabe had picked him up...

"And then he nearly crashed the car. Right," Sam muttered to himself as he finally managed to remember. He stood, stretching his slightly sore muscles out before moving into the kitchen. While it was early, he used to wake up at this time to go on a morning jog, so he wasn't terribly grumpy at the impromptu wake up call. He could always catch a nap later since it was Wednesday and therefore he had no pressing priorities.

He had almost turned on the coffee machine when Gabe raced into the kitchen, struggling to shove his legs into his jeans while simultaneously putting on his coat.

"No time for that kiddo, I'll get us some on the way," he said quickly, stumbling over his words just as much as he was stumbling over his legs, "There's another body."

Sam's stomach dropped a bit, even as his heart rate began to pick up.

_It's horrible and gruesome, but I'm excited regardless. How fucked up is that?_

"Where? Who?" he asked, abandoning the coffee machine in favor of getting some clothes. While he had planned for an action-free day(save for lunch with Gabe), Sam figured serial killers didn't really care about whether or not he had the day off.

Gabe followed him out, his golden aura like a flare in the dim apartment. The light show was pretty, but Sam flicked on some lights along the way regardless to keep up appearances.

"Principal Mitchell of Southview High. He's apparently been set up there."

Sam nearly ran into his door as he turned to look back at Gabe.

_Wait, what?_
"Principal Mitchell?" he asked in disbelief, and Gabe nodded, tilting his head with interest.

"You knew him?"

The Winchester snorted as he regained his bearings and made his way to his dresser. Gabe's aura lingered, especially around the bed, and it parted gently around him as he moved.

"I graduated from Southview," he explained as he pulled out a random pair of jeans, "Mitchell liked to think of himself as a totalitarian, but in reality, he was just incompetent and-"

"An asshole?" Gabe finished with a faint smile.

Sam blinked, then smiled back.

"A constant in the case," he commented, "The killer set him up at the high school?"

"Apparently. Ready?" the consultant asked, clearly impatient to go, and Sam grabbed a pair of socks before nodding.

The two managed to make their way downstairs in two minutes, which was impressive as Gabe had run down the stairs in lieu of using the elevator (Sam had leapt down the last set in his haste to keep up). Sam didn't think he'd ever seen Gabe move so fast and had to haul the man back when he tried to run out the lobby doors.

"It gets icy," he explained as Gabe reeled back in alarm, "So watch your step."

"Did you have to choke me to make your point?" he asked, rubbing his neck, and Sam shrugged sheepishly as he let go of the man's collar.

"Sorry," he said, and Gabe scowled at him, but the glint in his eyes told Sam that all was well.

It was still dark outside as they made their way to the Beetle (carefully, as Gabe seem to took Sam's warning seriously). A good coating of snow covered the ground, and the college student estimated that around six inches had fallen judging by the neat layer on the car. It sparkled in the light of Gabe's aura, adding an extra light source to the glaring streetlamps and the consultant's aura.

"Crap. Now I've got to scrape off all this damn snow," Gabe hissed, rubbing his hands together as a sharp wind blew down the sidewalk.

"I'll handle it. Just start the car," Sam said, nudging him in the right direction, "I'll get it done faster than you."

"I'd argue with you, but you have a good point," Gabe said with a long glance to his arms, "Snow scraper's in the back."

While Sam began to scrape the windshield clean, the consultant started the car or at least tried to. The engine sputtered but refused to start, and Sam could hear a muffled curse from inside.

Sam frowned down at the hood while Gabe tried again, and again, but each time, the engine stalled.

"Let me try," the Winchester said as Gabe got out of the car, and the consultant threw his hands up in frustration.

"Just what I need. I've never had a problem with the engine before," Gabe exclaimed, his aura quickly turning orange with irritation, and Sam clasped his shoulder in an attempt to calm him.
"Don't worry, I'll get it started," he said reassuringly, "Just scrape the snow off the windows."

Gabe stared at him for a moment with a furrowed brow before nodding, the edge of irritation in his aura softening as he took the snow scraper.

Sam ducked into the Beetle, quickly realizing he would never get his legs inside properly. Gabe had the seat way too far forward for that, so he settled on twisting sideways as he reached for the ignition.

"Come on," he muttered, hoping that the engine would start. Unlike his brother, he only ever had a very rudimentary interest in cars; just enough to learn how to change a tire and change the oil. He knew next to nothing about stalled engines, and he could only hope the car might start.

Twisting the key, Sam bit his lip as the engine seemed to stall, but then with one last cough, it started.

"Yes!" he said as Gabe walked around.

"How did you do that?" the consultant asked, and Sam shrugged, stepping out.

"Luck. Get in, I'll finish up," he said, taking the snow scraper from the confused man before steering him into the car.

Quickly scraping off just enough to make sure they had visibility, Sam ducked inside into the warmth of the car, the sound of the wind cutting off as he slammed the door.

"Let's go!"

... Southview High loomed overhead in all of its depressing, gray glory. With three stories and multiple additions, it was a conglomerate of buildings that Sam remembered far too well. He frowned slightly as they pulled up into the main entrance, where police cars, an ambulance, and most importantly, a medical examiner's van, were all parked with their various lights flashing. The snow managed to cover the usually yellow grass and pathetic landscaping that framed the school, but it also emphasized the starkness of the building. Sam didn't think Southview ever looked more like a prison than it did in the winter.

Gabe seemed to notice his less than enthusiastic expression as they parked, as he began to chuckle.

"High school wasn't the best?" he asked, and Sam took an aggressive sip of his coffee, which only made the P.I laugh harder.

"It wasn't fun," he confirmed, shaking his head slightly, "It's weird, I only graduated two years ago, but it still sort of feels like I should be heading to homeroom now."

He winced as a particular memory came to him.

"I also met Jess here," he muttered, waiting for the sting in his chest at the thought of his ex. Surprisingly, it was barely a pinch when it used to be agony, and Sam sipped his coffee to hide his faint surprise. Maybe he was finally getting over her.

A hand reached out and clasped his shoulder, and the Winchester looked over to see Gabe offering a reassuring smile, even as his aura rippled with a dark displeasure at the mention of Jess.

Sam smiled back, letting the gold shades wash over his shoulder, and then the moment was over as they both got out of the car.
Inside, the foyer was bustling with activity, more than the school ever saw at this early hour. Sam quickly took in everything with the practiced eye of a former student; the office directly ahead filled with faculty and officers, some of which he recognized from both groups. The double doors down the hall to the right that led to one of the main buildings used for classes were shut, which meant that Principal Mitchell had been set up somewhere down the left. There were too many options down that way, as the cafeteria, gym, auditorium, theater, and music hall were all down that way, not to mention the small wing that held some history classes and-

"It's the trophy cases, isn't it?" Sam asked as they began to walk down the hall, and Gabe glanced over at him.

"Yeah, Jody mentioned something about those," he said slowly, and Sam nodded, feeling a strange sense of satisfaction at the fact that he'd deduced that all on his own without the assistance of a vision.

Speaking of visions, I didn't have one that mentioned Mitchell at all, and I didn't sleepwalk last night either. What's up with that?

"Mitchell was more interested in the athletes than anything else," he explained as they passed the cafeteria, which was on the left, and the closed doors of the auditorium on the right. Ahead, his suspicion was confirmed at the sight of crime scene tape blocking off the two double doors that led to the gym foyer, "He was almost obsessive about it. Since the killer's all about symbolism, it'd have to be something athlete related, and the trophy cases are about as public as it gets."

A familiar blonde ducked under the yellow tape to greet them, but Sam noticed that her aura was different. The usual peach was swirling a darker mauve color in discontent, and instead of greeting them affably, Donna grabbed their hands and tugged them down the smaller hall on the left just past the auditorium that led to the theater and the music wing.

"What's wrong, Donna?" Sam asked, instantly concerned at the sight of the detective. She was always so cheerful, and her aura was usually on the more stable side. Something, or someone, must have really bothered her to make her aura appear like this.

"Talbot's here," she said grimly, doe eyes fixing an apologetic look at Gabe, "Jody tried to stop her, telling her she needed to rest from her flight, but..."

"She's already kicked me off the case. She works fast, I'll give her that," the consultant said with a little laugh.

Sam felt his stomach twist sharply as he took in Gabe's words and the faint green-blue colors of disappointment.

Gabe's off the case? But he can't be! What...what do we do now?

"As soon as she heard you were on the case she kicked you off," Donna said sadly, "We'd try to sneak you onto the crime scene, but she's here right now."

For a moment, they were all quiet, until Gabe nodded and smiled. To an outsider, it might have looked convincing, but Sam could see the forced quality to his behind his eyes and in his aura.

"Well, guess that means we should be off. I have other cases I have to get to anyway," he said indifferently, "Come on kiddo."

Donna glanced over at Sam, eyes wide with concern, and the college student nodded slightly before they parted ways. As they left, he looked over his shoulder at the bustling crime scene and thought
he saw bloody Enochian painted on the glass of the cases, but it was just a glimpse.

Outside, the sun was beginning to rise, staining the sky in shades of pink and orange that Sam didn't really feel like admiring at the moment. Gabe was uncharacteristically quiet by his side, golden aura revealing nothing obvious. There were subtle shades, but Sam for the life of him couldn't figure out what they could possibly mean, which bothered him immensely. While sometimes minute shade differences were impossible to read, he'd always prided himself on being able to pick up on them. It seemed he'd have to figure this out through talking.

_Not my strong suit, but I have to give it my best shot. I don't know what Gabe's thinking right now._

"So that's it?" Sam asked bluntly just before they reached the Beetle, which looked out of place amongst the motley assortment of vehicles.

"Pretty much," Gabe said with a casual shrug, hands in his pockets as his jacket flapped in the wind. Sam, for some reason, had the urge to button it up, much like he did whenever Ben had a piece of clothing on wrong (usually shoelaces; even his genius nephew struggled with those) and pushed it down viciously. Gabe was a grown adult, not a kid.

"'Pretty much'?" Sam echoed in disbelief, stopping on the icy sidewalk. Gabe stopped with him and shrugged again, but this time a bit harder.

"Yes, 'pretty much'. This is the nature of my job, kiddo," he said, and Sam frowned.

"I'm not a kid," he snapped, "So you're just going to, what, walk away from the case? Doesn't it bother you?"

Gabe fixed patient gold eyes on him, the look reminiscent of a parent waiting a child's temper tantrum out. The gaze only served to rile Sam up even more as the man responded.

"There's nothing I can do about it, ki-Sam," Gabe said, seeming to backtrack when he saw the look in Sam's eyes, "Talbot's head of the task force now, and she makes the decisions. If I get lucky, they _might_ bring me back in for some consultation, but probably not. Bela and I never got on well."

The golden-eyed man huffed a laugh at the word 'consultation', and Sam felt his hand clench around his coffee cup, enough to make the paper cup crumple a bit.

_A task force that's probably going to get nowhere, just like last time._

"That's bullshit!" he growled, "You can't just-just give up. This isn't like you at all! What if the killer just keeps going and they don't catch him?"

"It'll be all right Sam; the LPD are good at what they do," Gabe said soothingly, and Sam's hand finally clenched into a fist.

Hot coffee dripped down his hand and sizzled on the snow below, but Sam barely winced at the sensation, ignoring Gabe's curse as he reached for his hand.

"No, they're not!" Sam hissed, raking his free hand through his hair, "They _fucked_ up almost twenty years ago with Yellow Eyes, and they're going to _fuck_ it up this time with this Death dude, and I'm not just going to stand by and let them-"

The throaty growl of an engine Sam was familiar with reminded him of where he was, and he abruptly cut himself off as he turned to see Ash's old junker of a truck roll up. Jo was sitting in the passenger seat, and he frowned as she practically flew out, skidding to a stop in front of him.
"Sam! What are you doing here? Oh, hi Gabe! What happened here?" Jo asked, her eyes flicking to the front doors before returning to him and his crushed coffee cup, "And what happened to your coffee?"

"I spilled it," he said shortly, exchanging a nod of greeting with Ash through the window (he looked sleepy, but mostly aware, which was good), "What are you doing here Jo? Didn't they cancel school for you guys because of the snow, or...?"

"They did, but I left my phone charger in my locker," she explained, breath misting in front of her as she spoke breathlessly, "Sam, I need to talk to you about Kevin."

Sam threw away the ruined cup in a nearby trash can and took in Jo's aura with a frown. The crystal teal was darker now, with an anxious edge to it that immediately had him worried.

What's Kevin done to make her so concerned?

"What about him?" he asked, and Jo bit her lip before tugging on the end of one of the braids she'd done her hair in.

"I'm really worried about him," she admitted, "He keeps going out late, and I don't understand why because I know he hates parties and stuff like that, but he still goes anyway. Whenever I asked him about it he always clammed up, but I think it has to do with some of the friends he has that still go here."

"You think they're dragging him into bad stuff?" Sam asked, and she shook her head.

"I think he's trying to help them out of bad stuff. Gang stuff," she said, "Gangs have started recruiting from here a lot more, and I think a couple of his friends have been sucked in. It's getting really out of hand, but the administration isn't doing shit about it."

Gangs again. It always circles back to the gangs.

"Do you think he might get into serious trouble if he keeps this up?" he asked, and Jo shrugged, face crumpling into a morose expression.

"Maybe. When we studied together last week, he had the worst panic attack I'd ever seen him have. I think it's really getting to him," she said, aura almost blue, "He won't let me help him. To be honest, I don't know if I can help him."

"Don't worry, I'll figure something out," Sam said, clasping Jo's shoulder and rubbing it gently, "Go get your phone charger and enjoy your snow day."

"I'll escort her inside," Gabe offered, and Sam nodded before letting the two of them walk off.

He sighed and walked over to Ash's truck, leaning against the driver's door as the man rolled down his window.

"What happened?" he drawled, nodding at the school as he leaned a forearm on the door.

"Serial killer got to Principal Mitchell, but you didn't hear that from me," he responded, earning a surprised huff from Ash.

"That bastard's dead? Bad way to go, but it's about time," he said frankly, "Can't tell how many times he tried to get me arrested for smoking weed."
"Ever hear him do anything really shady besides the usual rumors?"

Ash ran a hand over his mullet and fixed him with an inquisitive look.

"Not really. Whatcha doin’ out here anyway Sam?" he asked, and the Winchester shrugged, scuffing his boot at the ice-covered asphalt.

"Just curious. Don't smoke here," he said, noticing the blunt sitting in the cup holder with a frown.

"I have my flaws, but i'm not that much of an idiot," Ash remarked, "And I don't smoke with little Jo in the car. Ellen would skin me alive, and then how would I sleep on my favorite pool table?"

The two laughed at the running joke before they exchanged goodbyes. Sam went to the Beetle to grab some napkins, as his hand was quickly growing sticky from the coffee, and managed to clean himself up more or less by the time Gabe and Jo exited from one of the nearby side doors.

After struggling to start the Beetle for two minutes(with it eventually starting under Sam's control), the duo pulled away from the school in silence. It was vaguely uncomfortable, and Sam was embarrassed about his outburst(what a waste of coffee), but he also didn't really feel like talking about it yet. Now that he knew more about what might be bothering Kevin, he had to figure out how he'd approach his roommate, not to mention figure out something regarding the case and-

"Who's Yellow Eyes?"

Sam couldn't help the slight flinch at the name, but he concealed the reaction by rolling his shoulders like he was stretching. He didn't respond, his mind whirling for something to say that didn't involve telling the story.

Please just let it be.

A minute of extremely tense silence stretched on before they were suddenly careening to the side. Sam nearly face planted into the dashboard as they screeched into some random parking lot, and he hissed as his knees slammed painfully against the compartment in front of him as Gabe braked hard.

"What the fuck?" he asked incredulously, turning to look at Gabe, who was already looking back with a set face as he put the car in park and unbuckled his seat belt.

His aura was glowing orange, much like it had back on the roof after Sam had chased the killer, though it wasn't as mad looking. It was definitely determined, and with a nervous twist in his stomach, Sam realized that Gabe wasn't going to let this go. The man was far too stubborn and curious for his own good.

"Who the fuck is Yellow Eyes?" he asked, crossing his arms as he scowled. His eyes were on fire, but as Sam watched, the man's aura softened a bit, "And why are you so mad?"

Sam's face twisted, and he looked away, rubbing a hand over one of his sore knees as he looked out the window.

The sun had risen almost completely now, the sky fading from dusky pink to blue. There wasn't a single cloud in sight or an aura that Sam could lose himself in. Just the empty street and the dead trees lining it, and the layer of snow.

Figures. The one time I really need a couple of auras to focus on, there's nobody in sight.

"Sam, you crushed a coffee cup," Gabe said, sounding impossibly soft. Sam could feel the man's...
own anger bleeding away, but his own was still wound tight with the tension he felt on the topic, "I just want to know so maybe I can help."

That was all Sam could take. His hand reached out before his brain caught up with what he was doing, and suddenly he was outside in the cold, slamming the door behind him hard enough to make the car shake slightly.

He walked away a few paces, breathing hard as he looked around for anything, anything at all, to focus on besides stupid Yellow Eyes or Gabe or just murder in general.

There was nothing though, and he ran both of his hands through his hair before he kicked at a lump of ice. It shattered, spraying across the ground, and Sam stared at what remained of it, suddenly not angry at all as rationality kicked in.

Why should he have been? Gabe didn't know what had happened; couldn't have known. Yellow Eyes was nearly twenty years ago, and he didn't come up often these days in regular conversation, though sometimes whenever there was a particularly gruesome murder his name would be whispered. Sam was honestly surprised no one besides Lisa had brought him up ever since the killer had started his rampage. John had always been the bitter, angry one when it came to Yellow Eyes, and while Sam was still angry about it, it was residual anger absorbed from his father. He had been just a baby, and unlike Dean and John, had no memory of his mother. His anger came from the incompetence of the police and the robbed opportunity to know his mother, and had faded consistently over the years as his need for a maternal figure lessened and lessened. If this new serial killer hadn't started his own rampage, Sam probably wouldn't have reacted so strongly to mentions of him.

Sam suddenly felt a hot flush of guilt crawl over him. Gabe probably thought he was acting like an idiot right now, or even a psycho. Who crushes a coffee cup in anger?

*Only thing to do now is tell him. Maybe if I tell him he'll understand.*

The Winchester nodded to himself and turned around, summoning what nerve he could through the sudden ball on anxiety he had wound himself up into.

Gabe's aura was suspiciously normal when he reentered the car as if Sam hadn't done anything weird at all by storming out. Sam couldn't find any anger or confusion in his face; just the man's usual open face with a bit more patience than usual. It seemed he was content to wait for Sam to speak, and the Winchester leaned back against the seat with a sigh, looking straight ahead so he didn't have to look in Gabe's eyes. He didn't know what would come out of his mouth if he looked, and he wanted to tell the story his way.

"Yellow Eyes was a serial killer centered in Lawrence almost twenty years ago," he started, "He got his name because one of the two people that saw his face said that he had yellow eyes, bright yellow eyes like he wore contacts. Hence the name."

Sam could feel Gabe's aura shift to that persuasive air the man sometimes used, but the consultant didn't say anything. It was more like the man was encouraging him to keep going in some silent way.

"He killed five women. At least, it was assumed he did; their bodies were never found," Sam explained, "All of them were blonde and somewhere in their twenties, but that was all that they shared. They all had different occupations and different backgrounds, and they were all taken from different places."

"Mary Winchester was his last victim."
The shift in atmosphere was almost palpable. A sense of empathy washed over him, so strong that Sam had to look at Gabe.

His face was still the same, but his eyes had changed, sharper now that he understood. Sam sighed, rubbing the back of his neck as he momentarily lost his train of thought.

*Gabe always finds a way to do that to me.*

"I was six months old. I never really knew her," he said with a wry smile and shrug, "No one's really sure what she was doing. She had never told my father John that she was going to take me out to the park, but the assumption was that she had decided to linger outside after dropping Dean off at preschool instead of going straight home."

Sam frowned, "I can't remember anything since I was too young, but the police said that she had probably spotted him before he could sneak up on her because there were signs of a chase. My stroller had been abandoned, and there were tracks through the wooded section of the park she had been taken from."

"You were the second person to see him, weren't you?"

Gabe was leaning forward now, brow furrowed slightly and a slight tint of indecision to his aura, as if he wanted to do something but wasn't sure if he should.

"Yeah. Doesn't mean shit though," Sam muttered, "They...well, he caught her, and for some reason, I was left behind in a little tree hollow. At first, they thought my mom had hidden me, but he'd carved his calling card into the tree, so it had been him. I was in the woods for a while until someone's dog found me. Apparently, I was a quiet baby."

At this, Gabe exhaled sharply, frown deepening.

"That's terrible," he stated, and Sam smiled slightly at the fervor with which he'd said it.

"It was. John was never the same after. None of us were," he finished, "That's why I don't have confidence in the LPD when it comes to this new serial killer. They made mistakes with Yellow Eyes, and I don't trust them not to mess up somehow this time around. I...I can't let that happen, and that's why I'm so...upset about you being taken off the case."

Sam ducked his head, cheeks flushing as he continued, "You're the best person for the case. You're headstrong, smart, and great at what you do. And...I trust you. I know that if there's anyone that can catch this guy, it's you."

For a moment, the car was completely quiet, but then suddenly Gabe's arms looped around him, his hair tickling the side of his face as the consultant leaned over the glove compartment to hug him.

Stunned, it took Sam a moment to catch up, but then he was hugging Gabe back, absorbing his aura like a sponge. No matter how many times he came in contact with the man, he didn't think he'd ever get used to the enveloping warmth or the sense of contentment that his aura left him with.

"You think very highly of me, Sammy. Definitely more than the way I see myself," Gabe said with a faint chuckle, a hand reaching up to thread hesitant fingers through the ends of Sam's ever growing hair. It was an odd gesture vaguely reminiscent of the soothing way Dean used to run his hands through his hair when they were children. Maybe it was weird, and the hug was definitely drawing out longer than a friendly hug in a car should be, but Sam couldn't really bring himself to care.

"That's bullshit," Sam said idly, too caught up in the sensation of Gabe's aura to imbue his voice with
the indignation he felt at the man's words, "You're the best detective in Lawrence and you know it."
"Technically I'm just a consultant," the man responded in a teasing tone, and Sam huffed.

"Same difference," he dismissed before reluctantly pulling away.

"You're right though," Gabe remarked, resting an arm against the steering wheel as he gazed intently at him, "We can't just walk away. I was originally planning on just skulking around the sidelines and irritating Bela, but... what if we conducted our own investigation?"

"Isn't that kind of illegal?" Sam asked, and Gabe smirked deviously.

_Oh boy. When he gets that look on his face, nothing good can come from it._

"A little, but you forget I am _also_ a P.I," he said, his smirk growing as his aura practically blazed with mischief, "As a P.I, I am up for hire, and _I_ think _you'll_ be my new client."

Sam arched an eyebrow before tilting his head in confusion as he tried, and failed, to see the logic behind Gabe's proclamation.

"Explain," he demanded.

"You, an _innocent_ victim of terror at the WM library, want to hire someone to discover the identity of the person that harassed you _so horribly_," Gabe said, eyes glinting, "I am the _obvious_ solution of course, and as I am known to be not only relentless in my investigations, but also cunning and underhanded with my methods, us working alongside the official investigation won't raise too many eyebrows."

The Winchester blinked before grinning, suddenly understanding why Gabe looked so smug.

"That's a clever cover story," he admitted, only serving to fuel the consultant's ego, "As long as we don't get into serious trouble it should be fine."

"Awww, you're no fun, kiddo," Gabe pouted, and Sam rolled his eyes before they simultaneously reached for their seatbelts.

The ignition once again gave Gabe some trouble, and Sam shook his head as he had to start the car for the third time.

"I'm taking you to Bobby's," he declared as they drove, "This is ridiculous, and I don't know enough about cars to help."

"Bobby's?" Gabe asked.

"A family friend that runs a mechanic's shop," the Winchester explained, "He'll give you a fair price and get your torture device of a vehicle running in no time."

"Hey! My car is _not_ a torture device!"

"Tell that to my poor knees."

Between the two arguing over the value of the Beetle and Gabe misinterpreting Sam's instructions ('I said right here! No, _here_-Christ I'm going to die!'), it took the duo the better portion of a half hour to reach Bobby's shop, which was located in the southeastern portion of Lawrence in a mostly business area.
"Stay here," Sam requested as he looked at the open shop, "I'm not sure if Dean's working today or not, and I want to check first."

"I can't meet the brother yet?"

The college student looked at Gabe, who was gazing back innocently at him.

"Not after all those stunts you pulled getting here," Sam sniffed, ignoring the strange twisting feeling in his gut at the thought of Gabe meeting Dean, "Now, stay put."

He opened the door and got out before Gabe could say anything, sighing hard enough to make a giant condensation cloud.

_Gabe and Dean meeting would be a disaster. They'd butt heads, and Dean is too overprotective to care that Gabe and I have a good friendship. He'd just see a stranger and flip out._

Inside, the small reception area was warm and lit in very yellow lighting. There were a few threadbare, cushioned chairs, a coffee table with magazines, and a water cooler and coffee station all off to the left. To the right was a hall that Sam knew led to a single bathroom, a closet, and the garage, and directly in front of him was the reception area, and Bobby himself poring over what looked like an inventory file.

The man looked up at the sound of the jingling bell and blinked before straightening his ever present baseball cap. His earthy aura went to a more orange shade of surprise, and Sam grinned as the gruff man visibly did a double take.

"Well, look what the dog dragged in," Bobby commented, walking around the desk, "Where have you been boy? I ain't seen you since your brother's birthday."

"College has me beat," Sam said as they exchanged a very manly, gruff hug that involved a lot of back pounding.

"That's not the only thing that has you beat. Where'd ya get that from?" the older man asked, gesturing to the almost healed bruise on Sam's face, and the Winchester shrugged.

"Long story. Is Dean here?"

Bobby's eyes narrowed minutely at the blatant subject change, but he still responded, "Nope. Only showed up once last week. Something's up with him, but I don't know what."

*Probably busy protecting Castiel,* Sam thought, filling in the blanks, _But how much is he protecting him though if he hasn't shown up here?*

"That's all right," Sam said with an easy going smile, "I actually brought you a customer."

"A customer?" Bobby asked before his eyes slid past him to look outside, "You're not talking about that yellow monstrosity sitting outside, are you?"

"It's an ok car," Sam argued, earning a disbelieving look from the older man. He sighed, running a hand through his hair, "Look, ignition's having some trouble, and you know me. I don't know jack shit about cars."

"Damn right," Bobby muttered before scratching the scruff on his face, "But all right. Get your friend in here and I'll get someone on it."
"Thanks, Bobby!"

The gruff man waved him away with a grunt, and Sam stepped out to get Gabe.

"Am I allowed to come in?" the P.I asked, sounding a little snippy, and Sam rolled his eyes before popping open the driver's door and tugging the surprised man out.

"The coast is clear," he confirmed, "Now, come in and talk to Bobby. He's a little difficult, but he's like an uncle to me, so don't let him get to you."

"That doesn't sound too hard," Gabe remarked, and Sam gave him a warning look as he opened the door.

"So this is your friend, huh?" Bobby asked as Gabe strolled in. Sam mentally crossed his fingers as the two men visibly sized each other up. "Never seen him before."

"We met recently," the P.I said smoothly before Sam could gripe at Bobby, "Gabriel Milton, private investigator and consultant."

He stuck out his hand, and Sam had to stifle a snicker at the faint look of shock on Bobby's face. Bobby was usually the one that stuck out his hand first in handshakes, and he watched the two shook hands in a grip way more firm than necessary.

Men. Sam thought as he shook his head.

"Investigator? How'd you and Sam meet?" Bobby asked suspiciously as he glanced at Sam.

"The Roadhouse," Gabe answered with a charming smile that Bobby barely reacted to, "Sam said you were the best guy to come to for car repairs, so can you help?"

Bobby studied the P.I with sharp eyes for a second before nodding, gesturing in the general direction of the garage.

"Pull up in station #2. If it's the ignition there's probably a bigger problem, so you're probably going to want to get some breakfast and go along your day on the subway."

Gabe was handed a business card, and then the two of them were herded out of the door in classic Bobby style as the phone began to ring.

The duo stood outside for a moment, taking in the fact that they'd been practically shoved outside.

"Well, I think that went well Samaquatch."

"Let's just get your car fixed."

They dropped the car off in the garage, where a worker Sam vaguely recognized as a part-timer took the Beetle off their hands.

"My poor car," the P.I moaned dramatically.

"It'll be fine. I'm sure it won't take too long," Sam said, clapping a reassuring hand on Gabe's shoulder, "Now, let's go find a subway station. We need to decide what we're going to do next."

"But that requires walking." Gabe whined as they began the long trek (Sam was pretty sure it was just a few blocks, but with Gabe?) to the nearest station.
"Should I throw you over my shoulder like a sack of potatoes then?" the Winchester asked, and Gabe blinked up at him, his aura swirling a bit in surprise.

"No way you could do that," he said disbelievingly, crossing his arms, and Sam smirked.

"I totally could. Want me to prove it?"

"No!" Gabe exclaimed, too quickly for it to be true. Even if Sam hadn't been able to see that green streak in the P.I's aura he'd come to associate with lying, he would've known that. "I'm perfectly fine on the ground-ahhh!"

Sam swept Gabe off of his feet and tossed him over his shoulder in one smooth motion without a second thought. There was one precarious moment when he thought he might slip on some hidden ice on the sidewalk, but he didn't, and then they were walking down the sidewalk as if they had just done a normal, everyday thing.

_Gabe's so light. I thought he'd be heavier._

Not only was Gabe much lighter than he'd anticipated, his shoulder was tingling now due to the man's aura. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling, though Sam was sure his arm wouldn't feel the same for the rest of the day.

"-put me down! Sam, ok, you've made your point!" Gabe said, pounding a fist against his shoulder, but the Winchester only hummed and tightened his arm around the man's waist as he kept walking.

"It's easier just to carry you then listen to you complain about walking," the Winchester explained over Gabe's protests.

They walked like that for a few minutes until Gabe seemed to give up, ending his mini-rant with a massive sigh and one final kick of his legs.

"Got that out of your system?" Sam asked innocently, and he could practically hear the P.I's eyes roll.

"When did you get so bold?" he asked as they passed pedestrians, and Sam pretended to think about the question for a second before answering.

"Well, I met this guy named Gabe on my night shift last Tuesday. Ever heard of him?"

"Haha," Gabe laughed sarcastically, "Can I come down now? I have to get us on the right train."

The Winchester paused, then realized that they had arrived at the station. He had walked the whole way with Gabe on his shoulder, and he flushed as his rational mind finally kicked in.

_Did I really just do that?_

Gabe's cheeks were suspiciously pink when he set him down, but the man only coughed and led them down to a train that would take them to North Heights. Sam didn't say anything about the destination choice, as he was too busy trying to keep his ear from getting too hot from embarrassment. He'd have to stop letting Gabe's aura loosen his inhibitions in the future.

_Stupid auras._

In the daylight, Gabe's apartment building seemed even more impressive, though Sam had to admit as they entered that the night skyline from the windows was better than the daytime one. Maybe it
was because he'd seen the nighttime view first, but as he looked out at the Lawrence, he was disappointed it wasn't *quite* the same.

The sound of wheels pulled the reluctant Winchester away from the windows to see Gabe pushing out the whiteboard he'd seen on his first visit.

"You're lucky I haven't erased this yet," the golden-eyed man remarked as he rolled board into the living room before flipping it over.

At the top of the board was 'The Crucifier/Death?', with a doodle of what looked like a mad face next to it. Directly beneath that was what looked like a timeline of the victims, and beneath *that* seemed to be a free for all of questions, more doodles, and phrases. They were all in different colors that Sam suspected were somehow color coordinated, but if there was a method to Gabe's madness, he couldn't immediately discern it.

"This is...crazy," the college student said, struggling to find as he stood to read the board more thoroughly, "Impressive, but absolutely crazy."

Gabe flashed a smile, "My specialty. Anything stand out?"

Sam gazed at the board for a minute, eyes skimming around until they landed on a single question underneath the point on the timeline that simply said 'The Chase'.

'Sam saw a ring. Important?'

An image flashed before his eyes of the killer in the alley, then in the WU library, with the same ring. *Sapphire, gold, an evil stone.*

"This," Sam said, pointing to the question written in blue(and the little ring doodle next to it), "The ring. It's big, noticeable. This guy, he's been good at not leaving prints or any other sort of forensic evidence, and he doesn't show up on camera. Why wear the ring then when it's a strong identifier?"

"But you can't place the ring?"

Sam shook his head in frustration, "No. Maybe it's a family heirloom or something."

He continued reading the board before the word 'gang' popped out at him.

"Meg said that the gangs had been getting Enochian messages for a while before the killing started," he murmured, "I wonder what they said. Probably warnings and threats, but still. If he graffitied them, that'd require venturing into gang territory."

"Up for the challenge?" Gabe asked with a light in his eyes, and Sam shrugged.

"If we're quick and inconspicuous, it should be fine," he said nonchalantly. Truth be told, the gangs didn't really scare Sam too much. Thanks to John, he knew how to defend himself, and if push came to shove, he was confident in his chances to gain the upper hand if the situation took a bad turn.

"Keep thinking. I'll whip us up some breakfast," Gabe said, brushing his fingers along his elbow as he walked past.

Sam shivered slightly as gold colors swished past, but he kept his focus on the board.

*First thing we should probably do is see if we can find any of that graffitti...maybe Meg knows a few places we can look, but she might not be so open to talking now that she's with Benny. Questioning*
someone in the gang would be the easiest way, but there's no way that'll happen...

Sleep washed over Sam like a wave, and he stiffened slightly as he swayed.

Dammit. Here, and now?

He managed to stumble back and sit on the couch just as his eyelids drooped shut, and then there was-

... A pitch black night sky, devoid of light pollution. They were out somewhere far, far away from Lawrence, with crisp mountain air so fresh it burned in his lungs and the scent of pine so strong it was almost cloying.

They?

Sam's hands, smaller than he ever remembered them, tightened in familiar leather. It felt like he was watching from outside and simultaneously acting out the memory at the same time, and the resulting double vision effect made the edges of the image distort more than the fragile memory already was.

His head scratched against a stubbly face as he buried his nose in the leather jacket to keep it from getting frostbitten. Someone's hand bumped his forehead, and he peered around the neck of the person that was carrying him to see familiar green eyes, bright against the dark backdrop of the night.

Dean.

Freckled and young, his brother shot him the reassuring, lopsided grin he always gave when he thought Sam was afraid. If Dean was being carried as well, that meant they were with John, which felt right, since it smelled like him, and this was his old jacket, wasn't it?

Why was he with John though? And where were they?

"You're good boys, remember that," he said roughly, voice echoing as if he was speaking from a distance, even though he was right there, or here. Sam's head swam as the words faded, muffled like the crunch of thick snow beneath John's feet and the whisper of the wind through the boughs of the pines that loomed on either side.

Sam turned his head away from the crook of his father's shoulder, rubbing a red nose as he gazed at the cabin at the end of the path they were walking. The windows were yellow squares, illuminating the outside of the wooden walls. Where a door was supposed to be was just an opening showing the same yellow light, and a heat so intense he found it hard to believe there was still snow intact around the cabin.

Time seemed to slow as they approached, his father's voice fading to a whisper as Dean reached out a hand to tangle in Sam's scarf. He was trying to reassure him, to be the fearless older brother, but Sam could tell by the quiver in his jaw that he was scared too.

The light seemed to pulse, voices whispering now that weren't his father's. Sam pressed against the solid weight of John, cringing away. He didn't like the voices, as they weren't making sense, and they were making his head hurt.

"Daddy, I'm scared."

"Don't be, Sammy," a voice answered from far away as the heat reached out. They were almost at
the cabin now, "Everything will be ok."

The scene melted away as the yellow light burned everything out of sight. Sam wasn't falling, but it was something close to the sensation as the memory was swept away under the bright onslaught. Remnants of it still lingered though, long enough for him to pick up on traces of it.

*It isn't a good idea, but it's the only one-

*Protection, at least until they're adults-

*They shouldn't remember anything-

They all burned away though, and the memory was lost again. Now, it was just hot, and his chest itched madly as heat coursed through his bones. It was like something was crawling beneath his skin, maddening enough to-

"Stop it!"

Sam gasped as the voice broke through his mind. Hands were tugging at his, which were poised over his chest, which was...bare?

"Sam, are you awake?" Gabe asked, gold eyes wide as he kept Sam's hands apart. He sounded almost panicked, and the Winchester gulped as he looked down at his chest.

There were large welts on his chest as if he'd been clawing at his ribs and heart. Thankfully, he wasn't bleeding, but he had a feeling it would've been a lot more serious if Gabe hadn't been around to stop him.

*Shit. What did I do that for?*

"I...what happened?" Sam asked, confused as he looked around. He was standing in Gabe's bathroom of all places, and the sink was running. Now that he was becoming more and more aware of his surroundings, he realized that his hair and face were wet.

"You fell asleep on the couch," Gabe said, tugging down on his hands until they were standing with their hands clasped together. The consultant didn't seem too aware of their position, and Sam was too out of it to comment on it. "And then you got up, and I thought you'd just taken a nap, but you were sleepwalking. You came into the kitchen and stared at me, and it was almost like you were awake, but you weren't."

"How'd I get here?" Sam asked, shivering slightly in the cool bathroom.

Gabe blinked before reaching for a towel and handing it to him as he shut the faucet off. The man's aura worked to warm him up, lighter than usual colors filling the bathroom and chasing away the tense feeling the sleepwalking episode had left him with.

"After you stopped in the kitchen you came in here. I followed to make sure you didn't hurt yourself, and I thought you wouldn't," Gabe continued, face pale as he fumbled through the cabinet beneath the sink, "You turned on the water, and just-just stuck your head beneath it before you began scratching yourself!"

He pulled out a container of ointment, and Sam finally moved to towel dry his hair.

"I'm sorry if I scared you," he murmured quietly as he read Gabe's aura and the wavery, pale ivory that stained it.
Gabe's mouth pressed into a thin line as he began to spread ointment on his chest, soothing the angry welts with soft sweeps of his fingers. Sam held still and let him work, the sting in his chest dulling under the man's care.

"That's not it, Sammy," the golden-eyed man responded with a slight shake of his head, "I-well, it was more violent than I was expecting, but I'm more worried about what you experienced in your head more than anything. Do you remember anything?"

*You're good boys, remember that.*

"A memory," Sam whispered after a moment, voice echoing strangely in the acoustics of the bathroom, "A very old memory."

Gabe's hand paused in its soothing motion on his chest, right over the black pentacle on his chest.

"A...traumatic one?" he asked, voice stiff, and Sam shook his head, quick to ease the man's assumption by nudging his shoulder in what was supposed to be a casual, teasing manner. Instead, his hand lingered, fingers moving of their own volition to tangle slightly in the fabric of the shirt Gabe was wearing.

"No, just...something I didn't remember before," he said, furrowing his brow. He could remember bits and pieces of the strange memory; the strong scent of pine and Dean's freckly face.

*And the cabin. Why were we brought to a cabin?*

"I don't want to hug you, or else I'll just waste all your handiwork," Sam said suddenly, breaking the quiet of the moment they'd fallen into.

Gabe startled, fingers curling slightly against his tattoo before he huffed out a short laugh.

"You have a point," he said, sounding almost...wistful as he stepped away. Sam didn't understand why he'd sound like that, but he shrugged the thought aside (and his now red ears) as he reached for his crumpled shirt on the ground.

*A cabin that we were both brought to when we were young...but I don't remember being brought to a cabin ever in my life.*

"I should probably go," he started awkwardly, and Gabe shook his head, jutting his chin out stubbornly.

"No way, not after-that," he said with a slight wave of his hand, "You'll eat the breakfast I made, and-"

"The breakfast you burned?" Sam asked as a new scent made itself known, and Gabe cursed before running out of the bathroom.

Sam followed to see a faint trail of smoke coming from the stove. It wasn't too serious, but the smell of burnt food drew him out of the last of the strange fog his sleepwalking episode had left him with, leaving him with far too many questions and a desire to be by himself to think. Gabe was a great listener, but he wasn't ready to talk about whatever he'd seen yet with him, not when he himself didn't understand what he'd seen-remembered. Sam wanted to think it out first, but he couldn't do that here.

*I have to go. That memory-I can't have made that up, which means I either have to talk to Dean or...John.*
The mere thought of seeing John made Sam's tongue bitter and his stomach flip, but he couldn't just ignore this. If he couldn't reach Dean, then maybe...

As a last resort, if I can't figure this out on my own or through Dean.

"Dammit!" Gabe swore as he turned off the stove and waved a towel through the air to disperse the smoke.

"I have to go," Sam said suddenly, and the P.I whipped around. He looked ready to protest, but his mouth shut as he looked at him. Here, in the kitchen, with the winter sunlight streaming in through the living room, it looked like there was a halo of light around his head.

His aura swirled quickly in furious thought, and for a moment, Sam thought he'd protest further, but Gabe did something he'd never anticipated.

"Send me a text or something so I know you made it back home alive."

The Winchester blinked, taken aback at how easy that had been, and Gabe sighed as he tossed the pan into the sink.

"Arguing with you would be pointless now," he reasoned, though his face was slightly disappointed. It was obvious he wanted Sam to stay, if only for a while, "So I won't. It'll just draw this out, and you'll go anyway. I guess you have to think or ruminate on what you may have remembered—which, by the way, I expect to be told about-so I'll just let you go now."

Gabe sighed, running his hands through his hair as he leaned against the counter, and Sam stared at him for a moment before stepping forward.

The hug was quick but fierce. Sam was pretty sure he had knocked Gabe's breath from his lungs and had lifted him up a few inches off the ground, but he didn't care. He didn't care that his shirt felt sticky with ointment from his chest, or that his hair was still damp, or that he must seem like the most problematic person in the world. Gabe's aura was comforting, and he breathed it in like he could somehow take a piece of it with him when he left.

One, two, three—that's enough Sam.

He pulled away, avoiding looking at Gabe's face as best he could as he left. He could feel the surprise in his aura from the hug, but there was something else there he couldn't figure out, and he knew if he looked in his face he'd want to stay to figure out the puzzle.

Their eyes met for a brief second though. It was a silent goodbye, and Sam left with the knowledge that Gabe had become a better friend to him in the past week than some people he'd known for years.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I'm back with a Tuesday update! This chapter took a bit of an angrier turn at times than I expected, but I like it anyway. For those of you that had theories regarding Yellow Eyes, here's some of it! There's still a few things that will be touched upon later, but who he was and his importance to the Winchesters is now official. I've also introduced Bobby, which I've been meaning to do; it was just a matter of when.

Plot-wise, I think things will pick up in the next few chapters. I already have some dramatic moments planned, and another possible Gabe POV chapter in mind, because I definitely want to revisit his POV. While I'm definitely more comfortable writing from Sam's POV, there was something very
refreshing about writing that one chapter from Gabe's POV. Besides, I want to get into his backstory a bit more, and I'd rather do that from his POV.

Regarding updates, my weekly Saturday schedule has been shot to hell, to put it bluntly. I'm playing it by ear right now honestly, as my writing flow has been all messed up by summer vacation. It's weird; I updated more consistently during the school year than I do when I have all this free time. Ugh, either way, I'll have to figure something out. I go back to school in September, and I'd like to get a few more chapters out before I have to deal with the hellhole (pardon my language) that my school is. At least I'm a senior now and I get out a block early. Small mercies, but mercies nonetheless.

Comment what you think, as always, even if you think it's a theory you think is stupid or a weird thought you had while reading. I've said this before, but I love hearing and responding to you guys!

Until the next update!
Chapter 15: The High, and Subsequent Crash

Going back to campus the next day was surreal, considering the wild week Sam had had up until then.

LU was nearly in riot over what had happened Monday. Rumors were flying faster than the speed of light, fueled by the increased police presence and the sightings of security officers actually doing their job. Sam had been on edge for a moment, fearful that the information that he'd been one of the three locked in the library had leaked, but there wasn't a single whisper of his name, Adam, or Kevin. It seemed that the LPD had done that much right.

Class itself suddenly seemed boring and dull compared to the things he'd done, from chasing a serial killer through the grimy alleys of Lawrence to encountering the same madman in his dreams and in the WU library. Sam was ashamed to say that, for the first time in his entire college career, he'd actually slept through quite a bit of his 8 A.M class. The act was so out of place for him that his professor had actually pulled him aside to ask if everything was ok. Everything wasn't ok, obviously, as he could sense the apathy he'd been feeling lately for school solidify with every boring second he spent on campus, but the college student just set his jaw and sat through it, telling himself that he was in school for a reason and that he had a goal that didn't involve chasing serial killers every second of the day.

This mantra of 'I want to be a lawyer, which involves sitting here and learning' helped slightly, but not for long. Now that he was sitting in his Criminal Law class, Sam let his focus on the lecture fade as he mulled over what had happened the day before.

After he had left Gabe's place, he had spent the later part of the morning trying to work through what little he could remember of the strange memory he had experienced. Why he was so sure it was a memory versus a weird, prophetic dream was the odd familiarity to it, like recalling the lyrics to a song long forgotten, or walking through a place that was well known after a while spent away from it. Sam only had that feeling to go off of, but the more he thought about it, the more he was sure the event had occurred.

The mystery behind the faint memory only grew when he couldn't recall when it had occurred. Sam had scoured his childhood memories in between cleaning the apartment and doing his homework, and besides rubbing salt into old family wounds with nostalgic rememberings of better times, he couldn't recall anything about a cabin. Winchesters were better acquainted with dirty motels and the inside of the Impala, not spooky dwellings high up in the mountains.

Contacting Dean had been a failure. His calls had gone straight to voicemail, which meant his brother's phone was either dead or turned off. It wasn't an uncommon thing with Dean, as with the less than normal lifestyle he led, contacting him could be difficult at times, but it was still frustrating not being able to reach him. Sam had ultimately sent a text asking to meet sometime soon and left it at that. John was the other option, but Sam didn't even want to entertain the thought of speaking to the man until he'd discussed things through with Dean first.

Sam hadn't spoken much with Gabe. They'd exchanged sporadic texts throughout the day, with their conversation only growing after Sam had finally given up trying to work through the memory. He
had to admit, it was fun speaking with Gabe through text. These days, he wasn't close enough with anyone to text back and forth so consistently and so casually, and talking with Gabe reminded him of simpler high school days, where his texting habits had been at their peak.

Even though he hadn't spoken much to the man, Sam still had to contend with the P.I.'s lingering aura. It had spread just about everywhere in the apartment and was particularly concentrated on the couch and his room. Unfortunately, both places were his most frequented, and he'd actually gone and done his laundry just to get away from the washes of pastel colors in an attempt to give himself some time to think without the distracting influence. Except in the laundromat, he'd just remembered what Ben had asked him last week, and had added that particular problem right back to his dismally long list of issues to tackle.

At least when he'd gotten back, the colors that had aggravated him slightly when he'd left comforted him. He'd felt almost guilty enjoying the warmth that soothed his worried mind, but it wasn't wrong if he was the only one who could feel auras, right?

His phone buzzed faintly from within his pocket, startling Sam out of the doze he'd fallen into. Luckily, no one noticed his knee-jerk reaction, as no one was sitting near him, and he was high enough up that the majority of the class couldn't see him anyway.

Sam took a few notes off of the board just to lessen the slightly guilty feeling of zoning out, not because he really needed them. The professor was notoriously unhelpful and tended to teach straight from the book, so Sam ended up just doing a lot of self-studying anyway.

The college student surreptitiously fished out his phone and almost broke out into a grin at the notification. He managed to restrain himself though as he read the text.

*Sherlock: So I think that not only do I owe you like 2 coffees, but also a lunch date. Anyway, can I pay off one of my debts today?*

There was no question regarding the sleepwalking episode he'd had yesterday, or anything related to it. Gabe seemed to be respecting his desires at the moment, something that Sam appreciated more than he would ever let on.

*Sam: I think I can manage to squeeze in a coffee between classes. Meet me at LU?*

*Sherlock: Sounds good kiddo. BTW, I'm pretty sure I just saw your brother when I picked up my car*

The content feeling that had filled Sam popped like a bubble as soon as he read Gabe's text. He took a breath and texted back quickly, trying, and failing, to reassure himself that nothing bad or worse, embarrassing, had happened.

*Sam: Did u talk to him?*

*Sherlock: Nah, u said not to, and he seemed to be in a bad mood anyway. He was all bruised and shit. U said he's a boxer right?*

Sam breathed a small sigh of relief. For now, Gabe was safe from Dean's inevitable big brother grilling and threatening.

*Sam: Yeah he fights, but he can take a beating. Trust me, he can handle a lot.*

*Sherlock: That sounds like a statement with a backstory behind it Sammo*

People were packing up now. Class had apparently finished while Sam had been caught up texting
Gabe. He quickly swept his things together and shoved them into his bag, making his way out of the lecture hall and outside, glad to be out of the drafty room and on his way to somewhere warmer. The WU library was closed until next week (that much blood must be hard to clean up), but there were dozens of other places to go on campus, and there was a nice library with good corners to study in that he had in mind.

As he walked, Sam debated telling Gabe a bit more of the truth regarding Dean. While Dean's condition wasn't exactly something secret, their intense training and Dean's underground fighting reputation were.

Well, it's Gabe. He won't go around telling everyone if I tell him not to.

He was still hesitant to share the darker aspects of his life though, so he decided to just tell the P.I about Dean's CIP and leave it at that.

Sam: Dean has a condition called CIP. Basically, he can't feel pain, which is why he can fight and has chosen fighting as his sort of career.

There was no immediate response, and Sam managed to get out from the cold, into the library, and set up in a quiet corner before Gabe finally responded.

Sherlock: That sounds so fucking cool! But what if he gets really hurt and doesn't know?

Sam stared at his phone for a moment before suddenly smiling. Most people got caught up in the 'cool' aspect of it whenever he'd mentioned it, but there was the flip side of it being potentially fatal if Dean ever got hurt badly and wasn't aware of it. He had almost expected Gabe to be one of those people, but the P.I was good at thinking things through that most people didn't. He had to be for his job, but it was still nice to know he kept up that train of thought regularly.

Sam: That's the bad part to it. He's been hospitalized a few times for stuff like that, and he always insists he's 'fine'

Sherlock: He looked stubborn. And also like he could beat me to a pulp. U won't let that happen, right?

Sam: Of course not! That's why I'm mediating when u two meet. He's a shoot first ask questions later type of guy

Sherlock: Wonderful. I suppose its mandatory to undergo the big bro interrogation. I wonder if all older siblings are overprotective like that lol

The Winchester gazed at his screen for a moment before leaning back in his chair, feeling a bit of sympathy as he took in the P.I's words. They were obviously intended to be casual, but Sam couldn't imagine not having Dean in his life. His brother had been the one person he could always rely on in his entire life; the person that he knew would always have his back and support him as best he could, even through their disagreements. Their bond was no ordinary sibling bond, as they had been through too much crap together to have just an average relationship, but Sam felt even if they had been like other siblings, his mentality would still be the same. Had Gabe always been fostered alone, to say something like that? Or did he ever get placed with other kids and had bad experiences?

The sympathy grew, filling Sam's chest and making him almost want to say something about it. He pushed it to the side though, deciding to somehow broach the topic more seriously on another day. For now, he'd keep the conversation light.
Sam: Nah, us Winchesters just don't do things by halves. Meet me in the Starbucks across the street from the main hall?

Watson: Sounds good. I'll be waiting in half an hr w/drinks.

Sam smiled and tugged his phone away, deciding to get a bit of work done. Now that Gabe was officially off the case and they'd be doing their own independent sleuthing, he wanted to set aside as much free time as possible to helping catch the killer. He didn't want a repeat of Yellow Eyes.

After making some decent headway into his Civil Procedure essay and taking better Criminal law notes (the professor just made the class so boring), Sam realized a half hour was almost up and that if he didn't leave then, he'd be late meeting Gabe, and that was something he did not want to do.

"Shit," he muttered under his breath as he hastily packed his things for the second time that day and left the library. The snow was just beginning to melt, as temperatures had been pretty frigid, but the sun seemed to shine a little brighter as he made his way towards the main building. It made sense, as it was almost March, but he would still be disappointed in winter's eventual end.

The Starbucks was bustling when Sam walked in, mainly with LU students due to its proximity to campus, but there were also a few regular citizens amongst the noon crowd. Auras crowded against each other, intermingling to create a messy haze of hues that Sam only gave a cursory gaze to. He was more than tall enough to spot Gabe and his blinding aura, his eyes automatically drawn to the gold. He had somehow snagged a nice table for two by the windows, which was impressive considering the current rush of customers.

Sam automatically smiled at the sight of the P.I, who was restlessly jiggling a knee while simultaneously fussing with the sleeves of a black jacket he had never seen before. His back was facing him, so Gabe had no idea he was there until Sam slid into the seat opposite him.

"Hey," he greeted, flashing a warm smile which only grew at the sight of the responding pulse from the man's aura, "I thought this was just going to be coffee?"

Besides the two steaming cups, there were also matching chocolate chip muffins. The Winchester's stomach gurgled slightly at the sight, as he had only remembered to grab some fruit for breakfast.

"Well, I figured you hadn't thought of lunch, what with all the work you do, so I figured I'd include some food," Gabe responded casually as he smiled back, "Plus, I can pay off my debts quicker."

"Hmmm, I don't think so. Good try though," Sam teased as he took a sip of his coffee.

"Aw man!" Gabe snapped his fingers and made a show of looking disappointed. Sam laughed at the dramatics, the cold quickly melting away as he enjoyed his brief respite from school.

"So, how's school, Sammy?" Gabe asked, leaning forward with his chin propped in his hand. His aura was receptive, inviting him to talk, and Sam found that this time, he didn't feel as reluctant to give in to the urge.

"It's all right," he said, breaking off a piece of his muffin, "Some of the classes are boring, and some things are tedious, but overall it's cool."

"Learning to be a lawyer sounds hard," Gabe commented, and the Winchester shrugged.

"Sort of, but I think it'll be worth it."

Gabe smiled, eyes shining gold in the sunlight streaming through the store. He easily had the
strongest aura in the whole business and combined with the overall atmosphere, it made for a pleasant experience, sitting and chatting with him. Sam found it enjoyable, as public places usually tended to be distracting and overwhelming, depending on the amount and type of auras. Gabe's aura almost cleared a space of sorts around them due to its potency, enough so that Sam didn't feel pressured by everyone else.

"You're definitely smart enough to become one," he said, aura reflecting the firm belief in his voice, "I'm sure within the next few years you'll be a hotshot lawyer winning cases left and right."

The Winchester blushed, tugging on his floppy fringe in embarrassment as Gabe laughed.

"Aw, don't be like that," he teased, tilting his head as he continued, "You'll be great and we both know it."

"Gabe, stop," Sam whined, embarrassed at the certainty the man spoke his compliments, and he relented with a satisfied smile.

"I'm just saying, you're going to be one of those lawyers on a billboard in a nice suit-"

"Gabe!"

The two spent the better portion of the hour chatting until Sam had to reluctantly leave for his next class, which started at 1:30.

"You stopping at the Roadhouse, or...?"

The P.I shook his head, and the giddy, serene bubble Sam had been enjoying for the past hour popped. He would've drooped a bit, but Gabe's aura dimmed at his refusal, which meant even he was sad there would be no Roadhouse visit tonight.

*Well, it makes sense. He can't drop by everyday; he obviously has to have things to do.*

"I have to wrap up a few minor cases I've been assisting on," he explained with a sigh, "But once I get through all the formal stuff at the station, I should have enough cleared out of the way to make time for my new client's case."

He waggled his eyebrows and winked, making his reference to their side investigation into the serial killer obvious, and Sam's slightly downturned spirits lifted right back up.

"Sounds good to me. Wanna meet sometime tomorrow to discuss the case?" he asked, somewhat nervous as he made his request. He was pretty sure he wasn't going to be turned down, but he had never been one to actively make plans unless they were study sessions. Casual hanging out was something Sam had never really gotten into, and when he had someone else had always made plans. Hell, even Jess had controlled about 90% of the stuff they had done.

*That's probably one of the many reasons we hadn't worked out,* Sam thought wryly.

Gabe didn't seem to share Sam's hesitation, as his aura brightened and he beamed.

"Why not? Friday nights you're the jack of all trades, aren't you?" Gabe asked with a roguish smirk, and Sam blinked at the expression before nodding.

"Yeah, though I think last Friday I didn't get too much of a chance to show off my bartending skills," he responded, thinking back to the, quite frankly, *insane* Friday night he'd had.
"But I definitely got to see your bouncer skills in action," Gabe remarked thoughtfully as he seemed to be reminiscing. "That was impressive."

"It was nothing," Sam brushed off (for him, it really was nothing, as John had taught him a lot more than that) before he checked the time, "Shit, I gotta go."

He stood, throwing his bag over a shoulder and gazed at Gabe for a brief second in indecision.

Would a hug be too much? Before, they had only hugged after weird emotional discussions and situations, like yesterday with his random sleepwalking episode. Sam had hugged friends before in similar situations, but never during casual hangouts, save for Kevin sometimes. Gabe didn't seem to mind during situations like that; he had even initiated some of the hugs, but what about in a casual scenario?

*Best to play it safe.*

Sam instead reached out a hand to brush against the P.I's upper arm, enjoying the feel of the jacket and the man's natural warmth as he said goodbye.

"See ya later kiddo," Gabe said with a customary grin and wink, but Sam could've sworn he saw a flash of faint regret amidst the usual gold and ivory. He brushed it off as a trick of his eyes though, and by the time he arrived to class, it was largely forgotten. The notion was ridiculous after all. What could Gabe possibly regret?

... 

Sam knew that as soon as he saw both Becky and Anna working the tables that he was going to have a long night.

"Fucking fantastic," he said as soon as he spotted the two girls serving plates, and Jo cast him a sympathetic look over her laptop.

"I'm sure you can handle it," she said, and the Winchester shook his head, tying his apron on reluctantly.

"Not both at once," he muttered, thinking back to the few times he'd been placed on the same shift as the two. While Anna wasn't as transparent as Becky was in her interest, she had certainly taken it up a notch recently, and he didn't want to think what could happen tonight if they both tried something. Ellen knew about Becky's weird obsession with him and tried to make it so that they didn't work the same hours, but it was inevitable that they ended up working together at some point.

A worse thought hit Sam as he looked around for someone else.

"Is Meg here?" he asked (if she was here, his shift would be migraine inducing at minimum), and Jo shrugged, twirling a pencil around her fingers.

"I haven't seen her."

Sam nodded before slinking back down the back hall, hoping to avoid the girls for a few more minutes. As he passed the kitchen, he paused before deciding to duck in. Benny had said he'd take care of Meg, so if anyone knew where she was right now, it'd be him. He wanted to talk to her, not only because of the case but because he was truly concerned for her.

"Benny?" he called out, rapping his knuckles against the door frame to get the attention of the man prepping the grill for a long night of dinners.
"Ah, Sam. Come on in," the cook said affably, his aura looking settled and calm. There didn't seem to be any stress or worry, which meant that Meg was probably fine wherever she was, but then, he could never really discern anything much from Benny's aura in the way of negative emotions.

"How are things going?" Sam asked, walking forward to stand by the grill with Benny. It seemed today the action was permissible, for the cook said nothing on the contrary as he worked.

"Pretty good. It's not too busy today," he remarked before turning to fix an amused gaze on the waiter, "You wanted to ask about Meg?"

Sam blinked once before deciding that Benny's assumption was pretty easy to make, all things considered, "Uh, yeah. Is she ok? Where is she right now?"

Benny hummed, adjusting his cap as he examined the grill.

"She's doing all right. Meg's a spitfire, right now she's probably sick of being cooped up, but it's best for her to lay low for a couple of days," he explained, "That boyfriend of hers let her go easier than I thought he would."

"You think he might retaliate?" the waiter asked, picking up quickly on the hidden implication, and Benny nodded.

"Hmm. It's likely, especially since he thinks he's all that with his thug friends. For now, she's staying at my place, but I won't let anyone see her until Kyle either makes his move or it's obvious he won't retaliate," he continued, his tone becoming firm.

Sam nodded understandingly, ignoring the faint prickle of disappointment at Benny's pronouncement. The cook was right; Kyle could try to do something against Meg, and her safety was more important than trying to talk to her right now. Perhaps in a couple days, he could give it a shot, but for now, this particular avenue for information was unavailable.

Ignoring the girls while simultaneously trying to work was a tricky balancing act, and more than a few times he had to slip away from their clutches by pretending to be engrossed in a customer's order or in whatever spill he was cleaning. While Anna was much more bold than Becky in her physical advances, Sam felt that Becky was probably the creepiest, as she liked to slink behind him like a shadow. At times, he nearly ran into her as she was so close, and she always flushed and scampered away with a stuttered apology before skulking back, and then the process started all over again.

Therefore, when Jo came with his ringing phone, Sam eagerly claimed his fifteen minute break, ran to the employee room, and locked the door before the girls could try to follow.

"Hey Dean," he answered.

"Hey, Sammy. Look, I need to drop Ben off. I'm already here, but--"

"I'm coming. Just wait there, all right?" Sam said, undoing his apron as he walked to his locker. He was glad, both that he now had an excuse to leave, and because Dean had called this time instead of leaving Ben unsupervised. Sure, he'd probably picked the lock again to get in, but that was a small technicality in the face of this mini victory.

Lisa must have talked to him or something. I'll have to thank her later.

"All right," Dean said, sounding relieved before his tone switched, "By the way, what did you want to talk about?"
"Uh, a memory I remembered," Sam started, grabbing his bag, "Do you know anything about a cabin in the mountains we went to when we were really young?"

There was a long pause before Dean cleared his throat. Sam thought he could hear Ben's chatter in the background.

"You remember too?" his brother asked, lowering his voice audibly, "I thought it was just some weird memory that I made up or something."

You're good boys, remember that.

"I thought so too, but it feels real, doesn't it?" Sam asked, pushing away the echoing words, "Do you remember anything specific, like why we were there because I don't."

"Not really, I-it was cold, and all I remember is Dad walking up the cabin, which gave me the fucking creeps. But I don't think we've ever been to a cabin before."

"No, I don't think so," Sam murmured, mind whirling as he analyzed what little information Dean had given. The biggest part was that they both remembered the same thing, within the same time frame, even though the memory had seemingly been lost by both of them for years.

That's not suspicious at all.

He wanted to ask if Dean was sleepwalking too, but that would mean revealing that he was sleepwalking, and he didn't want to do that just yet. Dean would want to try and help him, but Sam knew he couldn't do much, and Dean would grow frustrated by what he'd deem as some kind of personal failing to 'take care' of him. It had happened before, and Sam knew his brother well enough to know that telling Dean he was sleepwalking would lead to more or less the same thing. Of course, the longer he went without telling him would lead to Dean feeling betrayed when Sam eventually did reveal his problem, but Sam decided that not telling would be best, for now, to spare Dean from somehow feeling inadequate.

"Well, I'm sure it's nothing serious," the younger Winchester said, shutting his locker, "Try not to let Ben tear up the living room too much."

After telling Ellen he was leaving and clocking out, Sam managed to duck out the back door and avoid the girls as he made his way to a subway station. It was almost eight by the time he made it back to his apartment, where he opened the door just in time to see Ben tumble down the armchair and land in the beanbag at the bottom with a joyful shriek.

"I thought I said not to tear up the living room," Sam remarked as he looked at the mess of toys and the half-built pillow fort that spanned between the couch and one of the breakfast bar chairs.

"Oh, you're home," Dean said, sticking his head out of the kitchen while Ben simultaneously screamed, "Unca Sam!"

"Hey, buddy," Sam said, grunting as Ben slammed into his knees, "Is that marker on your face?"

There was what looked like blue and green scribbles on Ben's cheek, smudged slightly as if he'd rubbed his hand over it.

"Yeah," his nephew replied, peach aura more orange today in hyper excitement. Judging by his sticky hands, he'd had more than his usual amount of sugar today, "Come into the pillow fort!"

"I don't think I'll fit, Ben," Sam said wryly, glancing over at the precarious construction, and Ben
shook his head hard enough to give himself whiplash.

"You can, cause Daddy fit!" he said, tugging on his hand, "So c'mon!"

Sam snorted at the image of Dean in a pillow fort and glanced over at his brother, who was looking away with an overly nonchalant look on his face. His aura gave him away though, along with his pinkening ears.

"I'm bigger than your Daddy," Sam said, which made the four year old pout and cross his arms, "So you'll just have to go enjoy it without me."

Ben scowled, but he didn't cry, instead choosing to huff loudly in disapproval and spinning on one heel to retreat to his pillow fort.

"Fine! You're not allowed here anyway Unca Sam!" he yelled, before crawling into his fort.

Sam would've felt hurt by the words if it weren't for the fact that Ben was clearly on some kind of sugar high, and had looked way funnier than intimidating when he'd thrown his mini-fit. He managed to keep his snickers to himself though as he stepped into the kitchen, where Dean was sighing and shaking his head at the fort.

"You know how he gets when he has sugar, Dean," the college student chided. Ben, while he got hyper at times, was also more prone to being grumpy and throwing fits in the short high.

"Yeah, yeah," Dean sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose temporarily before turning to face him. At this angle, Sam could finally see the purple bruise and the cut on his cheekbone. Gabe was right; he looked as if he'd been in a rough fight. "I'm sorry about that, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to butter him up to make this easier."

Sam arched an eyebrow."This? Is he reluctant about you leaving now?"

*Or maybe Ben doesn't want to come here anymore,* a small voice whispered traitorously.

Dean nodded, a shadow dimming his aura.

"I think the last time I left him here affected him more than he let on," the green-eyed man admitted, "It wasn't my intention, but he became really clingy when I said I had to drop him off here."

"What do you have to go do anyway?" Sam asked curiously. He had a feeling it was going to guard Castiel, but he wanted to see if Dean would say anything about his new activity.

His brother's aura cycled through an interesting series of green before flaring slightly, then settling into a more nervous hue that instantly had Sam tilting his head in an attempt to read the colors better. There was the nervousness, a flash of happiness, and then sharp anxiety and confusion that was buried by-

"Stop doing that!" Dean snapped defensively, crossing his arms over his chest, and Sam jolted from his observation with a sheepish smile.

"Sorry. I see where Ben gets it from though," he teased, only darkening the glower of Dean's face.

"Whatever. I have to go work," he said curtly, even as a bright shade of green crossed over his heart and fizzled at the edge of his aura, "Benji, I'm leaving!"

There was the sound of shuffling in the living room, and then pattering feet as Ben ran into the
"Do you have to?" he pouted as he buried his face in Dean's chest, and his brother looked over his son's head to give Sam a 'see-what-I'm-talking-about?' look.

"Yes, I have to," Dean said, ruffling Ben's hair before setting him down. Or trying to, at least. Ben held on, fingers gripped tightly in Dean's leather jacket.

"C'mon Ben, I've gotta go," Dean said, though this time there was a more reluctant tone. Sam knew if Ben kept this up, Dean might just relent.

*Except he needs to keep Castiel safe, which means he needs to go now.*

"All right," Sam muttered before scooping Ben up and twirling him around. The four year old let out a startled giggle, too caught off guard to cry as Dean shot him a grateful look and darted out the door.

The tears came later, of course. Ben hardly ever cried, and while it was difficult to sit through the wails, Sam knew he never cried for long. So, it was only a few minutes later that the wails were reduced to quiet hiccups, helped by a soothing hug as they walked aimlessly around the apartment. Sam wiped the tears and snot away, and ten minutes later, Ben was running circles around the living room with his Batman figurine in his hand.

*Kids are exhausting, but they bounce back quick,* Sam thought with a sigh as he collapsed on the couch with a microwavable meal, too tired to make anything better. Sleep and schoolwork would be impossible with the way Ben was running around, so he decided to just let his nephew work out the last of the sugar high as he channel surfed.

He had just closed his eyes and kicked his feet up on the coffee table when someone rang his doorbell. The buzzing made him groan, and Ben paused in his running (how was he not dizzy from all those laps around the room?) to look at the door.

"Is that Kevin?" he asked, and Sam frowned as he looked in the general direction of the door.

"Probably not. Kevin has a key," he replied, forcing himself up off the couch to go see whoever it was.

Out of all the people, he could've thought would show up, he hadn't expected Gabe.

"Hey, Sammy," the consultant said, smiling with brilliant eyes, and Sam stared for a moment, the lazy feeling he'd had burning away in the face of the man's aura.

*What the hell?*

"Uh, hi?" Sam asked, before shaking his head and pulling the door open wider so Gabe could walk in. "Come in, I guess."

"You guess?"

Sam pulled a bitch face as the P.I stepped in, "Well, you dropped by unannounced, so forgive me if I'm a little shocked."

"Unca Sam, who's that?"

Gabe paused about halfway down the entrance hall, where Ben was now standing at the end of it. His nephew looked like the epitome of a four year old in that moment: messy hair, the faint shadow...
of marker on his chubby face that Sam couldn't quite get off completely, and wide dark eyes that glimmered with curiosity.

Sam hurriedly shut the door as Gabe turned to look at him with the same level of curiosity, and something else that he couldn't read. It flashed across his aura too fast, but whatever it was made it brighten considerably.

"Ben, this is my...friend Gabe," Sam said, hesitating a brief second before saying 'friend' for some reason, "Gabe, this is my nephew Ben."

Ben's eyes widened, and he darted away to what sounded like his pillow fort without another word. Gabe cast a questioning gaze to Sam, who sighed and led the man into the living room.

"He's really shy," he explained as they sat on the couch, avoiding the various obstacles along the way, "It usually takes him a couple of meetings with new people to warm up to them, and that's if he likes you at all."

"Does he run if he doesn't like someone?" Gabe asked, and Sam blinked at the P.I's face and the blue shade to his aura before shaking his head.

"No, he runs like that all the time or hides behind me. I'm sure you'll get along fine," he said reassuringly.

Gabe looked unconvinced, though before the blue could overwhelm his aura, Ben poked his head out from inside the fort. His eyes were narrowed in thought, but he seemed to make up his mind, as he crawled out completely and walked up to them with a handful of sweets.

"I have some left," he explained, holding out his palms to show wrapped caramel creams, "Daddy bought me some. Here."

He pressed some into Gabe's hand and smiled, clearly pleased with himself. Sam was also pleased with him, as Ben was hardly ever so bold with strangers.

"Thanks, kiddo," he said with a smile in return as his aura lit up, "These are actually one of my favorites."

"I like chocolate better," Ben said, casting a sidelong glance at Sam, "But Unca Sam says I can't have anymore today."

"Because your dad gave you more than enough before you even got here," the Winchester responded easily, ignoring Ben's huff, "You're lucky I'm even letting you finish those."

"Unca Sammmmm."

"Those puppy dog eyes won't work on me," Sam said as his nephew's whine trailed off.

Ben pouted, before turning to Gabe, his aura changing to a different color as he tilted his head. It was more serious and darker than the peach he had come to associate with Ben.

"Do you fight monsters?"

The question was random but strangely accurate. Sam froze, thinking back to when Lisa and Ben had visited.

You can't let it eat you!
Gabe glanced at Sam, who shrugged helplessly and shook his head to indicate he hadn't told Ben anything about him, though now that he thought on it, maybe his nephew had paid more attention to him and Lisa when they’d been talking then he’d let on.

"In a way, though I usually end up catching them," the P.I responded, and Ben hummed before unwrapping a caramel cream.

"Well, there's a big monster you and Unca Sam have to catch," he said, dark eyes flitting between him and Gabe, "Or else he's gonna eat us all."

_Oh boy._

Sam chuckled nervously, "Ben-

"Why do you think he's gonna eat us all?"

Gabe was leaning forward now, his complete attention on the child before him. His aura swirled pensively, more thoughtful than if he was simply entertaining Ben.

"'Cause he's mad," Ben responded simply. He was leaning towards Gabe too, without a single shred of his typical shyness in sight. Soft peach colors had been replaced by a stormy version of his aura, as if simply speaking about the 'monster' was a trial in itself, "Too many people made him mad, and now he's hungry."

"Do you think he's going to eat you?"

Ben paused in chewing on his caramel cream, wringing the wrapper between his tiny fingers as he considered the golden-eyed man's question.

"Not yet," he said finally, voice far calmer than it should've been considering the subject matter, "He's gonna eat you and Unca Sam first if you don't win."

To his credit, Gabe didn't flinch or look perturbed by what he'd heard at all. Sam, on the other hand, was torn between acknowledging the strange twisting feeling in his gut at Ben's words and shoving his nephew into the bedroom so he'd stop talking.

Of course, these sort of things only happen to me.

"Well, I'm not really interested in being a monster's lunch, and neither is your Uncle Sam, so don't worry too much," Gabe said indulgently, his expression gentle as he reassured Ben with his words.

Sam watched as Ben's aura settled back down, though the peach was duskier now, the blue turning it into an odd gray lavender.

"Now, I'm going to have to take the grand tour of that amazing pillow fort," the P.I said, infusing cheer into his voice, "But first, let me talk to your uncle. Sounds good?"

Ben smiled, content to finally have someone to explore his fort with, before disappearing into it with a swoosh of blankets.

"I'm sorry about him. Usually, he's not so hyper," Sam groaned quietly once Ben was gone, and the P.I shook his head.

"He's 4, and I've met worse ankle biters in my illustrious career," he said with an easy smile. There was no trace of discomfort or the green flash of a lie, which meant that Gabe truly didn't see Ben as
bothersome or annoying.

*Well, that's good.*

Sam arched an eyebrow and leaned in closer so that the four year old couldn't possibly overhear them, draping his arm across the back of the sofa. Gabe's aura brushed along the sides of his face, and at this proximity, it felt like a pleasant buzz along his skin.

"What did you come here for exactly?" he asked, confused. He didn't think Gabe had left anything, and they'd agreed to meet tomorrow, so what had he come for?

Gabe shrugged, smoothing a hand over his hair. It was messier than usual, though Sam couldn't tell if it was because the man had taken a nap or walked through the wind.

*Considering how horrendous his bedhead gets, it's probably the latter,* Sam thought wryly.

"I just felt like it," he replied nonchalantly, "I was in the area, and I figured I'd drop by. Not for the case or anything, but..."

"As friends?"

Gabe's aura shifted slightly as the man shrugged again, and Sam tilted his head before beaming.

As friends.

"Well, lucky for you, I not only have nothing to do, but I *also* have a hyper 4 year old that needs to blow off some steam before he can sleep," he said, before daring to poke Gabe in the chest, "How do you feel about entertaining Ben while I whip us up something to eat?"

Their faces were quite close now, close enough that when Ben called out for Gabe to 'hurry up!', they nearly bumped foreheads. Sam was too quick for that though and managed to keep his skull intact as they pulled away.

"It seems his royal highness has made the decision for me," Gabe said with a nervous chuckle and...pink cheeks?

"Seems like it," Sam said, deciding that Gabe's flushed face was probably from the current temperature in the apartment (the sauna had returned with a vengeance), "Try not to get lost in the castle, midget."

"I am not a midget!" the P.I said, and Sam stood, arching an eyebrow as his shadow fell over the man, who was forced to look up to keep eye contact.

"Whatever you say, *Gabriel,*" the Winchester drawled, unsure of what possessed him to use the man's full first name, but enjoying the feeling anyway, "I'm gonna go make sandwiches. Have fun with Ben."

Gabe was too caught off guard to retort, and Sam walked away with the small victory, feeling satisfied he'd managed to one up the ridiculously witty remarks the P.I always managed to come up with.

Sam listened with half an ear as he whipped up some grilled cheese sandwiches to what Ben and Gabe were. The man had managed to fit inside the fort (no surprise there; he was *more* than small enough for that), but it seemed like he'd convinced Ben that renovations had to be made so that it could be big enough to fit *him.*
"Are you sure you can do it?" Ben asked doubtfully.

Gabe straightened, puffing out his chest as he placed his hands on his hips. He'd shed his jacket (draped on the couch), and his shoes (Sam would have to get them out from under the coffee table if they were extending the fort in that direction), leaving him in a black T-shirt that was paint stained along the hem.

_Had he been painting recently before he came?_

"I'm the master of building forts," he bragged, his aura particularly showy as he spoke, "Just leave it up to me."

Ben's frown lessened, but a trace of doubt still remained (The look was reminiscent of his mother) as he clambered onto the couch and said, "If you say so."

Both of them seemed content with the other's presence, which was the only reason why Sam hadn't swooped in and coddled Ben, like he sometimes did when the four year old was uncomfortable with people, or put Ben to sleep already to spare Gabe the headache inducing antics that a four year old was capable of, no matter how well behaved Ben was on a normal day. It was odd, as Sam had never really pegged Gabe as someone who handled kids well, and he didn't think he'd ever seen Ben less shy in a first time meeting with someone.

_It's unexpected but cute._

Sam blinked at the random thought before quickly setting the food down on the breakfast bar and clearing his throat

"How about you guys eat _before_ you try to make the castle better?" he said, drawing the attention of the duo currently trying to wrestle a blanket into control.

Their twin expressions at the sight of food made Sam want to laugh, but it quickly switched to one of concern as Ben toppled off the couch in his mad rush to reach the food, narrowly missing the coffee table.

"Ouch!" he said, though it seemed to be an exclamation made on instinct more than actual pain, as he picked himself back up and continued on his way.

"Okay there, kiddo?" Gabe asked in concern before the Winchester could ask his nephew if he was really ok, and Ben grinned up at him.

"Uh huh. Unca Sam, Gabe says that _his_ car's the best, but isn't Daddy's car the best car _ever_?"

"I think they're both great cars," Sam said, slipping into the affable peacekeeper position with ease, "Now, how are you going to get in your chair if you don't let go of Batman?"

"Like this, obviously," Gabe said as he picked Ben up and set him down in a chair, "I thought you were supposed to be smart, Sammy."

Ben giggled as Sam pinned Gabe with one of his bitch faces, to which the man only laughed and settled down to eat as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

And maybe it was. The thought occurred to him throughout their less than normal dinner, as Gabe kept them on their toes with anecdotes and wit that constantly toyed with the line usually drawn for things four year olds shouldn't hear. Ben seemed perfectly at ease and grew sleepier and sleepier as he (finally) burned through the last of his sugar high and crashed.
He nearly face planted into his plate, but Gabe managed to catch him just in time.

"Does he usually do that?" he asked with a hint of concern as Sam walked around to pick up his nephew, brushing the crumbs off his face and clothes with a practiced motion.

"It's pretty normal whenever he's had a lot of sugar," he explained, worming the piece of crust Ben hadn't managed to finish before he'd fallen asleep. "I'm telling you, he's a lot calmer on a normal day."

"He must be a model citizen then since he acted like a pretty normal kid in my opinion," the P.I remarked, and Sam hummed as he shifted Ben to his hip so he could stack the plates.

"Yeah, he's not a typical four year old. Is that...marker?" he asked, gesturing to the scribbles on Gabe's forearm, and the man looked down at his skin as if he hadn't noticed it before. Considering how easily he kept up with Ben's ridiculous pace, it was likely he hadn't. He had already proven the type to walk around paint stained.

_I wonder if he'll ever let me see some of his work._

"Hmm, I guess so," he replied, "I didn't think he'd finish a whole sandwich after all those sweets. Is that normal too?"

Sam smiled at the P.I's line of questioning. His aura showed that the man was simultaneously intrigued by Ben's behavior, and mildly irritated that he didn't already know enough regarding the subject.

"He's Dean's kid, so yes, it's normal for him," he said indulgently, stifling a laugh at Gabe's sheepish expression, "He burns through it pretty quick, so I'm not too worried for his well-being."

Ben shifted in his arms, but Sam knew he wasn't awake and only rubbed his back soothingly until the child settled down again.

"I've got to get him to bed. Do you mind helping me clean up?" he asked, and Gabe shook his head.

"Course not. Go get the kid settled, I got this," Gabe said as if he'd been granted a task more important and difficult than getting the living room back in order. The living room _was_ pretty messy though, so perhaps the man was entitled to his bravado.

Sam shook his head but left the man to his devices. Ben was quickly becoming a dead weight in his arms, and he wanted to get his nephew changed into pajamas and in bed before he could wake up. He seemed to take after Dean in regards to sleep, something that frustrated Lisa, who believed toddlers should get at least 10 hours of sleep.

Luckily, today seemed to be a 'sleep like the dead' day for Ben, as he only woke briefly once when Sam had to maneuver his arms through sleeves. The Winchester was relieved to see that Ben's aura remained soft with sleep, though he also noticed as he tucked Ben up against the wall that there was no peach in his aura now. It was more purple and pink, much like a sky at dusk looked, with the ever present kaleidoscope swirling slowly underneath.

_Well, the peach probably wouldn't stick around for long, _he thought idly as he smoothed Ben's errant strands of hair away from his forehead. _He's still young, and before the peach, it was cobalt like Lisa, and before that, it was green like Dean._

He'd miss the peach though. It was the first independent color Ben's aura had adopted predominantly that hadn't come unconsciously from his parents, and it had also been the first sign that his own
unique personality was emerging.

The sudden banging on the front door startled Sam and shattered the peaceful moment he'd been wrapped up in. He swore silently before hurrying towards the bedroom door, shutting it firmly before the knocking could wake Ben. The door wouldn't do much, but it was better than nothing.

"Who the hell is knocking?" he asked (what was with people and banging on his door this past week?) as he moved down the hall, only to see Gabe leap over the coffee table and pull a familiar looking weapon from his coat in the blink of an eye. The motion was far too coordinated considering the sheer amount of stuff to maneuver around in the living room, but the P.I somehow landed without breaking a toy or tangling himself up in a blanket.

His aura was flared out, almost in a protective manner, gold shimmering with hues of vermilion. The vermilion was joined by flickers of bright white as it flared out in twin arcs, like-like-

*Wings? What the fuck?*

Sam's mind blanked for a moment as he realized he was looking at a gun, and then his brain finally began to work as he saw Gabe stalk towards the front door, positioning himself between Sam and the entrance like it was nothing. His aura flared accordingly, and Sam felt the wash of color cascade over him in a nearly overwhelming blanket of protect, protect, protect-

"Jesus Christ, Gabe, hold on!" he exclaimed as he managed to rip himself free of the aura's influence, grabbing the baseball bat that was leaned against the armchair (how that got there was a mystery), "Where did you get a gun? Calm down!"

"Just stay behind me, Sam," Gabe said in a serious voice. Every inch of him was tense, the ouroboros tattoo rippling as his muscles shifted, "Get the phone-"

Sam wasn't really sure what would've happened next if a familiar voice hadn't added itself to the frantic pounding on the door.

"Sam, let me in! For God's sake, let me in, please!"

"For fuck's sake, it's Kevin!" the Winchester exclaimed, nearly dropping his bat as he rushed to grab Gabe's wrist in an attempt to get him to put the gun down, "Gabe!"

The P.I blinked as Sam's hand wrapped around his wrist, and then he relaxed, letting Sam push the gun to point to the floor instead of the door. Sam took a brief moment to make sure that, yes, the gun would stay there, before shoving Gabe further into the living room and rushing to open the door for Kevin. His roommate sounded as if he was being chased by the hounds of hell, and when he finally managed to stop fumbling with the chain and get the stupid door open, his thought was only solidified by his friend's appearance.

Kevin was soaked in sweat despite the freezing weather outside as if he'd run the entire way home, and his eyes were wide with fright. He was panting, only confirming the suspicion that he had run for a long time, and he was trembling like a leaf. The knees of his jeans were grass stained and torn, and in his hand, he was clutching a phone that Sam knew wasn't his.

The worst was his aura though. It was so pale that Sam thought it somehow disappeared, but auras never did that unless someone was dead. No, it was still there, like a thin film of sickly olive green that stuck close to his skin in a frail attempt to protect him. He was terrified, and Sam gaped as he suddenly noticed the blood on Kevin's knuckles, and a red mark on his face where he'd been hit.

"They're coming. Oh, God, they're coming for me!" he moaned as Sam finally snapped out of his
shock and dragged Kevin bodily into the apartment. It seemed he'd used the last of his energy to get there because he swayed dangerously and leaned against the wall as he gasped for breath.

Sam's stomach flipped as he took in his roommate's fearful words, and Jo's worried conversation to him yesterday, and the strange way Kevin had been acting lately (what had Kevin done?).

"Who's coming?"

Kevin's dark eyes fixed on him, and Sam was barely aware of Gabe watching from the living room, listening as well.

"The Dead Eyes. They're coming to kill me!"

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

*evil cackling* And with that cliffhanger, the chapter ends! I haven't had a good cliffhanger in a bit, so it was satisfying to finally write one. My morbid fascination with them is a bit of a problem, but oh well. I'm ready for your outrage, so bring it!

This chapter's mostly fluff, with drama at the end of course. Pretty sure I mentioned this, but I'm slightly better at writing angst and drama than mushy scenes, and I definitely enjoy it far more. Fluff was necessary in this chapter though, as I think it would be wise to bribe you guys before I throw the next few chapters at you. Let's just say you're in for a wild ride ;)

Anyway, the fluff is also for the lovely CaptiveRiptide! They protested I didn't have to, but I wanted to cheer them up, and it really wasn't much trouble. I just fleshed out the Sabriel cafe scene more than I originally intended, so don't start on me in the comments CaptiveRiptide! No harm done, as it hasn't affected the overall plot.

Let's see... Kevin's plight will be addressed in the next chapter, as I'm itching to finally get into his situation, which I've been purposefully skirting around so far. Have no fear, he'll be intact. For now.

Also, I wanted to say that I have tagged this work as violence and crime fighting. Gabe's gun will also be addressed in the next chapter, and while I think it's pretty tame, I just wanted to say this really quickly anyway. I'm not going to go batshit crazy with this blood and gore in Chromaticity, but this story will get progressively darker, and there'll be more scenes similar to those typically seen in crime shows and what I've written so far, such as the chase scene and the library scene where the killer is involved. Just putting that out there now!

I think that's about it. Comment what you think, as always. I had great discussions regarding weather and climates last week, so don't be afraid to comment! I'm going to wrap up this A/N since it's getting to be a ridiculous length. Until the next chapter, readers!
The Marble

Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 16: The Marble

It took Sam a moment to register what Kevin had said, but after the brief second where he blanked out, his mind kicked back into gear as all his old training came back to him. Then he was in motion, steering Kevin towards the living

"Fuck. Get on the couch," Sam ordered before going for the door. There wasn't anyone in the hall, but he didn't linger, shutting the door and chaining it all before Kevin even managed to stumble to the couch, "Gabe, is there anyone outside?"

The P.I moved to the living room window as Kevin collapsed on the couch, gasping for breath as he continued to clutch the mystery phone. After peering through the curtains for a few seconds, Gabe looked back and shook his head.

"Gabe, turn off all the lights, I'll turn on the lamps," Sam said before touching Kevin. His roommate flinched, but the reaction wasn't as violent as the Winchester had expected considering how fearful the poor teen currently was. Maybe Kevin was more aware at the moment than he appeared.

"Kevin, do they know where you live?" Sam asked, and he immediately shook his head.

"No, no, not the Dead Eyes," he said, taking in a shuddering breath before letting it out and running a hand through his hair, "No, but my school friends do, and-and they might ask them-"

"But the ones that you fought don't know," Sam said, and Kevin nodded shallowly.

Sam exhaled once as his mind raced, "Then we're safe for the moment. Kevin, deep breath in, deep breath out, like this."

The next two minutes were spent trying to calm Kevin down before he could spiral further into panic. Sam had done this a few times for him whenever the teen would have a panic attack, and so knew the routine. It took Kevin a little longer than usual to regain a more stable breathing pattern, but then, this wasn't a usual situation.

*Running for your life from gangs shouldn't be a usual situation.*

"Ben's still asleep."

Sam looked away from Kevin's face and thin aura to see Gabe standing off to the side in what was left of the pillow fort. He hadn't even heard him approach, and certainly hadn't noticed that he'd turned off all the lights like he'd said and gone to check on his nephew.

"Sometimes he's a heavy sleeper," Sam answered quietly, if only to say something to the man.

Gabe gazed back with gold eyes shadowed heavily by the warm yellow light of the lamps. His aura had calmed down now, though a piercing bolt of white still pulsed within it, a fierce vein of protective feeling directed at him. Sam didn't know what to make of the new color, so he looked away awkwardly and focused his attention back on Kevin.
"What happened?" he asked, and Kevin swallowed heavily before meeting his gaze. His eyes were still wide with fear, but it was more controlled now, less like a startled animal of prey and more like someone who had had the fright of their life and was trying to handle it.

"I-I fucked up big time," he started, eyes flicking to Gabe, "You're with the police right? Do-can't you do anything?"

His tone was desperate, but Gabe stood steadily in the face of Kevin's fear, his face open and voice soft as he replied.

"I can't do anything unless you tell us what happened."

Kevin blinked, then nodded, seeming to regain a bit more of his sensibilities with the response. Sam stood up to get settled on the couch beside Kevin, and Gabe took his vacated spot, sitting on the edge of the coffee table like it was nothing. If Sam had tried that, he would've probably broken the wood.

*He's lighter than he looks, remember?* he thought idly, thinking back to yesterday when he'd carried Gabe all the way to the subway station. Had it just been yesterday?

"Where did you go tonight?" Gabe asked, leaning forward with his hands clasped loosely between his knees. Like this, his aura soft and his eyes searching Kevin's face, it was clear that he'd adopted this position before, most likely through interviewing witnesses and talking to distraught people of all kinds that he invariably came across in his line of work. Wherever it was, the way he sat showed he was ready to question and listen without judgment, at least for the moment, and Kevin seemed to sense this as well, as his aura turned just a bit greener.

"I went to a house party," he said, voice trembling a bit, "I-I don't really like parties, but a-friend of mine told me that another friend was getting caught up with the D-Dead Eyes, and I didn't want that to happen."

He sniffed, tugging on the sleeve of his jacket, and paused when he saw the cell phone he still had clutched in his hand. His fingers loosened, and he passed the phone to Gabe, who took it without comment.

"So I went, but my friend wasn't there," he continued, rubbing his hands, "I looked all over for her, but-but I couldn't find her. In my search, I stumbled into the yard, and around the c-corner, a few guys were having a conversation."

"What did they say?"

Sam watched as Gabe's aura rolled over Kevin in shades of soothing pastel. If it had been anyone else questioning Kevin, he would have been much more on guard, but he could tell that the P.I had the situation in hand. More than in hand really; Kevin was calming down, and Gabe was getting the story out of him easily. His weird gift of persuasion was in full force.

*He can't see his own aura at work,* Sam marvelled as the gold and ivory turned the living room into a calmer version of itself, the shades shimmering in the light of the lamps and twisting in the shadowy crevasses the light didn't reach, *How strange, that he can do this without a second thought.*

"It was Kyle," Kevin blurted out after a few moments of silence. With his statement, Sam froze on the armchair, but Gabe showed no outward reaction, a startling thing when the golden-eyed man was usually a very expressive person.

"Who was Kyle talking to?"
"Some other gang members. I-I know their faces, but not their names," the Asian boy responded, "He was talking about Meg. I-I know her because she sometimes talked to me at parties. She-I haven't seen her in a while though."

*All these connections*, Sam thought, jiggling his knee in sudden morbid anticipation. Whatever Kevin was about to say next couldn't be good, not if Kyle was talking about Meg.

"He was talking about making Meg pay," he said, eyes wide, "He was mad that she got away from him-but he doesn't know where she is, so they dropped the subject."

"What did they talk about after that?" Gabe asked, and Kevin grimaced.

"The Crucifier," he whispered.

It took a moment for Sam to realize that they were talking about the serial killer now(it was a really stupid moniker in his opinion), and Gabe also seemed a bit thrown by the abrupt change.

"What about him?"

Kevin hunched his shoulders slightly, "They were nervous. He's been-that crazy language he likes to write in is all over their territory in graffiti tags. Apparently, they've been seeing him a lot too. Long hood and coat, just long enough to play mind games with them."

Sam and Gabe exchanged knowing gazes. It matched up with what Sam had learned from Meg, and if they were operating under the plausible assumption that the Crucifier(Death, whoever the fuck he was) held a grudge against the gangs, then it made sense. The question was why he was going after those that had personally slighted him in some way instead of the gangs? Were the gangs simply too big for him to tackle, or did he have some other hidden plan in mind? It certainly seemed like it if he was toying with the gangs in this way.

"Kyle said that the people who hired him were getting impatient," Kevin continued, wringing his hands. "I don't know who, but he sounded pissed and scared. A bigger gang I guess. They-whoever it is, they're putting pressure on the Dead Eyes to get their shit together. Someone called Novak is evading them, and Kyle was mad about that. Said that they would have to 'bring out the big guns', whatever the fuck that means."

His breath hitched, "I don't know much after that. They saw me, and they tried to beat me up to keep me quiet I guess. I panicked and threw a punch at someone. Kyle maybe? Someone went down, and I went down, but I got up and managed to get away, but not before grabbing someone's phone."

He gestured to the phone with a pale hand, his expression turning wrier, "I thought I had dropped mine, but now I've got a gang member's phone, and it probably has a bunch of shit on it. Contacts at least. That's why they're going to kill me."

Kevin grimaced before falling back against the couch with a massive groan, pressing his hands against his eyes.

"I'm so screwed."

"No, you're not," Gabe said calmly before Kevin could continue, "Not if they don't know where you live. Do any of them know you?"

"Only by my face," Kevin admitted after a long moment, "I'm usually careful not to attract the attention of the higher ranked members."
"Is this what you've been doing lately? Trying to keep your friends from joining these gangs?" Sam asked, and Kevin nodded, chewing on his lip.

"It's getting out of control, and I just didn't want to see them throwing their lives away by joining them!" he said, sitting up as his aura flared up with indignation. To such a straight and narrow personality like Kevin, the idea of joining a gang was probably too much to bear.

"Well, now we have a phone, and a little more information than before," Gabe said with a sigh, drumming his fingers against the case of the phone lightly. Sam noticed that the man held it with a sleeve covered hand and that he was careful to avoid touching it too much with his fingers. Did he want to get prints off of it or something?

Can he do that? Is he still allowed at the station to get something like that done?

"I'm assuming you don't want to report this?" Gabe asked, and Kevin shook his head vigorously.

The P.I sighed, before running a hand through his hair, "Well, I can't get a protective detail on you since, at the moment, there technically has been no crime reported. You haven't had one assigned to you ever since what happened at the WM library?"

Kevin shook his head, confused looking now, as well as Sam, who piped up.

"Were we supposed to get one?"

Gabe blinked, then muttered something under his breath as his aura flashed with irritation.

"Hoffman and Olsen have been assigned one under the assumption that they might be the killer's next targets," the P.I said, "I suggested to Jody to get something similar set up for Kevin and Adam, and that I could keep an eye on you, Sam, but I bet Talbot thought it'd be a waste of time. She never did pay attention to witnesses in cases like she should."

He scowled, presumably thinking of the mysterious Talbot, and the Winchester was torn between throttling this Talbot idiot for Gabe's sake and finding the man's expression strangely adorable.

Adorable?

"But-but we saw the killer!" Kevin exclaimed, his terror temporarily replaced by disbelief at the situation, "We saw him! We were fucking terrified and chased by him! I think that takes precedence over a-a piece of clothing in an elevator!"

"That would be my logic as well, but Talbot's in charge now, and she calls the shots," Gabe responded with a grimace, "I'll try to find out how the investigation is going, but Talbot's always been a bitch to me. She'll stonewall anything I try, so I'll have to be careful none of my...inquiries get back to her."

"That's fucking unbelievable," Kevin said once more, just to make his point, before slumping against the couch, "That's...if I die, I'm suing the LPD."

The teen crossed his arms and pouted petulantly, and Sam was strongly reminded that Kevin was still only 17; still a kid. He couldn't help but snort at his friend's righteous indignation at the situation(and well-deserved indignation at that) before standing up.

"Come on, let's get you to bed. Ben's in, so keep it down," he said, tugging Kevin up by his elbow. The boy was making it difficult, as he had sunk into the couch and gone limp, but he eventually got to his feet when Sam pulled him up effortlessly.
"Ben's in? Shit, my bad," his roommate said, and Sam shook his head, steering him out of the living room. Kevin was still cursing, which meant he was still worked up.

"If he slept through all this, he won't wake up if you take a shower. Let's get you cleaned up."

Kevin's aura had recovered more of its color by the time Sam got him settled in his room. It was a good sign that his roommate was well on his way to recovering from the ordeal he'd gone through, but Sam made a mental note to keep an eye of Kevin for the next few days regardless. He stopped by his own room to check on Ben and was relieved to see that his suspicion was correct. His nephew was knocked out cold and would be until morning.

Gabe was sitting in the living room when he returned, the phone Kevin had unwittingly stolen sitting on the coffee table in front of him and the gun he'd seen before resting on the man's thigh. The sight of the weapon distracted Sam temporarily as he frowned.

"Since when do you have a **gun**? Were you carrying it around all night?" he demanded. He didn't like the idea of Ben being around a gun, as it resonated too much with what his childhood had been like(John had always had a gun in the glove compartment of the Impala, not to mention what he had in the trunk), While he knew his nephew wasn't exactly a stranger to such things due to Dean, who had owned one for a few brief months for reasons he had never delved into, he still didn't want Ben around one.

"Yeah, but it's not even loaded," Gabe admitted, looking guilty as he scratched the back of his neck. About to delve into a rant about the dangers of carrying a weapon around kids, Sam blinked as he took in the P.I's words and his genuinely sorry face.

"It's not loaded?" he asked, sitting down next to Gabe so he could pick up the weapon(a Glock if he remembered correctly) and check for himself. The motion was comfortable, second nature to him as he pulled back the slide, and upon finding the chamber empty, ejected the magazine to check for bullets there.

Nothing. The gun really was empty.

"You've been carrying around an **empty** gun?" the Winchester asked in disbelief. The way Gabe had carried it, he thought for sure it was loaded, what with the way he leapt over the coffee table...

The image of Gabe vaulting over his furniture took over his mind, his black shirt standing out like ink against the brilliant white that had pulse through his aura-

*Stop thinking about that!* Sam thought furiously, pushing the image away.

Gabe flushed, "I don't really use it a lot, ok? Last time I did was about six months ago in Boston, and I don't make a habit of carrying it around unless I'm working a serious case. I figured there was a 50/50 chance it was loaded. How do you even know how to-

"My father," Sam said shortly, reinserting the clip and handing the gun back to Gabe.

They sat like that for a few tense moments before Gabe suddenly sighed, hunching over as he raked his hands through his air.

"When did this case get so **complicated**?" he groaned, suddenly sounding very tired, and Sam felt his heart twist uncomfortably in his chest as Gabe's aura flickered to reflect the man's worn out attitude.

*This case has him worried too. Maybe...*
"Technically it's not your case anymore," Sam said slowly, part of him rebelling at the thought of leaving the convoluted mess the case had become to the LPD, but another smaller part was adamant that the two of them couldn't handle it all on their own. Not without messing up or putting themselves in enough danger to shave 10 years off their lives.

The P.I paused before rolling his head in his hands to fix a single gold eye on him.

"I'm not giving up," he announced, jaw set stubbornly as he let his hands drop to his lap. One hand curled around his gun, while the other clenched into a fist, "I made a commitment to y-to this investigation when you told me what happened with Yellow Eyes. Maybe it's getting to be bigger than I originally anticipated, but I've never given up on a case before, and I've never left one unsolved, and I'm not about to start now!"

His voice was low so as not to wake anyone, and his words were words that could've been shouted, but the message could be found elsewhere. It was in his steady voice, and his burning eyes, and the vermilion that saturated the gold aura. It was in the way that his skin tugged over his tightened knuckles, and the way the lamplight illuminated his features, and most importantly, in his amended statement, the unspoken word caught and rolled around Sam's sharp mind like a kid with a treasured marble.

You.

Sam's heart stopped twisting, but he wasn't sure if the jackhammer pace it had suddenly taken was any better.

"You mean it?" he asked, trying to wrap his head around the idea that Gabe was determined and committed to the case for him; to him.

Gabe's face softened, and the harsh shadows that had hardened his already set face softened with him.

"Yeah, of course."

His aura said he was telling the truth, and the marble in his mind spun away down a deep track to come to rest somewhere in his gut, where his Winchester instinct was telling him that Gabe was telling the truth as well.

Sam had thought that the point of no return had been on the rooftop, after they'd chased the killer, or that moment where he'd hugged Gabe after his sleepwalking episode at his apartment, or even that moment in his car when Sam had told him about his personal history with Yellow Eyes. All of them had been significant in their own way, but not like this. Now though, he thought that this was probably the moment, but for the life of him, he couldn't come up with any words to do it justice.

So instead, he settled for a half hug, half tackle that knocked Gabe back against the armrest of the couch and jostled the lamp on the end table enough for it to teeter wildly.

"Oops," Sam muttered, realizing that he'd probably knocked all the air out of the P.I's lungs with his strength(sometimes he forgot how strong he was), but Gabe only half chuckled, half gasped, and hugged him back.

"You're the only person I know that could hug someone to death," he remarked, and Sam snorted, his fingers ghosting over the thin fabric of Gabe's shirt as he loosened his grip a bit.

"Sorry," he said, not sounding very sorry at all because he could tell by the way the man's aura curled and enveloped him that Gabe didn't really mind.
"Whatever," Gabe grumbled, even as his fingers ran through the ends of his hair. Sam smiled, suddenly feeling much lighter as he pulled away slightly to look at the P.I.

"Thanks, Gabe," he said softly because the almost euphoric feeling that had driven him to hug Gabe so hard had faded into something softer, like when the man's gold aura shifted into pastels.

*Because this is nice, being candid with Gabe.*

Before Gabe could respond, and it looked as if he would've, the man's phone went off, startling him into pulling away as 'Heat of the Moment' began to blare.

"Shit!" he exclaimed, quickly swiping 'decline' without hesitation, "Stupid! You don't think I woke Ben, do you?"

"No way," Sam said with a laugh because the P.I seemed so concerned about the boy he'd only met a few hours previously, "When he sleeps like the dead, he sleeps like the *dead.*"

The Winchester paused, something that he'd thought of before returning to him. He'd always been curious, but he'd never asked Gabe before because he didn't think he'd get a response. Now though...

"Why is your work ringtone 'Heat of the Moment'?", he finally asked.

Gabe tilted his head before chuckling, ducking his head as he grabbed his jacket from where it'd fallen to the floor at some point during the night.

"It's sort of corny, and kinda stupid, so don't laugh."

"Never," Sam responded, crossing his heart jokingly, and Gabe shot him a doubtful look before continuing.

"Well, the night I got my P.I license approved, I was in a pretty good mood," he started, aura turning to a more nostalgic shade as he thought back, "I-well, nobody really believed I would make anything of myself beyond high school, so the fact that I managed to scrape through enough classes and get my license was pretty big. So, I got into my car with the paper in my hand and turned on the radio, and the first song that came on was 'Heat of the Moment'."

"So that's why it's your work ringtone?" Sam asked, and Gabe shrugged.

"It was like a sign from the universe at the time, and once the idea popped into my head, it seemed like bad luck to not do it, so I did," he explained, pulling his jacket on, "A lot of my ringtones are like that, not to mention my life choices."

Gabe flashed a cheeky grin, and the Winchester shook his head before another thought occurred to him.

"Is my ringtone recommended by the cosmos as well, or am I ringtone-less?" he asked.

"Ringtone-less is not a word," Gabe retorted, and Sam shrugged.

"The universe will get back to you on that question," the P.I continued cryptically, and Sam blinked before shaking his head.

"Right," he said dubiously, his curiosity officially piqued by Gabe's evasion, "You headed out now?"

"Yup," Gabe said, popping the 'p' as he picked up the phone Kevin had provided before tucking it
into an inner coat pocket, "It's almost midnight, and I need at least 12 hours of sleep before the weekend starts."

"Plan on having fun, huh?"

Gabe grabbed his gun and tucked it into the waistband of his jeans as he smirked. A cherry red spark flew across his aura.

"Of course. You're bartending tomorrow night, right?"

Sam stared at the man's devilish expression before coming to the conclusion that the man must be insane if he was actually looking forward to coming to the Roadhouse despite the brawl that had broken out last week.

_Gabe's been insane for a while though, and if we're on the topic of sanity, I probably lost mine the moment I got myself involved with a serial killer case._

"I'll be sure to brush up on my martini making skills just for you," the Winchester responded, standing to see the P.I out properly, "Who knows, maybe I'll break up a fight or two."

"Now _that_ would be something to see," Gabe remarked as they walked to the front door, "You were epic last week."

Sam blushed, "It was nothing."

The door was opened, and once again, Sam felt reluctant letting Gabe go. Luckily, the man paused in the doorway to give him a parting gaze that was particularly potent.

"You're a smart kid, Sammo," he said, shoving his hands into his pockets, "Keep an eye out, and if you see anything suspicious, call the police immediately. Don't bother calling me first."

Sam wanted to say that if he was going to be calling anyone, it'd be the P.I, but Gabe's eyes narrowed as if reading his mind.

"I mean it, Sam," he said seriously, "I don't think these morons will show up here, but if they do, you call the police first. OK?"

"Fine," Sam muttered just to appease the man. Considering how quickly Gabe had shown up to the WU library last time despite how far away he'd been, he had more trust in the P.I than the LPD.

"Good night, Sam."

"Night Gabe," the Winchester said with a sigh, watching the man walk down the hall for a few steps before shutting the door. The last thing he saw before he shut the door completely was a brief flash of the useless gun pressed against the small of Gabe's back, and wondered if the man would ever get around to loading it.

Lisa came to pick up Ben in the morning. Luckily, she didn't ask too many questions about where Dean had run off to, but Sam had had another problem to deal with when his chattery nephew had decided to inform his mother about the 'new friend' he'd made last night.

"-and he helped me make a pillow fort, and he even let me see his badge!" Ben exclaimed happily over a quick breakfast of toast and jam. Lisa and Sam were nursing twin cups of coffee on either side
of the four-year old, just in case he gestured too wildly and tipped himself off the edge of his chair. It had happened before a few times, though Ben hardly ever got excited enough to do it.

"Really?" Lisa asked, a strange glint in her eyes as she listened to her son ramble on about Gabe, "So you like Uncle Sam's now friend?"

Sam groaned, "Please don't encourage him."

"Yeah, he's great!" Ben said, jam-sticky hands reaching for his cup of orange juice, "He's kinda like Jess, but better."

Sam froze, and Lisa visibly choked on her sip of coffee. Ben was oblivious to their reactions, busy sipping his juice nosily.

*Jess, but better?* Sam thought wildly, *When had he gotten that impression? And when does he still remember Jess?*

Lisa's cobalt aura was sky blue along the edges with visible shock, and Ben's dusky aura (the peach was no longer there like Sam had anticipated) was steady, which meant that his nephew had been honest.

"How's he like Jess?" Lisa asked after recovering from her near death experience by coffee, and Ben tilted his head, dark eyes narrowing slightly as he visibly thought hard.

"Well," he started, "They both have the same color hair, and they both smile a lot..."

Sam exhaled, gulping down some coffee to recover from the attack of nerves that had overwhelmed him. To a four-year old, Jess and Gabe *could* look similar, in a vague sort of way, especially since Ben hadn't seen Jess in almost a year, and his memory of her was probably faded. Jess was blonder than Gabe after all, and he thought that Jess probably smiled more than him too. Ben was just talking about physical similarities.

"But Gabe's nicer than Jess," his nephew continued on, "Jess smiled a lot, but she was mean. Gabe smiles a lot, but he's nice."

This time, it was Sam's turn to choke on his coffee as he realized that Ben had pretty much summed up the differences between Gabe and Jess in a few short sentences.

Jess had been nice on the outside, but as their relationship deteriorated, the smiles had become a cover up for what she'd really felt. Really, the more he looked back on it, Jess had always had a fake smile for everything. Gabe on the other hand, was truly 'nice', as Ben had put it, behind his cheery exterior.

"Is he nice to Uncle Sam too?" Lisa asked, and Sam shot her a glare over the rim of his cup, to which she only batted her eyelashes coyly as Ben perked up.

"Well yeah, Mommy," he said with a pointed gaze as if Lisa was being particularly thick this morning. Sam had to cover up a snort as he realized that Ben had pretty much summed up the differences between Gabe and Jess in a few short sentences.

"Well yeah, Mommy," he said with a pointed gaze as if Lisa was being particularly thick this morning. Sam had to cover up a snort at the sheer amount of weight his tone of voice carried, "He makes Unca Sam laugh a lot, which means they have to be good friends. Maybe even best friends!"

Ben turned to look up at him beseechingly, "Is Gabe your best friend, Unca Sam?"

Lisa smirked as Sam spluttered, completely thrown by his nephew's question.

*Where is all of this coming from? Did Gabe make that strong of an impression on him last night?*
"Er, he's not my best friend," the Winchester responded, but hurried to amend his statement when Ben's face crumpled in disappointment, "But he's a very good friend!"

The four-year old's face brightened, his aura shifting to a much more pleasant magenta, and Sam breathed an internal sigh of relief.

When the mother-son duo went to leave, Lisa positively smirked at him, her cobalt aura resplendent.

"It's good to see your new friend makes you so happy, Sam," she said cheekily, eyes sparkling as she left, "I'll have to make sure Ben keeps me up to date more often."

Frankly put, Lisa's parting words had him very apprehensive. The woman was nothing but tenacious when she got interested in something, and he knew that Ben's comparison of Jess and Gabe would have made her very interested.

He managed to set the thought aside though as night approached, and the excitement of his night shift overcame the swirling mass of thoughts that had occupied his mind. Working at the Roadhouse at night was rowdy, high-tension at times, and almost always violent in some sort of way (people just loved to fight at the restaurant for some reason), but it was definitely more enjoyable than the day shift, and besides, Gabe was supposed to drop by today.

Not even the appearance of the twin Roadhouse terrors, Anna and Becky, could dampen his spirits (much). The bar was bustling, and there simply weren't many opportunities for the girls to try to harass him. Anna was the one he encountered the most, as she was subbing in for Meg tonight, and therefore had to come back to the bar to collect drinks. Becky had been delegated to handling the food orders, so he only had to put up with the creepy stares he could feel boring into his back from the blonde. Anna was tenacious, but her flirting was left at a minimum since there were so many orders to handle.

Despite his dislike of the girl, he made sure to always keep her red hair in sight, which was easy in the dim lighting of the 'bar mode' of the Roadhouse. Anna, while not nearly as acerbic as Meg despite her mean attitude at times, was pretty enough that she earned unwanted attention that she couldn't always fend off. Her mode of defense was buttering up the customers and slipping away when they were too busy trying to figure out whether or not they had a chance with her, which, while quite manipulative, sometimes exacerbated the unwanted attention instead of allowing her an escape.

He also kept an eye out for Gordon, but he didn't think the man would show tonight. Enough people had told Ellen that the massive bar fight last week had been originally triggered by Gordon, and she had been livid. The grapevine would've done most of the legwork, and if the man had any sense, he would stay away for a long while. And if he didn't...

***Well, he won't be here for long.***

"Mind giving me a beer, Sam?"

The Winchester looked up from the quickly diminishing collection of glasses (the dishwasher sure was taking their sweet time), to see Ash leaning against the counter, his eyes a telltale red and his mullet hairstyle more messier than usual.

Sam rolled his eyes, but got Ash his typical Corona, even going so far as to crack the cap open for him. Usually, he maintained a cut-off point for *really* inebriated people, but Ash was one of the exceptions. Not only was everything on the house for him due to his services for the restaurant, but Ash had an unnaturally high threshold when it came to substances. Sam wasn't sure if it was due to
prolonged exposure to such things or some genetic predisposition, but whatever it was, a beer wouldn't so much to the already high man.

"Started the party early, huh?" the college student asked, and Ash blinked once lazily before smiling.

"Aw Sam, it's almost 11! Prime time of the night!" he said, gesturing with his beer to the clock hanging on the wall behind him.

Sam glanced at the clock and was surprised to see that it was indeed just past 11. Where had the time gone?

"Try not to get any beer on the pool table this time," Sam said as Ash took a swig of his beer, and the mullet-haired man raised his beer in a sloppy salute.

"Aye aye, Captain!" he exclaimed before stumbling away, and the Winchester sighed before returning to his work.

Sam was just about to duck into the kitchen to check on what exactly was going on (he was running out of shot glasses at an alarming rate) when a familiar voice called out to him.

"Hey, Watson!"

The Winchester immediately paused in his grumbled mutterings at the few shot glasses he had left and looked up to see Gabe slipping through clusters of people towards the bar. He was back to wearing his olive green jacket, but the purple shirt beneath it was a new sight. His aura stretched out ahead of him, lightening the thickness of the bar atmosphere as he approached.

"Evening, Sherlock," Sam greeted with a smile as Gabe slid into an empty stool, "What can I get you?"

"Same as last time, my dear Watson. Are those piercings I spy?" he asked, leaning forward on the counter for a better view, and Sam tilted his head accommodatingly, smirking.

"I've had these the whole time Gabe. My hair just hides them 95% of the time," he remarked as he began to work on Gabe's martini, "How was your day?"

Gabe groaned, propping his head in his hand as he dragged a finger along the counter, "Boring for the most part. What about you? Any unwanted company show up?"

Sam shook his head, sliding the martini across the counter, "Nothing. Kevin was torn between going to class and being paranoid enough to stay in, but I managed to convince him to go on the condition that I walk him around as much as I could."

"So no one on campus either?"

Sam rolled his eyes good naturedly, "No, Gabe. I can handle myself in a fight you know."

The P.I only grunted, "Yeah, but still."

Something in Sam's chest warmed at the man's clear concern for him, "Seriously Gabe, you saw me fight last week. Do you really think some gangbangers can take me?"

"If they have guns!" Gabe exclaimed, pausing in sipping his martini to slap the palm of his hand down against the counter to make his point, "Is dodging bullets part of your impressive repertoire?"

"Perhaps," the bartender said mysteriously, but Gabe only scowled, apparently not in a joking mood.
"I'm serious, Sam," he said, golden eyes narrowed, "This is serious!"

Sam sighed, leaning forward. He could tell the P.I. was serious by the way his aura was swirling anxiously, and he did his best to smile reassuringly as he took the man's straw and swirled it through the fruity drink.

"I know, but I can handle myself, seriously," he said, ignoring Gabe's snort at their over usage of the word in the conversation, "Now, it's Friday night. You're here to have some fun, not stress over whether or not I can really dodge bullets. So-

He let go of the straw to nudge Gabe's shoulder playfully, "Drink your martini, and maybe something stronger if you're feeling up to it, and stop worrying so much. You'll give yourself frown lines."

Gabe frowned in automatic response at the mention of frown lines, and Sam tsked before reaching up to rub them away with his thumb, a mental image of doing the very same thing earlier that week filling his mind.

"See, you just made my point," Sam remarked, ignoring the warmth emanating from the man in favor of stepping back, "So-

"Sam, I need four shots of vodka, stat!"

The Winchester groaned as Anna shoved her way to the counter before grabbing the last four shot glasses he had and quickly preparing the drinks, ignoring the waitress practically draped across the counter as he set the glasses on the tray and smiled politely. She was wearing a low cut shirt tonight, and it was quite clear what she was trying to do.

Just give her the drinks and she'll go away. Just give her the drinks and she'll go-

"Thanks, Sam," she practically purred, her aura taking a very unwanted turn towards dark pink, and it was only by sheer willpower that the Winchester managed to keep the full on body shudder at the color change down to a twitch in his hand.

Gabe arched an eyebrow at the redhead as she strolled away, his aura curling around him as he looked at Sam.

"Who was that?" he asked, his voice as even as if he was asking for the weather, despite the fact that his aura was turning vermilion in places.

Sam didn't pay attention to the change too much, too busy half wondering what he was going to do now that he was out of glasses and half wondering if he had ever run out of glasses before on a non-holiday night. He didn't think so.

"Oh, that was Anna," he responded nonchalantly as he shuddered, "She flirts too much."

"I can tell," Gabe said dryly, rapping his fingers against the counter as, "You interested?"

Sam blinked at the P.I. before bursting out into laughter and shaking his head.

"Hell no. I'm not interested at all," he said, still chuckling at the preposterous idea, "What made you think that?"

Gabe shrugged, blushing slightly as he scratched the back of his neck sheepishly.
"I-er, I don't know. You could've been!" he protested, and Sam rolled his eyes.

"Well, I'm not. Relationships don't go so well for me..."

He trailed off as he spotted a flurry of motion off in the corner of the bar that didn't fit into the rest of the scene.

_Aw, come on. Not again!

"Be right back," he muttered, walking around the counter towards a table right by one of the windows, where two men were yelling at each other and waving their arms in a way that caused his Winchester gut feeling to go off.

"Gentlemen, what seems to be the problem?" he cut in, speaking loud enough to be heard over the background noise and rock music as he approached the brewing conflict. One of the men was standing, his face red and shoulders broad enough that Sam knew if he threw a punch it'd probably do some damage. The other guy was younger and leaner, but judging by the look in his eye, he could probably hold himself in a fight. The combination wasn't good at all.

"This guy stole my table!" the guy standing yelled, scowling at the at the other dude, who simply ran a hand through his blond hair and sneered back.

"You snooze you lose buddy,"

The guy standing made an inarticulate noise of rage, and Sam sighed before stepping slightly closer, enough to put a bit more distance between the men.

"All right, let's just calm down before any does anything they regret," he started, only to be interrupted by the man standing.

"He _stole_ my table! And the little punk has the _goddamn_ nerve to just _sit_ there and _smirk_ at me!" he roared in indignation.

"Calm down, old man," the blond said as he took a swing of his beer, and Sam winced as the older guy swore again and tried to shove past the Winchester, hand swinging.

_So much for deescalating the situation._

He managed to land a glancing blow on the blond's jaw, but Sam grabbed the guy's collar and pulled him back before the fight could really get started, saving him from a broken nose as the blond guy tried to punch him back. The older guy got a return blow to the jaw instead, but his luck ran out when Sam tossed him to the floor with enough force that he slid back a couple feet on his back, crashing into the back of someone's chair in the process.

Someone hollered, and the patrons began to tune into the brewing brawl as the older guy scrambled to his feet. Sam stepped forward, ignoring the yells and cheers as he easily dodged the guy's right hook, twirling on the heel of his foot so that the guy flew past him from the force of his own punch. His heart was racing, not from fear, but _excitement_ and his hands were practically itching to throw a punch at the clearly drunk dude who was still trying to fight him.

What the hell's wrong with me?

"You should really calm down," he said mildly, ignoring the surrounding commotion as the older guy got to his feet.
"Fuck you," the guy snarled, swaying as he raised his fists, and Sam sighed imperceptibly before deciding to give the guy what he wanted.

There wasn't even a particularly strong aura trying to affect aura, like Gordon's strange aura had last week. Sure, the crowd was getting rowdy, and the general atmosphere of the Roadhouse had switched to a more bloodthirsty, excitable one, but it wasn't anything that could urge Sam on. This was something that was coming from him, and as the guy lashed out, Sam found that instead of punching the guy in the solar plexus and ending the fight cleanly, he wanted to draw things out a little bit.

Catching the guy's fist in a grip of his own, Sam twisted the man's arm around to pin in behind his back, earning a pained yell. The dude tried to wriggle away, but Sam used his other hand to grab him by the jacket collar and lifted him straight off the ground for a brief moment before tossing him towards the door.

He landed on the doormat with a thump, and the yells grew in intensity as the patrons realized Sam was giving him the boot. Sam rolled his shoulders and let the dude try to get up, strolling casually towards him like he hadn't just thrown a grown man halfway across a restaurant.

"Are you done?" he asked calmly as the man got to his knees.

The man glared at him, clutching his arm as his aura pulsed around him. Sam raised an eyebrow as the man suddenly got to his feet, and he sidestepped the punch once more, but he grabbed the dude by the collar again and dragged him back towards the door before he could crash into a nearby table.

"Uh uh, you've had enough. Hope you enjoyed your time at the Roadhouse," Sam said with a cordial smile as he pushed the door open with one hand, and using the one still holding onto the drunk man, threw the guy out through the front, where he stumbled and tripped over the curb to land in a heap on the asphalt.

The patrons began to calm down as they realized the show was over, and Sam sighed, dusting off his hands before making his way back to the bar, where Gabe was watching him with wide eyes.

"Holy shit, Sam! That was awesome!" he exclaimed as Sam walked back around the counter.

Sam shrugged, trying to ignore the blush he could feel on his face at the P.I's praise, "It was nothing."

Gabe snorted, "Yeah right. I would've been smushed by that guy, but you just threw him around like he was a rag doll!"

"He wasn't that big," the Winchester protested, even as mentally, he frowned at the thought of the guy fighting Gabe. Gabe was on the shorter side, and he didn't want to think of the man trying to defend himself in a confrontation.

"I suppose to you he wasn't. Have you ever met anyone taller than you?" Gabe asked, and Sam thought on it before shrugging again.

"That's what I thought," the P.I muttered, sipping the last of his drink. He must've drunk most of it while Sam had been taking care of the drunk dude, "'He wasn't that big'. Honestly Sam!"

The Winchester laughed at Gabe's disgruntled face before the man's phone went off. This time, the ringtone was something different, and Sam cocked his head.

"Breaking Benjamin?" he asked in disbelief as something that sounded suspiciously like 'Anthem of
the Angels' began to play, and Gabe shrugged, looking a bit embarrassed.

"It was the first song I thought of, ok, and Castiel is a sad dude," Gabe said, defending his ringtone choice as he answered his phone.

Sam arched his eyebrow, thinking of the Enochian expert. The man was awkward at times and serious, but... sad?

The Winchester thought back to when he'd spoken to the man after what had happened in the WU library and realized that maybe Gabe had a point. There was something inherently sorrowful to the man, though maybe it was just the man's clear discomfort with social aspects of life and his intense blue eyes that gave Sam that impression.

"What? Yeah actually, I'm here with him," Gabe said, hunching his shoulders so he could hear Castiel better. Sam tuned back in as Gabe frowned and looked at him before holding out his phone.

"He wants to talk to you," he said, obviously confused, and Sam blinked before taking the phone, holding it up with his shoulders as he collected abandoned glasses from the counter.

*Castiel wants to speak with me?*

His gut twinged, and Sam accepted the phone apprehensively, suddenly nervous.

"Hello?"

"Sam," Castiel greeted. He sounded tired, his deep voice especially hoarse as he spoke, "It's your brother. I-I think something's wrong."

A stab of icy fear traveled down his spine as the Winchester gut feeling intensified, all the worst case scenarios popping up in his head(Dean's hurt, he needs to go to the hospital, he's being stubborn, he's bleeding internally-).

"What happened?" Sam asked, striving to keep his voice even. Gabe sent him a questioning look, and Sam shook his head minutely back.

"He came in last night, but he was very tired. I don't believe he's been injured, as he has no visible injuries, but I know of his...unique condition, so I thought I should call you for this."

"Tired? Cas, what the fuck's wrong with him?" Sam hissed, unconsciously shortening the man's name.

"He's been asleep for almost 24 hours," Castiel said, and the frown was audible in his voice, "I can't wake him up at all. His breathing is steady, and he's mumbled a bit, but-"

*Oh great. Not again.*

"I'm coming," Sam interrupted, already tugging his apron off with one hand, "I think I know what's up, but just hang on, all right?"

"All...right?" Castiel responded, clearly confused, "Please hurry. It's...odd, seeing him like this."

"I know, but trust me, I think he's ok," Sam said, suddenly relaxing as his gut settled down, "What's your address?"

After getting Castiel's location, Sam hung up and handed Gabe back his phone. The P.I was looking at him expectantly, and the Winchester inhaled deeply before bracing himself against the counter and
looking him in the eye.

"I need a ride, please," he asked, flexing his fingers nervously, "It's an emergency."

Gabe's face softened, his aura reaching out in soft waves and cutting through the strong, alcohol-tinged atmosphere of the Roadhouse to brush against his face.

"Of course kiddo, I wouldn't ever turn you down. Is this about the mystery person guarding Cas?" he asked, and Sam bit his lip before nodding.

The P.I nodded before standing, tucking his phone into his back pocket.

"Go clock out, and I'll be waiting by the curb, all right?"

Sam nodded again, suddenly feeling relieved. Having Gabe around was hectic at times, but it was clear the man had his back, and for that he was grateful.

"Thanks, Gabe."

Gabe smiled and leaned over to ruffle his hair, nearly stumbling on his tippy toes as he reached up to do it. Sam laughed at the man's expression, and Gabe scowled.

"The things I do for you kiddo," he grumbled, shooting him a mock-angry look as he walked away, and Sam gazed after him, the man's words resonating strangely within him for some reason.

_The things he does for me_, he thought as Gabe weaved through the tables, _He does a lot for me, doesn't he?_

In his head, the marble slowly began to spin again, unknowingly powered by the force of Gabe's new words.

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Hello readers, I've returned! It's been a bit longer than I anticipated, but I've been getting prepared for the upcoming school year, which starts on the 4th for me, and so updating slipped my mind for a bit. I got my schedule in the mail yesterday and I already hate my life because I have to take a math class despite the fact I've already finished my required math credits (thanks guidance counselor), and it's in second semester. Second semester! My focus is going to be in the negatives by that point lmao, but at least I get to leave early cause I'm finally a senior. Thank heaven for small mercies.

For those interested in the process of this chapter, uhhh, it was pretty choppy. Writing this was definitely weird; some sections like the Sabriel couch moment came super easily, while others just didn't want to get written at all! Therefore, besides the usual grammar edits, this chapter has minimal editing since I was just like 'fuck it' mentally, so if it seems a little off or different, that's why. Like, the marble metaphor I came up with? I don't even know where that came from if we're keeping it real.

Also, my focus has also been pretty out of wack because I've been working a little...side project of sorts in between working on Chromaticity. Not sure when that'll go up, but I will say it's a Sabriel one-shot and that it won't be nearly as tortuously slow as the slow burn here.

Shoutouts to CaptiveRiptide (yes again) and Malec_Destiel_Sabriel (yes you too) for keeping me particularly entertained in the comments. I got good writing advice from CaptiveRiptide and giggles from Malec_Destiel_Sabriel, who was very enthusiastic in their questioning.
Anyway, I think I'll be able to get one more chapter up before the 4th, so watch out for that! The next chapter will focus more on Dean (who is not going to die I promise), and Cas (who I swear is more than a background character). Not sure what'll happen once school starts up again, but I'll delve into that problem later. Comment as always, and if you go back to school like me, tell me about it! We can wallow in our woes together.

Until the next chapter!
Castiel's apartment was close to the rougher, western section of Lawrence that had long been home to gangs and people that led seedier lives. He wasn't neck deep in gang territory; if anything he was a safe distance away from the beginnings of what was considered the 'wrong side of the tracks' in Lawrence, but Sam could easily see how the man had been originally jumped for his Enochian skill set, and how Dean had come across him in the first place. If they kept going west for maybe a half mile more, they would be running all sorts of risks.

"I don't think I've been in this section of Lawrence very often," Gabe muttered as he parked his car in front of a brownstone building with a weathered exterior. If Sam hadn't already been sure of the address, he would've known it was the right place anyway because of the Impala parked two cars down.

The Winchester gazed around, already feeling a brief sense of unwelcome nostalgia at the sight of the similarly weathered buildings, and the familiar outlines of taller buildings further west, hazy through the thin layer of fog that had drifted in over the past hour. A very dejected gray-green atmosphere clung to the place, faded in the street and darker blue in the shadowy alleys. It was much different from the brighter sections of town, and the usually much more varied colors that permeated Lawrence. This was the area of town that Sam used to frequent in the old days, back when John had been teaching them the 'family business' and both he and Dean had been fresh in their teens.

He shivered slightly. It was odd, being back in this part of town. It wasn't as if he had actively tried to avoid it; Dean's apartment was close by, but further to the south, and he'd gone to a few house parties in the immediate area. There was just something about being back near what John called their 'hunting grounds' that put him on edge, like in any second his father would come up behind him and bark out orders to be completed for the night. If he tried hard enough, Sam thought he could almost feel the man's hand clamp down on his shoulder.

"You okay?"

Sam looked at Gabe and took comfort in the gold shades that shimmered in the dark.

"Fine. Let's go," he said, pushing the door open. He wasn't ready to explain why he had so much personal history with this area, and it was unimportant when his brother was somewhere inside.

The inside of the apartment building was just as weathered, with an empty lobby desk and two elevators straight ahead. Sam waited impatiently as the elevator grumbled and groaned its way down, and once inside, cursed at the small space within. Gabe's aura filled the whole space, which helped to alleviate the cramped feeling he felt, but the two men were forced to stand face to face in close proximity to fit. Or rather, face to chest; Gabe was short enough that the man had to look up at him to make eye contact, a fact that amused Sam greatly as the elevator gears grinded to life.

"Something funny, Sam?" Gabe asked pointedly, and the college student shrugged casually, which only seemed to irk the P.I even more.

"What's the weather like down there?" Sam asked as nonchalantly as he could, unable to restrain
himself.

Gabe rolled his eyes hard enough to probably give himself a headache, obviously disgusted with Sam's poor choice in a short joke.

"Oh, for God's sake-

One of the fluorescent lights flickered ominously above them, and Gabe tilted his head farther upward to glare at the offending object. His expression changed quickly as the gears grind red particularly loudly, and he jumped, clutching Sam's arm.

The Winchester arched an eyebrow in amusement, even as mentally he was trying not to let himself be too affected by the man's touch (why does he have to have such a stupidly warm aura?).

"Don't worry Gabe, if the elevator stalls, I'll give you a boost up through the hatch," Sam said, nodding at the ceiling, "It might be a long journey up for you, but-

"Shut. Up!" the P.I said, punching him in the arm to emphasize each word, but the college student only grinned. Gabe wasn't too mad if his aura was any sort of indicator.

Still, Sam was glad the elevator doors slid open before he could crack another joke. He didn't think Gabe would be able to handle anymore ribbing regarding his height, even if it was coming from him.

Castiel's door was about halfway down the hall, recessed into the pale beige walls and slightly scuffed. Sam knocked, and a moment later, the door was pulled open by the Enochian expert, whose eyes widened upon seeing the both of them.

"Oh, good, you're here," he said, sounding slightly distracted. The dark shadows under his eyes only accentuated the vividness of his eyes, and his hair looked even more disheveled than usual. His aura was a deeper blue with worry, though no less impressive as he tugged the door open wider for them.

The duo stepped inside, and the first thing that stood out to Sam was the books. They were everywhere; shoved up against the walls of the already narrow entrance hall, bulging on bookshelves he could see in the living room straight ahead and stacked around a large work table where Sam supposed a dining table would be. The long wooden table was barely visible beneath the stack of papers and boxes piled high on its surface. It was clearly an academic's abode, and Gabe sneezed (which was understandable; dust accompanied the books) as Castiel fumbled for the light switch that illuminated the tiny entrance area they stood in. With the light, Sam could see the coat closet to his immediate left, the door half blocked by boxes, and the open space in the wall to the kitchen on the left.

"I see you didn't take my recommendation to at least dust the place the last time I came," Gabe remarked dryly, rubbing his nose as he sneezed again.

"Bless you," Sam said, and Gabe gave him a grateful, 'I-appreciate-your-support-in-the-midst-of-my-suffering' look.

"Why would I dust if I don't sneeze?" Castiel asked with a faint frown, his gaze fixed towards the living room before he looked at Sam. His aura was filled with worry, the blues reflected in his eyes, "He's asleep on the couch. I didn't want to turn on the light just in case..."

Sam shook his head, "Trust me, if I'm right, a light's hardly going to bother him."

Gabe looked at him curiously as Castiel led the way towards the living room, which was just past the barely controlled chaos of the work table. There was no TV (the bookshelves took up the whole wall
where one could've gone), and the coffee table was in a similar state to the work table, except there was more food, a first aid kit, and fewer papers. In the corner was an armchair where an orange tabby cat lay sleeping. Dim yellow light from the streetlamps outside filtered through the windows, which were devoid of curtains but had the blinds half closed.

"This is all very ominous Sammy. Dean's not seriously hurt, is he?" the P.I asked as the Enochian expert turned on the living room light.

Sam shook his head as he took in the long couch pushed up against the right wall and the prone form of his brother. His aura was swirling slowly in a circular motion that the Winchester knew was attributed to his brother's deep sleep, the usually bright greens more settled and darker as they spun lazily.

One of his arms was dangling down to brush the rug, and the younger Winchester noted his knuckles absentmindedly as he crouched down. They were bruised, but the blood usually attributed to such wounds had been cleaned off, and he looked back at the coffee table curiously. Along with the first aid kit he'd originally noticed were also used supplies scattered amongst the clutter.

He was cleaned up at some point, by Castiel obviously.

Castiel's frown deepened as he stepped closer. Without his trench coat, the man looked less intimidating and somehow younger, especially in the over-sized sweater and house slippers.

"He wasn't like that a minute ago. He was rolled over on his side," he informed, and Sam nodded before tugging back the blanket a bit to see Dean's face.

There were faded bruises and a cut near his scalp that had been closed up with butterfly stitches, but he didn't look like pulverized meat, which was better than he'd expected.

At least Castiel keeps him intact. If Dean hadn't crashed here, he would've been a sight to see when he woke up.

"He always switches to this position near the tail end of his sleep," Sam mused as he gently replaced the blanket. As he did so, the blanket pulled back his feet to reveal that his shoes had been removed, and Sam blinked at the sight before looking around more closely.

Dean's leather jacket had been draped on the armchair; his steel-toed boots tucked neatly against its side. The blanket draped over him was thick to ward off the faint chill in the apartment, and the pillow Dean was using wasn't a couch pillow; it was a bedroom one. There was also a duffel bag by the window that Sam recognized as Dean's, left half open beside a wooden chair that Sam had no doubt his brother sat in to keep watch over the street for signs of danger.

Dean's set up shop here, Sam realized, stunned, That's his travel bag. He hardly ever takes that out of the Impala, which means he trusts Castiel enough to leave it here. And Castiel took the time to make Dean more comfortable on the couch by taking off his shoes and jacket, not to mention cleaning him up.

Sam's brow furrowed slightly as his thoughts continued.

Dean's not very trusting of people, not to mention near strangers. He would've protected Castiel out of a sense of duty because of the original jumping, but surely the Dead Eyes aren't being that threatening 24/7? And to go so far as to leave Ben with me yesterday to come here?

"Why does it sound like you're saying 'sleep' with a capital 'S'?" Gabe asked, and Sam jolted out of his thoughts as he looked at the two men waiting on him.
"Because it's sort of like that," Sam explained as he got to his feet, "Dean...well, his sleep schedule is fucked up at the best of times. He's never been an 'eight hour a night' kind of guy, and between that and his pigheadedness, he hardly gets the minimal four hours of sleep."

"Sounds hardcore," Gabe commented, and Sam snorted as Castiel's frown deepened.

"He always insisted he was fine whenever he pulled all-nighters keeping watch," the blue-eyed man murmured, "Is this his way of catching up?"

Sam nodded affirmatively, "Pretty much. Every so often Dean will just pass out for a day or so and sort of 'recharge', and there's no waking him up for anything. In this state, he's almost comatose, which is startling considering how light of a sleeper he is, but it's just the way he is. Since he's in this sleeping position, he'll wake up in the morning at maybe seven or eight."

"So...false alarm?" Gabe summed up, and Castiel hunched his shoulders in an embarrassed manner, shuffling his feet as his aura lightened.

Sam smiled kindly as he addressed Castiel, "Pretty much, but like I said, it's startling if you've never seen it before. He usually only ever sleeps this deeply in places he feels safe in, which is why I was caught off guard when you called."

Castiel's aura took a more happy turn at the sound of his words, and Gabe yawned, shoving his hands into his pockets.

"All this talk of sleep is making me tired," he complained, looking rather sleepy indeed with his drooping eyes. It didn't stop him from smirking though as he addressed Castiel, "So, how's life with a male supermodel watching over you, Cas?"

The blue-eyed man blinked once at him before looking away, his aura taking a peculiar turn towards cerulean blue as he cleared his throat. Sam watched the change curiously.

"Dean is...an acceptable guest," he started in his gravelly voice, "Despite his pigheadedness, sometimes childish and churlish behavior, and his ability to inhale my entire pantry if I don't keep a watchful eye on him."

Sam snickered at the man's complete and utter seriousness as he spoke, and the fact that Castiel had summed up his brother up quite nicely.

"Sounds about right," he said as Gabe gaped at the blue-eyed man(he clearly hadn't been expecting anything that straightforward), "I think you'd get along great with Lisa; she's said pretty much the same about him in the past."

The man's brow furrowed, clearly confused as he tilted his head.

"Lisa...?"

Sam blinked, and Gabe looked between the two of them before clearing throat and fixing his gaze on the tabby, who was now twitching a hind leg rapidly in sleep.

"He never told you about Lisa and Ben?" he asked, confused as well. He already knew Dean had told the man about himself(those stupid 'Sammy' stories), but he never mentioned Lisa or Ben?

Castiel's aura was swirling like a tempest now, light and dark blues clashing almost violently as he crossed his arms over his chest. It wasn't anger; the man was just extremely conflicted and even more confused now, both of the emotions intercepted heavily by bolts of anxiety.
"Are they—is Lisa his—" Castiel started before frowning as if he didn't understand why he couldn't start his own sentence.

"Lisa's his ex-girlfriend, and Ben's his son," Sam said, deciding to put the man out of his misery, but unsure as to why the man was in misery in the first place.

Castiel's eyes widened slightly, and the tempest of his aura flared outward. Sam barely held back his flinch as the wash of blue crashed over him like a cold wave. It felt like what he'd always imagined cold ocean water would feel like; rough and unrestrained.

Gabe turned to look, golden aura flaring outward. Sam took a half step back from Castiel, which simultaneously brought him closer to the P.I. He knew the man wasn't aware of it, but Sam felt better standing along the edge of his golden aura for protection, but it wasn't needed for long. The wave of blue dissipated as quickly as it had arrived, and Castiel crossed his arms even tighter before ducking his head and whirling on his heel.

"Excuse me," he muttered as he walked away in the direction of the kitchen, and Sam blinked, taken aback by the man's violent shift in aura and his otherwise controlled exterior. Gabe stepped closer as cabinet doors were ripped open, frowning intently in Castiel's direction.

"What was that all about?" Sam asked, too caught off guard by the way the Enochian expert's aura had lashed out. There had been too much going on in the sheer amount of blue that had swamped him, and it was taking him longer than normal to process what he'd seen and felt. There had been shock, confusion, betrayal of sorts, and something like...guilt, but why would Castiel feel guilty—?

The Winchester suddenly paused, realizing what had been nagging at him ever since he'd stepped into the apartment. Dean had crashed here, which meant he had a significant amount of trust in Castiel and must've spent a great deal of time here.

Which means if I look...

Sam's eyes flicked around the apartment, and he saw what he hadn't seen before; too distracted by the material objects and his brother's state.

Castiel's aura was there in faded swatches of blue, something he'd registered almost subconsciously when he'd arrived. It was heavily centered at the work table, but there was also a flowing sheen of green that coexisted with the blue. It was there curled around the chair by the window, in a trail that led from the kitchen to the couch, and clung to an old-fashioned radio/CD player that he hadn't noticed sitting on one of the bookshelves.

"-Sammo, Samsqautch, Sam-

"Shhh," the college student shushed, reaching out a hand to clap over Gabe's mouth as he continued to look around, "I'm thinking."

He had done this before with auras in people's homes and certain public places, though he usually only did it when he was either unfamiliar with an area or the auras in question, and sometimes if he was seeking someone out in a crowd. Auras were tricky things to read when they got faded and muddled, but they could still be useful if he really looked at them instead of the cursory glance he usually gave most of them.

Sam tugged Gabe around with him as he spun in a slow 360 around the living room. He knew he was acting strange, but the P.I didn't make a sound as they spun around, and his aura, while slightly edged with wariness, was curious. Sam tuned out as much of Gabe's aura as possible as he tracked
the two auras in the apartment, watching the way they flowed and moved around each other. Part of it was his ability to see auras, but another part of it was simply his brain coming to its own conclusions, and as the green and blue swirled around each other contentedly, he understood.

"Oh," Sam murmured as he realized what he was seeing, and how it lined up with Castiel's strange behavior.

A muffled sound made Sam look down at Gabe, who was waiting patiently, and the Winchester smiled sheepishly as he removed his hand and let the P.I go.

"What was that?" he asked, and Sam shrugged, suddenly embarrassed as he struggled to find an answer that didn't involve auras.

"Just me thinking," he finally responded vaguely, and he ignored Gabe's disbelieving look as he looked towards the kitchen. A coffee machine was gurgling now, and the slamming cabinet doors had stopped.

"I think Castiel likes Dean," Sam said slowly as he processed what he'd seen, "Like, likes him."

Gabe blinked before his aura fell into concentrated thought for a moment as he looked to the still sleeping Dean on the couch.

"Well, I can't say I blame him," he quipped blasely before looking back to him, "Dean...doesn't swing that way though, right?"

There was a certain amount of hesitation in Gabe's tone that made the younger Winchester focus on the man's aura, and he was surprised to see nervousness in the now slightly blue-green tint to the gold. Why would Gabe be nervous?

Well, he'd only be nervous if-oh, could it be-?

Sam felt like smacking himself hard as he realized why.

Gabe had always been naturally very flirty with his comments, and while he hadn't given it much thought before (in his defense, between chasing a serial killer and school, he hadn't had much of an opportunity to do so), now it felt like he had missed something very, very obvious.

"I don't think so," Sam responded before shrugging overly casually. He wasn't really sure how to address this, but if Gabe wasn't going to mention it, then he didn't think he should make a big fuss or speak directly about it. "But then, I've never bothered to ask. Dean knows I'd never judge him on something like his sexuality."

He hoped Gabe would get the underlying message, and was glad to see the nervousness fade from the man's aura. Gabe didn't say anything outright, so Sam left it at that. They could stay in this odd ambiguity on the topic for now, though he still felt stupid that he hadn't thought about it before. Did Gabe think he'd judge him or something?

He frowned slightly as Castiel emerged from the kitchen, blue aura much more subdued. He didn't think he'd given off the impression that he might have some sort of negative reaction to Gabe's sexuality, whatever it may be, but he didn't begrudge the man his reservations. Despite his outgoing
personality, Gabe definitely had his secrets.

"I've made coffee if you're interested," the man said, blue eyes fixing on Sam hesitantly before flicking to Dean, then over to Gabe. Now that the college student was looking, it was almost painfully obvious that Castiel was worried and embarrassed that he'd given his 'secret' up, "I also have all the Enochian translations from Wilkes' scene, including the letter."

Gabe perked up, and the three drifted into the kitchen. It wasn't small, but it did feel a bit crowded with all three of them in the windowless space, not to mention both Castiel and Gabe's auras spreading out to fill the room with their respective colors. It was well lit though, and the table pressed up against the right wall in the empty space between the corner just past the entrance and the fridge was clear of academic material.

Castiel gestured for them to sit at the glass-topped table, bringing them a steaming pot of coffee, mugs, and cream and sugar despite their protests.

"So, anything stands out from the madness?" Gabe asked once they all had coffee, eyes alight with that spark Sam had come to associate with the man's natural excitement towards his occupation.

"Perhaps," Castiel responded cryptically as he abruptly left the kitchen. He was only gone a moment and came back with the evidence bag Sam recognized from the library that held the letter the killer had written, along with a few papers.

He handed them to Gabe before perching on top of the counter across from the table, his slippers dangling from his feet as he sipped his coffee. It was an odd sight, but since he was so casually dressed, it didn't seem completely incongruous with his character.

"The letter seems to be more focused on the fact that he knows people are looking for him," Castiel started, baritone voice all business now, "It wasn't written in blood though. If I had to take a guess, I'd say some sort of felt pen. It was also very neatly written as if he'd pre-written it."

"He put more thought into it," Gabe murmured as he skimmed through the papers, handing a couple to Sam, '"All of hell's demons and monsters won't be able to stop me. Red eyes seek me out, but they won't be able to find Death. For Death wears a mask, and by day, Death is but a hidden shadow in the darkness that taints this earth. Seek, but you shall never find.'"

Sam chewed on his lip as he mulled over the words, "He sounds pretty confident he won't be caught anytime soon."

"Cocky bastard," Gabe muttered, though there was only mild heat in his words, as he was far more focused on the papers, '"The word carved into her chest was 'hypocrite'?"

Castiel nodded, "Quite clearly."

"Maybe he's referencing the fact that her husband was a gang member? Did you ever confirm that Gabe?" Sam asked.

Gabe looked up from his papers and nodded, golden aura settling heavily over his shoulders as it curled away from Castiel's aura, allowing the blue to take some space in the middle of the kitchen. The Winchester had half a mind to just watch the auras find an equilibrium straight up, but he knew he couldn't. He'd already partly embarrassed himself in front of Gabe back in the living room.

"Yup. Oscar Emerson was incarcerated for armed robbery almost five years ago with two other buddies, and all three did have links to local gangs, but none of them could be linked to any particular one. They knew people who knew gang members so to speak," Gabe said, reciting the
information from memory as he pulled out his ever present black journal, "Wilkes got a divorce while he was jailed about six months in, reverted to her maiden name, and was promoted a few months after that to Head Librarian of the Watercrest Memorial Library, or the WM."

"Where she later met her untimely demise," Sam finished, noticing something on one of his papers, "Listen to this: 'For her sin of impeding the pursuit of knowledge, Death reaped her soul. May her folly, sloth, and sanctimonious attitude be purged from this building.'"

"That was on the wall above her?" Gabe asked, and the Winchester nodded before his eyes drifted down the paper.

At the bottom were a few extra symbols that looked different to the usual runes Sam had come to associate with Enochian. Looking at them gave him an almost uneasy feeling, and he frowned, shoving it away as he looked at Castiel

"What's this?" he asked curiously, and the Enochian expert shifted on the counter, brow crinkling slightly.

"Ritualistic symbols," he said, grimacing, "They are all associated with cleansing, but the way they were tacked onto the end of the message makes whatever he was attempting a bastardized version of their original intent."

"So he was...trying to cleanse the building?" Gabe asked, writing in his journal, "And used symbols incorrectly?"

Castiel shook his head, "Not incorrectly; just a different form to what they're usually seen as, and not in a good way. There are certain combinations that can be made in Enochian that have different meanings that, while aren't easily translatable into English, retain those meanings in Enochian. The particular combination he used is an intense method of cleansing, and if one believes in the power of such rituals, it would be a very unpleasant cleansing process amplified by the blood he used to write it."

Sam looked back down at the symbols and shivered slightly. There was something off about them, though he couldn't place his finger on what. He could certainly believe Castiel when he said that the combination they appeared in wasn't pleasant.

**Was the killer attempting rituals now? Or was he just picking and choosing what he wanted to use?**

Gabe shot him a concerned look, but Sam shook his head slightly as he took a sip of his hot coffee in an attempt to shake off the uncomfortable feeling the Enochian gave him. The tendrils of gold that had spread out over the table to subconsciously soothe him withdrew after a moment, and the P.I returned his attention to Castiel.

"So this guy's attempting...rituals now? Or some weird version of them?"

Castiel dipped his head, "I believe so. Of course, my expertise is only limited to translating the Enochian you bring me, not the killer's interpretation of it. In a demented mind such as his, he may see his writings as something different."

"Wonderful," Gabe drawled dryly, and the Enochian expert shrugged slightly, blue aura rolling like waves off of his shoulders.

"Enochian is a complicated language. Certain aspects of it are very rigid, but there are some parts of it that can be manipulated and built upon," he explained, blue eyes shifting down to his coffee, "I will say that, throughout history, Enochian rituals have always been the most difficult to interpret due
to the muddled origins of the language. I can't say with 100% certainty what the killer might intend, but it just...feels wrong.”

The man's aura reflected his unease at the Enochian, and for a moment, all three of them sat in silence. Gabe broke it by shutting his journal decisively, and Sam looked up as the man stood. His golden aura was slightly dejected, and very much resigned as he sighed.

"I'll have to drop this off with the police," he explained, his mouth tugging downwards, "I'm not exactly on the case anymore Cas, so after this, different people are going to come by for the translations."

Castiel's brow crinkled as he tilted his head, squinting slightly at Gabe. His aura began to swirl slightly, royal blue and ice streaking across each other.

"I...don't like that," the man said bluntly, and Sam snorted into his mug as Gabe blinked, clearly taken back by Castiel's admission.

"Me either, but I don't have a choice in the matter," the P.I said after a few moments of confusion, "Do me a favor though? If they do insist on dropping by your place, don't dust it."

Sam finally broke out into a laugh as Castiel's face shifted to an 'I-have-no-idea-what-you're-talking-about expression. Gabe smiled at the man's confusion before sticking out a hand to shake.

"It was nice to meet you Cas. Good luck with the stud on your couch."

Castiel began to shake Gabe's hand before he registered the P.I's second sentence, and he scowled. The dark expression was softened in intensity by his pinks cheeks.

Gabe cackled, and Sam stood, extending his hand as well.

"Thank you for patching Dean up," he said sincerely, before pitching his voice a bit lower, "And be glad, that he trusts you so much. There aren't too many people that can say that."

Castiel studied him for a bit, blue eyes brilliant against his matching aura before he inclined his head in response.

"And this situation falls under our, er, previous conversation," the Winchester added awkwardly. He still didn't want Dean to know that he was caught up in the mess the killer was creating, especially now that he knew Dean was probably adding onto his already formidable street reputation by going up against the Dead Eyes so viciously. Sam knew his brother well; if he was spending so much time with Castiel, the man was officially on Dean's 'must protect at all costs' list, even if he himself wasn't aware of it yet.

"Understood," Castiel said, and with that confirmation, Sam knew his secret was safe.

Sam looked back once at his brother, who was still sleeping deeply on the couch, as he left with Gabe. He knew that Dean wasn't aware of anything going on around him at the moment, but he still felt the need to check on him one more time. He took comfort in the peaceful supernova swirling around his brother's head, and that Dean was in good hands.

Outside in the hall, Gabe was suspiciously quiet, his golden aura reflecting his tumultuous thought process in roiling shades of ivory that Sam decided to leave alone for the time being. The P.I didn't seem to be struggling with anything; more like he was just thinking very intently, and Sam didn't want to interrupt. Gabe was smart; the Winchester didn't want to ruin whatever flow the man was on if it could potentially lead to solving the case.
As a result, the trip down the elevator was much quieter than its predecessor, and Gabe was quiet up until they reached his car. Once inside though, he broke the silence by turning towards Sam and smiling. The smile was warm, amplified by his now settled aura.

"Feel like grabbing a bite to eat with me, kiddo?" he asked, and Sam smiled in response. That was all the golden-eyed man needed before he was off, speeding away from west Lawrence as he chattered about food options as his aura filled the Beetle.

Sam leaned back, content as he left behind the section of Lawrence that had been such a crucial part of his life at one point. He knew that he hadn't seen the last of it yet; not if he was going to solve the case, but he found it didn't make him nervous as much as it once did. After all, he would be coming here with Gabe, and that made all the difference.

They found another Wendy's to eat at and managed to grab some food before the franchise closed for the night. Sam couldn't hold back a laugh at the cashier's expression when they drove up to the window and thought that he and Gabe probably made for a weird sight, pulling up in a yellow Beetle at almost 1 AM just for some chicken nuggets.

"Why is it that we keep having these late Friday nights?" the Winchester asked as they began to eat in the parking lot, and Gabe shrugged.

"Why not?"

Sam pondered the P.I's logic for a moment before conceding with a shrug of his own, and Gabe smiled.

"If our midnight rendezvous is so problematic, I'm sure I can rearrange my schedule so we can have these at a more reasonable hour," he said casually, though his golden aura flickered in an intriguing way that had Sam paying attention more closely.

_Huh. He wants to spend more time with me like...this?_

Sam ignored the warm feeling in his chest as he tilted his head and munched on a french fry thoughtfully.

"And if I like our midnight rendezvous?"

Gabe gazed at him for a second before smiling wide enough for his eyes to crinkle at the edges, golden aura like a flare in the night.

"That's the spirit!" he said, nudging Sam's shoulder with his own, "See, _this_ is why you're my Watson."

The conversation devolved into jokes from there, at least until they were done eating. It wasn't until Sam was slurping on his soda that Gabe's face grew more serious, and his aura swirled accordingly to match the expression.

"So, I got the phone that Kevin grabbed processed for fingerprints," the P.I started, turning in his seat to face him better, "I managed to call in a favor, so there won't be a record of it at all."

"All right," Sam said, slightly confused as he mimicked Gabe's action. It was harder for him since his legs barely fit into the Beetle, but he did his best, "Was there anything useful?"
Gabe nodded, "Fingerprints came back to an Owen Davis, who is the younger brother of Kyle Davis."

Sam felt his Winchester gut instinct twinge. Suddenly, he had a very bad feeling about the whole situation.

*At this rate, Gabe's going to need a bigger whiteboard. How much do those things cost?*

"Same Kyle that Meg dated?" he asked, already knowing the answer, but still needing to ask anyway.

"The one and only." Gabe confirmed, "Owen got busted on a small drug charge about two years ago, but he hasn't been caught on anything since. There aren't any mentions of gang ties, but a lot can happen in two years, and if Kyle is such a high-ranking member of the Dead Eyes..."

"It's not a stretch to assume Owen would be one too," Sam murmured, furrowing his brow in thought as he chewed on his straw. It was a bad habit, but one the Winchester hadn't ever been able to break, "Damn, this isn't good at all. If there's any sort of incriminating gang stuff on the phone, the Dead Eyes might try to take it back, or hurt Kevin."

"Yeah, it's not looking too good right now for Kevin. Right now the phone's at my place, but I guess we'll have to do something about it soon," Gabe said, resting his elbow on the top of his seat and propping his head in his hand with a sigh, "I also asked around about what the hell's going on with how the protective details are being assigned to people, and the response was pretty much what I expected. Talbot doesn't think any of what the LPD are referring to as the 'WM trio' is in danger, as in her head, the clothing in the elevator shows that there's a higher probability that he'll go after Hoffman and Olsen than you guys."

There was an edge of vermilion in the P.I's aura, and Sam didn't blame him at all, as he too was irritated at the logic.

He wasn't irritated for himself though; Sam was perfectly capable of defending himself against a knife-happy psycho thanks to John's relentless training. No, he was more irritated on Kevin and Adam's behalf. They were still minors by law, kids, and they had had the unfortunate privilege of running into the killer face to face. They had been terrified out of their wits, and the only reason they hadn't been harmed or killed by the maniac was because they weren't part of the killer's hit list (not then at least) and because of sheer, dumb luck. If Sam hadn't been there, who knows what would've happened to them.

Sam's fist clenched around his soda cup. Despite their fear, both of them had performed admirably in the situation; far better than most grown adults would've. Adam had gone as far as to follow the killer in a skewed attempt to somehow help, not to mention being ready to knife the psycho if he had gotten close enough. Kevin had stayed on the phone with Alfie and, despite his mild hysterics, had managed to keep him up to date as they ran through the library. They'd done more in those harrowing ten minutes than the LPD, and they didn't get protection?

*God, I hate the fucking LPD.*

Gabe seemed to sense his souring mood, as the man reached out to loosen his fingers from his cup, his golden aura soaking his fingers in shades of warmth as the man took the cup away from him.

"Don't want you crushing another innocent cup," the man teased gently as he fingers laced through his, "Take a breath, Sam."
Sam took one, and then another, letting his anger bleed away as Gabe held onto his hand.

"Sorry," the Winchester muttered, ducking his head in embarrassment (was Gabe holding his hand?), and he heard the golden-eyed man chuckle wryly as he let go of his hand.

"You have every right to be mad," Gabe remarked, his hand moving to rest on his shoulder, fingers brushing against his neck, "If it helps, a decent amount of people aren't very happy about her decision, our friends in the LPD especially so. I don't think I've ever seen Zeke so pissed off, and he's usually so level-headed."

Sam's lips quirked at the mental image of the calm, collected cop actually getting upset, and Gabe smiled at his reaction.

"It still makes me mad. Kevin and Adam need the protection," the Winchester admitted with a sigh.

The P.I's eyes narrowed slightly, "And what about you?"

Sam looked up, confused, and Gabe huffed before grasping his face in both of his hands. The move was unexpected, which led to Sam's slight flinch, but he relaxed almost immediately when Gabe's aura engulfed him in pleasant feelings that buzzed slightly against his skin.

*His aura's too intense for his own good.*

"You need protection too," he said, eyes serious as they fixed on him, "You deserve that much."

"Not really. I can handle myself," Sam explained, and Gabe shook his head, strands of golden hair falling across his face.

"Maybe in a fist fight, but you don't have eyes in the back of your head, do you?" the P.I asked, his grip tightening ever so slightly as his hands slid further back to grasp the side of his neck. Like that, Gabe's aura only made the pulse in his neck even more noticeable, and Sam wondered if he could feel it thrumming beneath his skin.

*Hopefully not.*

Sam also wondered if his ability to see auras counted as 'eyes in the back of his head', but quickly squashed down the urge to mention it at all.

He trusted Gabe, trusted him more than he'd thought possible considering he hardly knew the P.I (which was scary considering his Winchester paranoia), but Sam couldn't trust him with this. Dean was the only one to this day to know, and the promise they'd made years ago when Sam had first told his brother that he could see 'colors' around people still stood, if only on principle. Not even their father knew, and despite how long he'd been with Jess, he'd never quite worked up the nerve to tell her, which ended being a reminder on the benefits of not telling people considering how their relationship had ended. His ability to see auras was one of their brother things, and Sam didn't think that'd change anytime soon.

*Even if Gabe's probably one of the few people I know that wouldn't immediately send me off to an asylum if I ever told him.*

"No," Sam relented, before smirking, "But you can be my protection. No one will mess with me once they see Lawrence's Sherlock and his unloaded gun."

Gabe blinked, and Sam snickered at the man's dumbfounded expression before he caught on, when he then pulled his hands away (unfortunately) to cross his arms and scowl.
"Hey!"

They left soon after that, as it was getting late (I have a morning shift at the Roadhouse Gabe), and Gabe was continuously yawning despite the coffee he'd had at Castiel's and the sugary fruit punch that he seemed to favor when ordering at Wendy's.

"I'm just really tired, Sam," he said with his fifth (fifth!) jaw-cracking yawn as he made his way towards the eastern section of Lawrence. He was going a bit too fast for the college student's comfort, but at least both of his hands were blessedly on the wheel, "This case has so much going on in it that sometimes I can't help but stay up and try to figure things out."

Sam frowned, partially concerned now, but Gabe caught his look and tsked, picking up his soda.

"No, don't look at me like that, I'll be fine. I'm more concerned about you kiddo. You've got a lot on your plate, between working and going to school. How do you fit working the case with me into all of it?" the P.I asked, light and shadow dancing across his face as he took one of the overpasses that lead straight to East Center. During the day, the overpass was usually backed up with traffic, but now in the cloudy night, it was mostly clear.

"I'm good at multitasking."

Gabe pinned him with a doubtful look as he slurped his soda. Sam shot him a classic bitch face, to which the P.I only rolled his eyes slightly and turned back (thankfully) to look at the road.

"How are your grades?" he asked, and Sam arched an eyebrow at the slightly unexpected question.

*What do my grades have to do with anything?*

"Good?"

"That sounds like a question," Gabe remarked, and the Winchester crossed his arms defensively.

"Only because you sound like a parent right now and I'm very confused as to why."

"I'm just concerned!"

"Well, there's no need," Sam grumbled as he tried, and failed, to cross one leg over the other. There was simply not enough room in the Beetle, and he gave up trying as he raked a hand through his hair, "I have A's, so my scholarship's not in danger."

"Scholarship?"

Sam nodded, "I got a full ride, but there are some requirements. I have to keep up a 3.7 or higher, though I try not to dip below a 3.8 because they send warning letters."

"But you're good now, right?" Gabe asked, aura mildly anxious.

"Of course," the college student replied, before grinning cheekily, "You're talking to Sam Winchester, bookworm extraordinaire. Keeping up a 3.7 minimum is easy."

His bravado seemed to reassure Gabe, and he was glad when the man's aura settled down. Sam wasn't about to tell the P.I how boring Criminal Law was, or how some classes either had him up at random hours trying to keep up or completely reconsidering the wisdom in his career choice. He *definitely* wasn't going to tell Gabe that he'd had a mild breakdown his first fall semester freshman year over finals that had lead to Dean almost taking him to the hospital (it was incredibly handy that
he was on good terms with Lisa, who had stepped in). While Sam knew he was smart, sometimes he felt incredibly inadequate and not cut out to be a lawyer at all, especially during some rougher classes or tests. It didn't help that a figurative guillotine in the form of '3.7' hung perpetually over his neck.

*Jeez, don't think about that. I've gotten this far, haven't I?*

Sam couldn't help the slight tremor in his hands though and cracked his knuckles in an attempt to hide it. However much he came off as the untouchable, straight A student, one of his deepest fears was that he'd mess up somehow and his full ride would get taken away. It was stupid, especially considering the fact that at the end of the day, things such as serial killers and fighting ranked low on his 'fear' list.

*What part of 'don't think about that' is so hard to understand, Winchester?*

"Do you mind if I play some music?" he asked suddenly, the urge to listen to something loud suddenly overwhelming. Whenever he'd gotten stressed or upset, whether it be from school or training, Dean had always just turned up the music in the Impala. It was one of Dean's more healthy ways of coping(which were few and far between), and Sam could recall many a time when Dean had taken one look at him and just cranked the music up. It was an old fallback that Sam had picked up from his brother, along with the desire for the music to be potentially ear damaging and filled with a guitar.

Gabe shot him a curious look(they had never played music in the Beetle before, had they?), and Sam squirmed slightly as it turned into something more investigative. He suddenly got the feeling that his false confidence hadn't convinced the P.I as well as he'd thought, but Gabe didn't comment on it, only gesturing to the backseat behind them.

"There's a box full of CDs right behind you on the floor," the P.I started, swerving into another lane with barely a second thought, much less with his blinker on. Sam waited until the man had finished his violent lane change(why, oh why, did he have to drive so recklessly?) before moving.

It took some contortion, but Sam was flexible, and Gabe accommodating as he leaned far enough towards the left for the Winchester to reach the back without leaving his seat much.

Sam took in the red suit jacket hanging on a hook on Gabe's side to the half-filled bottle of whiskey rolling around on the ground before deciding that, while he had gotten almost used to the clutter of Gabe's car(he couldn't blame the man considering his half nomadic lifestyle), things definitely seemed a bit odder than before. Granted, he didn't look in the back seat much, but he was pretty sure the crate filled with what looked like the contents of Gabe's coffee table and a single pair of hot pink, fuzzy handcuffs had not been there before.

*I'm not even going to ask. I'm not.*

He managed to grab the unassuming plastic bin labeled with 'EPIC MUSIC' in hot pink Sharpie and arched an eyebrow at the words. Sam figured that since he couldn't voice his questionable fascination with Gabe's other stuff, he would do so with this.

"'Epic music'?" he asked with amusement, and Gabe flushed.

"I was in middle school, all right? One of my better foster parents was the manager of a thrift store, and hardly anyone ever bought the CDs, so I got to look through them and take what I liked," he explained, aura going from embarrassed to nostalgic as he spoke, "My music taste was pretty polarizing, as I listened to either 80's synth-pop and rock or 2000s R&B, but there's some better stuff in there."
"80's synth-Gabe, what the actual *hell,*" Sam said as he flicked through the CDS. The collection was in complete disarray, as the cases were either damaged in some way, cracked, or completely labelless. There were a few, Sam noted with interest, that seemed to be mixtapes and a lot more that didn't even have cases at all. The bin was bulging with all the music though, and it practically radiated Gabe's aura, which meant the man had had it for a long time and carried a fondness for it.

*Makes sense. Seeing how old some of these are, he must've been building up his collection for years.*

"You don't *have* to listen to any of it, but I *hate* radio stations. All they play is ads and they never, *ever* play the songs I want," Gabe grumbled viciously.

Sam grimaced. Radio stations in Lawrence were pretty awful, and he tended to use Spotify whenever possible, so he could understand the man's distaste for it.

A caseless CD caught Sam's eye, and he pulled it out with interest. It was labeled, "9th Woes," in the same hot pink Sharpie as the bin, but nothing else.

"What gave you the woes in 9th grade?" Sam asked curiously, and Gabe glanced over before doing a double take, his golden aura moving faster about him.

"Oh no, anything but *that,*" he said, and Sam glanced down at the innocent looking CD, his curiosity now increased tenfold. What on Earth could possibly be on the CD?

*Maybe some really embarrassing emo stuff? Everyone had that phase, right?*

Sam was kind at heart though, and kinder to Gabe than he was with regular people, so he only frowned and set the CD aside. He was going to listen to it one day though, that was for sure.

"Fine," he mumbled, pouting slightly before his interest perked up, "Oh, *definitely* this."

He hid the CD case with one large hand, ignoring Gabe's whine as he put the CD in and muted the volume until he skipped to the track he wanted.

"Sugar We're Goin Down" started playing, and Gabe's aura changed to shades of pink ivories of pleasant surprise.

"Fall Out Boy?" he asked, and the Winchester only shrugged before turning up the volume and singing along.

Sam had an alright singing voice, though he had been informed that he sounded better when drunk(which was questionable in his opinion). Dean had the better voice out of the two of them despite all of his denials, and Sam was pretty rusty due to the fact that he hadn't sung along to anything in a *long* while. However, the Winchester couldn't bring himself to feel embarrassed, because for one, he really just felt like singing, and two, Gabe's aura wasn't reproaching in the slightest. In fact, it only took a moment for the P.I to set down his soda and sing along. *That* wasn't what shocked Sam so much though(it was a very Gabe thing to do after all).

What shocked Sam the most was that Gabe had a great singing voice.

Sam stopped singing for a moment, gaping at the man as he sang along perfectly.

*Holy shit.*

"What's wrong Sam-a-lam?" Gabe asked after a few moments, turning to look at him, and the Winchester shook his head slightly before grinning.
"Dude, you sound amazing! You've been holding out on me!" Sam exclaimed, feeling an almost undue amount of excitement at the new discovery he'd made. He couldn't help himself though; Sam had always had an appreciation for singing ever since Dean had sung for him to help him fall asleep when they were younger and stuck in shitty motels.

Gabe blushed and ducked his head a bit, "Aw, I'm not that great kiddo."

"Uh, yes you are," the Winchester insisted as he rewound the track so they could start at the beginning. The immense stress that had begun to accumulate when Sam had thought of his scholarship and college fell away as he sang along with Gabe.

Racing down the freeway with Gabe through the night reminded Sam of his high school days, where he'd go out with friends and just be a teenager as they all wasted the night away, or when he'd go out with Jess to a house party back when they still dated and they'd somehow find themselves in the back of a car with people they barely knew, either drunk or just high on life. The feeling was intensified by the almost empty quality to the roads they sped down, and the millions of lights that kept Lawrence illuminated just about 24/7.

This was somehow better than all those late night outings though. Gabe's voice was great, and neither of them were drunk(Gabe had only had one martini at the Roadhouse, which hadn't done jack shit to his system; Sam could tell by the man's aura). Sam couldn't put his finger on what exactly made this better than all the other late night drives he'd gone on, but it just was.

Halfway back home, they switched over to Imagine Dragons(which had also startled the P.I as much as Sam's original choice of Fall Out Boy had; apparently, Gabe hadn't anticipated his music taste to be so 'youthfully alternative rock'). Sam had punched Gabe in the shoulder for that, but the older man only laughed and smiled in response, eyes gleaming as he suddenly rolled down the windows. The P.I immediately regretted his decision and shrieked as the cold wind blew in with a roar. All the clutter that Gabe kept in the Beetle suddenly came to life, either trying to escape through the windows or leap over previously unbreachable obstacles like chairs and legs. Sam nearly cracked a rib laughing as the man struggled to roll them back up, all while swearing impressively.

"How did you forget it's February?" the college student asked between gasped fits of laughter, and Gabe huffed, his once carefully swept back hair now a windblown mess framing his face. His eyes were bright with mirth as he smirked.

"Didn't you realize Sammy? It's March 1st."

What?

Sam blinked, then checked his phone. Ignoring the few texts and notifications he had from people he barely spoke to and social media he barely used, he realized that Gabe was right.

Somehow, the changing of the month felt more important right then that Sam thought it would've been if he hadn't been with Gabe.

The cathartic release that Fall Out Boy had given Sam changed to something more mellow as they approached East Center. They had finally managed to get the windows up(Gabe had swerved into the neighboring lane whilst doing so; luckily it was empty and his blatant traffic violation went unnoticed), and despite the now ridiculous mess the duo was surrounded by, there was an air of calm contentment in the car. Sam had fallen to simply humming along as Gabe continued to sing(Night Visions was their best album Sammo, and you can't convince me otherwise.), and while the Winchester wasn't sleepy in the slightest, he suddenly found that if he somehow never made it back
to his apartment, then falling asleep in the Beetle wouldn't be the end of the world.

_definitely not_, Sam thought as he watched Gabe sing with an unwittingly fond smile on his face.

Of course, all good things come to an end, and Gabe eventually pulled up in front of Sam's apartment building. The disappointment the Winchester felt as the music was reluctantly turned down caught him off guard, and he couldn't help but slump dejectedly as Gabe put the car in park.

"This sucks," Sam said in a rare show of teenage angst. He couldn't help it though; the carefree fun was now officially over, and now he'd have to go back to his apartment and get back to reality.

Gabe laughed at what was probably an epic bitch face of his, and Sam only scowled harder to hide the smile threatening to ruin his expression.

"I think that's the most you've ever sounded like a nineteen year old, Sammo," he remarked, his amused grin slipping into a half-smile as the man tilted his head, "It's so odd. Sometimes I think you're older because you're so mature, but at the end of the day, this is the kind of stuff you should be doing. Just having some innocent fun."

Sam shifted in his seat, fidgeting as Gabe seemed to dissect him with his eyes. It wasn't that the P.I was making him uncomfortable; it was more the fact that in some way the man's words hit home. He was nineteen, despite the fact that he was basically his nephew's third parent and working himself to the bone as a waiter just so he could make all the loose ends meet. It made him think about the frustration he'd felt lately at his life and all the responsibilities that had piled up on his shoulders.

Helping Gabe with the case had originally been a distraction for him; his weird attempt at feeling the way he'd felt tonight driving with Gabe. While it had worked at first (attempting to solve a mystery was quite fun in its own way), the case was getting too serious and convoluted to be just a fun little pastime anymore.

_I've never been normal, so why would normal pastimes do anything for me?_ Sam thought, _Even in high school partying and going out with friends never felt this great, and things with Jess crashed and burned._

Sam pointedly ignored the fact that a normal pastime like singing and driving had worked out perfectly fine with _Gabe._

"I've got things to do," the college student said lamely, furrowing his brow slightly as he tried to phrase his jumbled thoughts in a way to somehow explain, "I can't really afford to waste time like this all the time."

There was a faint sad look to Gabe's face now, which only made Sam truly uncomfortable now. It was sort of like the guilty feeling Sam got when he knew he'd disappointed someone, but different at the same time.

"Oh Sam. This isn't wasting time; this is having fun," the P.I said, his aura feeling like the sun now as he spoke, "I get that you have more responsibilities than the average person your age; I definitely feel you on that, but that doesn't mean you can't have fun like this."

Sam wasn't sure what to make of the P.I's words. For one, the way the man had said his name had sent an involuntary shiver down his spine. He didn't think anyone says it in such a beseeching tone of voice. All of his other words were a whole different ballpark, though Sam thought he could understand what Gabe was getting at.

"Well, then I'll just have fun like this with you," he announced, both honestly and in a desperate
attempt to get the sad tint of blue out of the man's aura, not to mention his face. That look hadn't been there before.

Something flickered across Gabe's aura; too fast to be read, but intense enough that Sam managed to notice it before it flitted away.

"Not that I'm mad, but...what about your other friends?" he asked, and Sam snorted.

"Sure I have other friends, but I'm not as close to any of them as I am with you, except for Kevin really. I don't know if you've noticed, but he's not exactly a 'roll down the windows in 30 degree weather' type of guy," the college student said with a half smile.

Gabe snorted, "Yeah, you have a point there."

"I tend to always have points," Sam quipped, earning an eye roll from the P.I.

"Go to sleep, kiddo."

Sam arched an eyebrow before shrugging nonchalantly and settling back into his seat. The Beetle may have been small, but the seat itself wasn't so bad if he ignored fact that his legs were folded up like pretzels beneath the dash.

"Oh, all right-"

"In your apartment," Gabe said, smacking his shoulder, and the Winchester pouted.

"Fine, I see how it is," he grumbled but grinned as he grabbed his bag.

"Good night Gabe. Will I see you tomorrow?"

Gabe tilted his head and smiled fondly.

"Tomorrow night, so I can continue some alcohol-based fun with my favorite bartender," the P.I said with a cocky smile, "Get some rest, kiddo, and call me if you need anything, ok?"

Call me if you need anything.

Sam wasn't sure why that statement struck him so hard tonight (or early morning). Maybe because no one had ever really said that in such a genuine manner like Gabe besides his brother. Whatever it was, he found that the desire to just stay in the Beetle and avoid reality was becoming more and more compelling.

Maybe it was just the drive. Or all the stress finally addling my brain. Or Gabe's aura working its weird mojo on me.

Gabe's aura was particularly bright; pastel shades shimmering against the backdrop of vivid gold, all of the different hues of ivory and mint green and peaches somehow melding together without muddying the whole aura. It was like standing in front of the sun, on the edge of being overwhelmed by the heat and light, but not quite there. In the face of all that emotion and color, it was entirely possible Gabe's aura could be causing his weird feelings. Sam had already found that Gabe's aura could make him giddy, or prone to spilling his guts, or comfort him when he needed it.

He didn't think the P.I's aura was the reason though, but then, Sam was quickly discovering that he wasn't so sure of a lot of things when it came to Gabe.

"That goes for you too," Sam retorted, shoving aside his thoughts in favor of focusing on the present,
"You know you can call me too, right?"

Gabe smiled, and his aura flared in such a way that it felt like it was smiling along with him.

"Of course kiddo. Now, get inside before I decide to whisk you away on part 2 of crazy driving and singing."

"That wouldn't be so bad," the Winchester quipped, but he opened his door, and Gabe turned on the ignition as cold air swirled around Sam and into the car.

"Good night Sam, and don't worry so much! It'll give you frown lines!" were Gabe's parting words, accompanied by a cheeky grin and a thumb to his forehead, just like the way Sam had taken to smoothing the lines from the P.I's head whenever he started fretting.

The sight made Sam smile, and then Gabe was gone into the depths of Lawrence, leaving him standing on the curb like an idiot in the cold. Sam shivered and turned on his heel, rushing towards his building to get out of the bitter night. It had been a long night, as nights seemed to have become whenever he spent them with Gabe, and he had no doubt tomorrow would be just the same.

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Woah, I'm back! Later than I wanted, but the first week of school hit me like a truck. A very large, high speed truck in the form of 'stress' and 'work'. Anyone out there relate?

Before I make an important announcement about Chromaticity, I just wanted to thank you guys for over **2,000** hits! I never anticipated anything like that when I first posted, and I hope that many more will come as we progress through this story.

Now, on the announcement. I've been thinking on this for a while, and I've come to a decision regarding the future of this story, which is...

**Chromaticity will become a series!**

No, you haven't read that wrong (though I might be batshit crazy for it). Considering how large this story has gotten and would get if I didn't break things up, and how much plot I haven't even hit yet that I want to, I've decided that 'Chromaticity' will stop at Chapter 20. This story will pick back up in a second installment whose title will be revealed at the end of this first story, so don't fret! This story is in no way getting abandoned; I love it too much to do that to you guys.

Why Chapter 20 you might ask? Well, it's the best cut off point plot-wise, and 20 is a nice number to end off on. The plan is to end on Chapter 20, take a break to get some plot together and a game plan in place, post some other stuff in said break, and then come out with the second 'book' after I've gotten everything together. I won't make you wait like 3 years for 'Book 2', but it might take a couple months for me to get it out.

Questions, comments, concerns? Leave your comments and I'll answer them! If not, just enjoy this 10k chapter, and all the Sabriel in the second half. And the Destiel in the first half too lmaooo.

(Fun fact: The chapter title is a lyric in 'Sugar We're Goin Down Swinging' if you didn't catch it. I couldn't resist what with all the music references I already had.)

(Fun fact#2: The second half of this chapter was brought to you by a sleepless night before my first day of school, and was originally going to be a lot angstier. I decided against it though, and lo and behold, we now have a much 'funner' chapter.)
Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Chapter 18: Hereditary

Fire consumes all. Orange and yellow flames roar as the choking black smoke clouds everything. Wood crackles and pops, crumbling as the walls around him become enveloped in flames.

A cry for help, a slumped body in a doorway. Screams chase him, echoing as he tries to find his way out. Where was the exit? He knew this place; knew where it was.

He knew this place-

"Please step away from the doors as you depart onto Kingsford Station on your right..."

The automated voice was familiar, cutting through the flashing images of fire and charred wood. Sam jolted in his seat, half-lidded eyes flying open as the intense heat and smoke faded away, replaced by the stale, cool scent of the subway and a stabbing headache. The familiar press of a thousand lingering auras swirled around him as he looked around the dingy train car and its passengers, all of them adding their own hues to the mess in the air. Someone with a blue-green aura was taking up the armrest to his left, and someone with a very vivid tangerine aura had been standing in front of him, but they were now gone, their aura all that was left.

Did I just have a vision on the subway?

He groaned quietly (the headache was a resounding yes on the vision question), pinching the bridge of his nose as the bright sears of color the flames in his vision had left behind faded away. The vision (it was almost concerning how normal it sounded in his head) felt familiar in a way, and Sam thought he might've had it before in his first sleepwalking episode, but he couldn't be sure. He'd seen a lot of stuff in that first episode, and he barely remembered half of it.

What was most disconcerting to the Winchester was that the vision had come so suddenly. Sam was sure he'd been fine a minute ago, if a little tired from the night before. Then all he'd seen was fire, and it was like he was there. Whenever there was.

Well, now I know that I can have a premonition at the drop of a hat. Hopefully I didn't act weird or anything like I do when I sleepwalk.

Judging by the disinterested faces around him, Sam was sure he'd been granted that small mercy. There would have probably been a lot more looks and whispers if he had tried to scratch his chest into pieces like he had at Gabe's place.

His hand automatically went to his phone at the thought of the P.I, a small smile gracing his face. They'd certainly outdone themselves last night in terms of wild shenanigans, and that was saying something.

Sam couldn't bring himself to text Gabe though. How did you say 'Hey, I've started having premonitions lately and I'm pretty sure this one I just had on the train is of a place I know getting burned down. Any ideas?' without sounding crazy?

I don't, the Winchester thought wryly as he grabbed his stuff and slipped out the closing doors before
he missed his station (he'd almost forgotten about work), There's no way of phrasing it without sounding like I'm a lunatic, and I don't want Gabe thinking I'm more of a goddamn nutcase than I've already shown him.

He winced as he thought of all the embarrassing and extremely questionable moments he'd had over the week with the P.I, from the flash drive he'd 'deduced' being in the hidden pocket to the way he'd gone full aura-seeing mode in Castiel's apartment.

Yeah, no way I can tell him this. It'll be the nail in the coffin.

Sam emerged back out onto the street and sighed, watching his breath condense in the chilly March morning. There was nothing to it; he'd just keep it to himself and soldier on like he always did when the going got tough. It was that attitude that got him his full ride to LU, and it'd be the attitude that got him through this. This being a serial killer on the loose, the sudden ability to see parts of the impending future, and an exuberant P.I with eyes too gold for his own good.

A little trickier than filling out scholarship forms, but still manageable. At least the serial killer won't ask me what my future aspirations are in short essay form.

The Roadhouse was already bustling by the time the Winchester stumbled in a few minutes shy of ten. Since he worked such late shifts as a bartender and bouncer on the weekends, he wasn't required to help out with opening hour, hence his rather abrupt entrance into the bustling breakfast rush. If Sam had been a little more aware, he'd have come in through the back, but he'd been too caught up in his thoughts to consider it.

Auras washed over him liked he'd taken a dip in warm water, all of the conflicting hues united by the underlying Roadhouse atmosphere. Combined with the rich scent of food and the loud conversations that all merged into a loud buzz of noise, it was quite the contrast from the relatively quiet walk he'd made from the station. There were enough people that Sam knew he'd be on his toes until noon, but not enough that he felt overwhelmed by it. He'd worked some pretty crazy days at the Roadhouse though, and if he was being honest, not much could faze him as a waiter anymore. He'd spent too long working at the Roadhouse to be intimidated by something as measly as breakfast hour.

Sam yawned and rubbed one eye as he walked around the counter, where Ellen herself was busy working at the register. Breakfast times were always times when Ellen would be out, and today was no different. Her hair was pulled back into a messy bun, but since her clothes were nice and she wasn't wearing an apron, she wasn't helping out. Judging by her relatively calm aura, it was because her help wasn't needed, which meant Sam was right about the crowd being manageable.

"Morning Ellen," he greeted, and the brunette owner replied in response, arching one eyebrow as she looked up from the register.

"You look like crap," she said bluntly, her marble aura flaring momentarily in concern (her aura was prone to flaring like that whenever she spoke to him though, so Sam usually turned a blind eye to it), "Everything was alright with Dean, right?"

Sam nodded, stifling another yawn as one of the part-timers slipped past him with an armful of napkins and a lime green aura. There were so many different part-timers with different working schedules that sometimes all he registered of them was their specific aura. Lime green turned the corner to enter the kitchen, passing by coral pink, who moved further down the counter on the right to take plates from that side of the Roadhouse.

"Yeah, he just ended up crashing at a friend's place," he explained, and Ellen hummed as her aura settled around her in satisfied pink and white swirls.
"That boy's always getting himself into trouble," she tsked, the cash drawer popping open with a ding as she pressed a button, "It's a good thing you're around to keep him reined in a bit, isn't it?"

The waiter hummed, even as internally Sam thought that out of the two of them, he was probably the one getting into the most trouble lately. A serial killer trumped illegal fighting rings, right?

Ellen sighed before shaking her head slightly as she changed the subject, "Get yourself on the floor as quick as you can, Sam. I've got Becky out here tossing syrup around like it's confetti, and I think Meg's going to strangle her before noon if you don't curb their attitudes like you usually do."

Sam nodded, only half registering Ellen's words as he walked away before he paused comically and turned to look back at her.

Wait a second. Meg?

"Meg's here?" he asked, and the brunette looked up with a half smirk, still counting bills in her ever-efficient manner.

"That's what I said, didn't?"

"Yes ma'am," the Winchester replied dutifully before his mind registered the sentence before Meg was mentioned, "You, er, said Becky was here too?"

"And Anna," she added helpfully, her smirk turning into a more piteous expression for a brief moment before she became amused again. Ellen knew very well of his struggles with Anna and Becky, and while she sometimes intervened, Sam was sure she secretly thrived on the drama. The work environment with him and the girls on the same shift was akin to that of a soap opera; probably better if they were working a rush. There was simply no other explanation for why she put up with them otherwise.

Sam groaned, running both of his hands through his hair before turning towards the employee room, Ellen's laugh echoing behind him as he trudged down the hall.

Ellen is evil. Pure evil. Becky and Anna? And since when is Meg back at work?

He had to admit, he was relieved to hear that Meg was getting back into her routine. She was feisty and loved to mouth off, but Sam had to admit there was a sort of humor to her acrid personality and comments, and she wasn't a horrible person at heart. Meg certainly made his shifts go by in a more spectacular fashion, and if he had to be honest, he'd pick her to work with out of all three girls. She was the only one that didn't stalk him creepily or try to get in his pants, and despite her griping and groaning, was probably the best at doing her job too.

Luckily, nobody was in the break room when Sam entered, which meant he managed to clean up and get his apron on in peace. By the time he'd gotten himself ready to go, he even felt confident that he could dodge the twin terrors today if he was quick on his feet and feigned business.

That's right, I'll just keep bringing out plates, and there's no way either of them could talk to me then. Ellen would fuss them out, and I can slip away and live to see another day.

Sam's clever little plan was dashed into smithereens however when, upon exiting the break room, his first terror came in the form of Becky Rosen.

Oh no.

To make matters worse, it seemed today she was feeling particularly plucky, as instead of squeaking
and scampering away, she remained to try to (horror upon all horrors) speak with him.

Where's Death when I need him?

"Oh hi Sam!" the blonde said enthusiastically, eyes widening as she realized that the stacked tower of mugs she was carrying was teetering ominously.

Sam managed to weave to the side and steady the tower with a hand, simultaneously saving himself from running into her and the Roadhouse from losing what looked like ten mugs. Ellen was alright with an occasional broken plate or mug, but ten? She'd skin the entire staff and hang them up to dry, hapless part-timers included.

"Uh, hi Becky," he greeted reluctantly, wincing as her pale pink and goldenrod aura practically exploded around her in intense excitement at his acknowledgment.

Here we go.

"I, uh didn't get a chance to talk to you last night," she started, biting her lip and looking at him with an ardent expression that Sam didn't like one bit, "You rushed out. What happened?"

"I had family issues," Sam said curtly, resisting to the urge to cringe away from Becky's aura, which, while unimpressive in both size and color, always seemed intent on trying to latch on to him whenever it got the chance. Today was no different, and the Winchester shifted uncomfortably as a tendril of baby pink tried to slide across his shoulder(ew, ew, ew), "I really should get to work..."

"Was it Dean?" Becky asked, inching forward as the unfortunate Winchester sidled back in mild shock.

Where did she get this weird boost of confidence from?

Her eyes were even wider, the blue unsettling as she clearly wanted to hear more. While Becky hadn't been around back when Dean had worked at the Roadhouse, his brother had come in often enough that Sam was sure Becky knew just what he looked like, and besides, he was sure Becky knew everything there was to know about him. Something like an older brother wouldn't slip past her at all.

She tried to follow me on Instagram after all. That's why I went private on there in the first place!

"He always looks so roughed up whenever I see him. What's up with that?" she continued, barrelling through his thoughts unknowingly.

Her tone of voice suggested that she didn't really care why he was roughed up, and considering her aura, Becky quite enjoyed the tough, street-wise exterior Dean sported.

Why can't she be obsessed with Dean like everyone else and their mother is so I can foist her onto him?

Sam reined in his thoughts and bit his lip, debating whether or not he could slip past her and dart into the kitchen(where she blessedly wasn't allowed by Benny after the Bacon Incident) to hide out indefinitely.

"Er-

"Well, if it isn't the Roadhouse's personal Green Giant being harassed by one of his little fans. Don't you have somewhere to be, Becky dear? Those mugs won't put themselves away."
The wash of violet that accompanied the drawl was weak, but there, and it was enough for Sam, who practically sagged with relief as he looked past Becky to see Meg standing a few feet away.

*Thank you, God, or whoever's out there.*

Meg was a little pale, both in her face and in her aura, but her tongue was still as sharp as ever as she glared down Becky with her dark eyes. With her crossed arms, planted boots, and trademark sneer, it was almost as if she was back to normal, and it certainly seemed to fool Becky, who shuffled back a bit.

"Umm," the blonde started, eyes flicking between Meg and him, clearly at a loss for what to do. It was obvious she wanted to stay to 'talk' to him, but her fear of Meg won out in the end, and with a much smaller, subdued aura, Becky slunk down the hall.

"You should get a restraining order against her or something," Meg remarked, stepping forward to take Becky's place, and Sam shrugged a shoulder, dismissing the blonde waitress quickly from his mind.

"Already got one against someone else. They're a hassle to get."

Meg's eyes narrowed slightly, but she didn't say anything more on the subject as she walked into the break room, clearly expecting him to follow.

They both sat across from each other at the small table, and Sam waited expectantly as Meg gazed at him with an unreadable look in her eyes. Her aura gave away a bit more of her thought process; she was studying him, the shade of violet evident beneath the current of anxiety and paranoia that was growing more and more commonplace among the violet every time he saw her.

"Kyle's not going to let me go so easy," she finally said, her statement breaking the silence that had been growing between them abruptly, "He hasn't tried to contact me at all since I took my shit and went to stay with Benny, and it doesn't sit right with me."

Sam nodded. While the confirmation from Meg was what he'd expected, it didn't make him feel any better. Retaliation from a prominent gang member such as Kyle could come in any number of forms; none of them good for Meg.

*If he's mad enough, he might even take it out on people he thinks are close to her. She was close to Cas, and Kyle knows it. Maybe even Benny if Kyle knows she's staying with him.*

"Any ideas of what he might do?" he asked, and the waitress shrugged.

"Kyle's not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but when he gets mad enough, he'll go to his underlings for ideas," she said, frowning a bit, "And some of *them* are smart. It's already been a few days now, which means he's definitely coming up with some kind of plan."

The ghost heat of fire flickered against the back of Sam's neck, making his skin prickle. It was like his Winchester gut instinct, or maybe it was just his mind playing tricks on him.

*No way, Sam thought, It can't be a coincidence. But what does some random fire with no known time and location have to do with Kyle?*

"Where the hell are you Meg? I got three tables that need waiting!"

Ellen's voice disrupted Sam's thought process, and the waiter cursed mentally(every time he got close to figuring out it kept *slipping away*) as Meg rolled her eyes and pushed away from the table.
"Coming!" she yelled from the doorway before looking back at him. Her aura swirled violet around her, drifting like the cigarette smoke she enjoyed so much.

"You're an idiot, Winchester," she stated, though the tone in her voice was almost...fond. Sam was caught off guard by it, as in all the time he'd known Meg, he didn't think he'd heard her sound anything close to genuinely fond, least of all towards him, "But...thanks, I guess."

She whirled on her heel and left, her words hanging in the air. Sam realized it was the closest he'd get to a genuine thanks for his assistance(what little he'd helped her with) in getting away from Kyle, and as he stood to get ready for work, he decided that it was probably the most genuine Meg could be.

He didn't mind too much though. There were plenty of gruff people in his life, and half-thanks and short words of acknowledgment were sometimes all they could manage.

... It was just past eleven(11:03 to be exact)when Lisa and Ben appeared, coasting in on the tail end of the breakfast rush. Sam knew this because he had been looking at the clock in an attempt to avoid eye contact with Anna, who was doing her very best to try and get his attention after he'd managed to slip away from her for the third time that morning. Anna, unlike Becky, had no qualms about approaching him and was good at doing it under the guise of work so she could avoid getting fussed out by Ellen.

"Unca Sam!" Ben called out, running up to the counter as Lisa ambled along behind him. He was wearing the aviator jacket he'd gotten for Christmas and had the messiest mop of hair he'd seen yet on his nephew, "Momma said I can have pancakes today!"

"Good morning to you too, Ben," Sam said, seizing the distraction his young nephew provided with both hands(even Anna had some limits; he hadn't been harassed by her around a kid yet), "Don't trip over your shoelaces."

Ben barely spared a glance down at his untied shoes(Sam was disappointed, but not surprised), choosing instead to pick a stool at the counter and drag it out like his life depended on it. The Winchester shot a look at Lisa, who simply sighed and rolled her eyes before picking her son up and plopping him down on the stool. She looked much more put together than her son, but also more tired than usual.

"I just tied these for you," she tutted, and Ben shrugged in a very Dean-like manner as he fixed his attention on Sam. His aura was on the more lavender side today, though steely blues that resembled the atmosphere of the Roadhouse flitted through the purple in a strangely repetitive pattern. It was definitely a change he'd have to get used to, and Sam was already trying to work out the nuances of Ben's new aura as the four-year-old stared him down.

"Can I have juice?" he asked finally, shoelaces the last thing on his four-year-old mind. At the sound of 'juice', his aura flared briefly in a color the waiter instinctively knew to represent hunger.

"Sure, you can have juice," Sam said, amused by Ben's single-minded focus on food(that was Dean through and through), "How about you Lisa?"

"Oh, just a coffee," the brunette responded, looking up from Ben's now tied shoes. Her cobalt aura flashed a dark color Sam knew to be worry, and her eyes darted to Ben before she bit her lip and continued, "And a few minutes to talk if you can spare it."
Sam arched an eyebrow before glancing at his nephew, who was clacking the salt and pepper shakers together and clearly not paying attention to them.

Lisa's worried...about Ben? But what for?

"Sure, I can take a break. As soon as Ben get his pancakes," he said, watching as the four-year-old perked up at the mention of food, his aura matching the cute head movement.

Lisa nodded, clearly relieved, and Sam moved away to get their beverages, barely sparing Anna a second glance as he passed her on his way to the coffee station, let alone Becky skulking by the register.

**What's wrong with Ben? Is he sick? Did he do poorly in school? Is someone bullying him? Do preschoolers even know what bullying is? That's dumb; of course they do, four-year-olds can be mean. Maybe it has to do with Dean?**

"You'll permanently wrinkle your forehead if you screw your brow up any harder, Sam, and that would be a damn shame. What's got your panties in a twist?"

Sam nearly poured scalding coffee on himself as he jerked himself from his thoughts. Jo had come up beside him, Caribbean sea aura cascading like crystalline waves as she gave him a doe-eyed look of concern. He hadn't even noticed she'd come into the Roadhouse at some point; he was so busy juggling the twin terrors.

"Nothing," he responded automatically, and the blonde harrumphed before propping a hand on her hip. Judging by the pencil behind her ear and the calculator in her other hand, she had come out from the break room to grab a cup of coffee before going back to her homework and had run across him instead.

"Uh huh. Does it have to do with Lisa and Ben?"

They both looked over to the pair, who were now being entertained by Ellen. Lisa and Ellen had never been best friends, especially when she and Dean had initially split, but today seemed to be a good day for them as their conversation seemed to be amicable. Besides, there was no way Ellen could be anything but soft when Ben was around, as everyone was pretty sure she saw him as a surrogate grandson.

"Maybe," Sam muttered, and Jo nodded knowingly before patting his shoulder.

"Well, whatever it is can't be awful," she quipped in her 'it-can-be-much-worse' tone of voice. He was proven correct as she continued with, "Not as bad as Anna and Becky."

The Winchester groaned as Jo cackled, sounding eerily like her mother.

*They must both watch soap operas together and dissect the plots in some fucked up mother-daughter bonding.*

"Where are they?" he asked, looking around furtively while he prepared Lisa's coffee. He could see Meg heading back to the kitchen with an empty tray, but he couldn't immediately pick out a certain blonde or redhead anywhere.

*Losing sight of them is about as safe as losing sight of a shark in the ocean.*

"Becky's somewhere in the back and Anna's in the bathroom. Probably nursing that cold shoulder you just gave her," Jo said helpfully, "I'll run interference while you discuss things with Lisa."
"Thanks," Sam said, sighing with relief, "You're a lifesaver."

"I am, aren't I?" the blonde said, flashing a self-assured smile as her blue-green aura gleamed happily.

Now in a much more relaxed, if nervous, mood, Sam left with Lisa's coffee and Ben's orange juice and arrived in time to see Ellen pat Lisa's hand comfortingly. Her aura reflected the genuine emotion behind the action, but neither of the women showed any sort of hint as to what could've brought it about in their expression or aura as he approached.

"Thanks, Sam," Lisa said, wrapping her hands around the mug as Ben grasped his juice eagerly.

"The food should be out in a few minutes. Make sure you take your break soon Sam," Ellen said, shooting him a meaningful look before leaving.

Now Ellen knows something. What the hell's going on?

"Everything ok?" Sam asked, feeling his Winchester gut instinct twinge a bit as he looked at Ben and Lisa. He considered the two of them his family, and he didn't like it when either of them ran into problems.

"Yup. Are the pancakes coming?" Ben asked eagerly as Lisa's aura flashed dark with worry again.

"In a few minutes buddy," the waiter said, feeling even more anxious now. He couldn't detect anything wrong with Ben's aura besides the new color change, and even if he was still getting used to that aspect of it, Sam would've been able to easily detect any sort of anomaly that could be the cause of all this worry.

Maybe Ben's an indirect aspect to whatever's going on?

"Why don't you tell Uncle Sam what happened last night?" Lisa said suddenly, eyes flicking from him to her son.

Ben pulled a face before propping his chin in one hand, the glass of orange juice clamped tight in the other.

"Dunno," he muttered, brow crinkling as he scowled down at the countertop. The switch from hungry and excited to disgruntled and moody was instantaneous, his aura turning stormy to match.

Sam blinked before turning to Lisa, who looked at him helplessly.

"He had these crazy nightmares last night," she started, lowering her voice and shaking her head slightly, "I mean, he's been having them on and off for a little while, but last night was the worst."

"I can hear you," Ben said, glaring at his mother, who glared back with identical eyes.

"You said you would only tell Uncle Sam what happened, which is why I brought you here," Lisa said forcefully, but there was also a bit of something that sounded like hurt in her voice, "So tell him!"

Me? Sam thought, suddenly feeling like he was missing something important.

They gazed at each other for a few uncomfortable seconds before Ben suddenly broke the stare, shaking his head slightly and looking to him. His aura was a deep grayish purple now, flickering with bolts of blue and pink. It was intense, churning with determination and an undercurrent of fear.
that could only come from the ghost memory of the nightmares he must've been having.

"It has to be secret," the four-year-old insisted, slapping a tiny hand down to emphasize his statement, "It's not secret if you're listening too, Momma!"

Lisa flinched, and this time Sam didn't imagine the hurt that rippled through her usually bright blue aura.

"You can tell me in the break room, Ben," he said hurriedly, giving his best attempt at damage control. Sam thought he had a grasp on the situation now, and figured the best thing to do was indulge Ben now and then give him a talking to about respecting his mother, "Do you want pancakes first, or later?"

"Later," Ben said, sticking out his arms to be picked up. Sam obliged him, pulling him over onto the working side of the counter, "Drink some grown-up juice, Momma. It'll make you feel better."

Lisa's face softened a bit at her son's words, and she sighed before acquiescing with a tilt of her head.

Ben's arms tightened around him as Sam brought them to the break room, which was blessedly empty. The waiter rubbed his back, sensing that Ben needed some reassurance as he sat them down in one of the nicer, wooden chairs up against the wall. Sam didn't bother putting his nephew in another seat, as he didn't think Ben was going to let go of his shirt anytime soon. His nephew's aura was soaking into his chest, pressed close in an unconscious attempt to draw some comfort from him.

"So, what's up kiddo?" he asked, what he'd just said only hitting him a few seconds later.

*Kiddo? I've been hanging around Gabe for too long.*

Ben didn't take notice though, his face already set in concentration as he struggled to find the right words to say.

"Unca Sam," he started, "Is Daddy Batman?"

*Huh?*

"What do you mean?" he asked, struggling to decipher Ben's intention behind the question. It was times like these where Sam was strongly reminded that despite his intelligence, Ben was, at the end of the day, a four-year-old.

The funny aspect of Ben's question melted away in a heartbeat though with his next words.

"I saw him, in my dream," he continued, aura swirling around him, "He was using his superpowers like Batman and fighting all the bad guys! And then I saw him with this other man that sounded like he was sick, but he wasn't. Daddy was keeping him safe from the bad men. So is Daddy Batman?"

Ben blinked up at him innocently, oblivious to the way Sam's heart dropped down to his gut.

*It sounds like he's describing...Castiel, but I don't think he's ever met him. Dean would've said something, and there's no way he did. Right?*

"Do you know what the man looked like?" Sam managed to ask asked, but his voice sounded far away as if he was listening to someone else speak.

*Ben's never met Castiel. Which means his dreams-nightmares, aren't normal.*

"Tall like Daddy," the four-year-old responded, frowning slightly, "A long brown coat. And blue."
"A brown...and blue coat?" Sam asked, temporarily distracted from his racing thoughts by the odd detail.

Ben shook his head vigorously, hair swishing around his forehead, causing Sam to have the wild, random thought that he really needed a haircut.

"No, his eyes were blue. They glowed, so I think he was a superhero too!"

"Right," the Winchester said weakly, rubbing Ben's back with a hand as he tried to wrap his mind around the fact that it seemed his nephew was suffering from the same weird dreams that he had been having lately as well, "Ben...do the dreams feel real?"

"Yeah," he responded, suddenly quieting down a bit as he slouched slightly in Sam's lap. His aura took a more blue tone, "Sometimes I don't wake up in bed. Momma got scared, cause I woke up in the bathroom last night, but I don't mean to!"

Shit.

"Of course you don't," Sam said, his next words slipping out in his haste to reassure his nephew, "I don't mean to either."

Brown eyes looked up at him curiously, and the Winchester carded a hand through Ben's hair as he debated his options.

Ben's been getting the same dreams. Which means that it's probably liked to some familial thing, since Dean and I aren't exactly normal, and I've been getting the dreams as well. Lisa probably just thinks they're night terrors, but if Dean and I are like this, then why not Ben?

The more Sam thought about it, the more sense it made(whatever reluctant he was in accepting it). Ben was pure, innocent, and full of potential; he didn't deserve the type of burden he and Dean carried on their shoulders constantly. Sam didn't want him to struggle with the secrets and half lies that he'd tried so desperately to make something normal out of all his life. Would Ben feel the constant nagging of different, even if he shoved it into the back of his mind and buried it deep? Would he feel the pressure of keeping it secret?

Sam knew on some level that he had been dreading something like this. Almost anticipating it in a way, because Ben wasn't like other kids his age, was he? He flipped through his college textbooks and used big words and knew so much more than he let on through that eerie, empathetic way of his. Ben had always picked up on too much, and even if at times his age was apparent, Sam knew that Ben was like them. A Winchester.

And so it goes, Sam thought wryly, Ben really is a Winchester.

Could he tell Lisa? Sam thought maybe(she was logical and accepting, surely she wouldn't react badly), but Dean had never told her the truth behind his 'boxing' career, and this was a whole different can of worms to open. Sure, Sam was sure Lisa suspected there was something off about them(hadn't she always bemoaned how secretive they were?), but she didn't know anything. Besides, he couldn't do this without Dean. Ben was his son, and this involved Dean's secrets too.

Which meant that, for now, he'd have to swear Ben to secrecy. It made Sam feel slightly guilty, but it was for the best. Dean was passed out on Cas's couch now, and it would only be for a couple days at most. As soon as Dean was back on his feet, they could discuss it and let Lisa in, and then they could work to help Ben.

It shouldn't be too hard. Ben's already been reluctant about telling Lisa anything, so I'll just go with
"I've been getting bad dreams too buddy," he explained, "It's my secret too. But now it's ours."

Ben's eyes lit up, and something like relief flooded his aura as he pressed closer to Sam. It felt good, seeing more pinks and purples lighten the worry-filled aura.

"Really?"

"Really," Sam responded softly, feeling his heart twist slightly. Did Ben feel that alone with his dreams?

"So does this mean we're superheroes?" the four-year-old asked, voice slightly muffled as he pressed his face against Sam's chest.

The Winchester hummed, a small smile crossing his face at Ben's simplification of the issue.

"Yeah, something like that. Did you see anyone else in your dreams?"

Ben fiddled with the cuffs of his jacket as he thought. His aura was much more open and receptive now, so Sam waited patiently, as he knew that his nephew would talk.

"I saw a lot of things," he said, "But I can't remember it all. There were lots of different people, and I didn't know all of them. I saw Momma once, at the hospital, saving someone important."

Sam took mental notes as Ben spoke. He hadn't seen Lisa at all in his dreams, not to his recollection at least, which meant he and Ben were seeing different things.

Different points in the future? Are we supposed to see different things, or is it just because we're different people?

"I saw a long hallway, a scary one," Ben continued, "Like in those scary movies I'm not supposed to watch. It went on forever and was all twisty. I think it was a giant basement."

Giant basement? Like the LPD's basement?

"A lot of the places were dark. Except for the place with fire," Ben mused, "There was lots of fire in that one."

Fire.

"Right," Sam said weakly. There was no way Ben's dream of a fire was a coincidence with his, which meant that the fire was important, "Do you know where this place was?"

Ben shook his head, and the Winchester slumped a bit.

Figures neither of us knows which building is getting torched. So much for this vision ability being useful.

Someone knocked softly on the door, and the pair looked up to see Lisa stick her head in slightly. Her cobalt aura was a little dark but much better looking than it had a few minutes ago when he'd last seen her.

"I don't want to interrupt, but..." she started worriedly, only to trail off as Ben scrambled out of Sam's lap to run full force at his mother.
"Hi, Momma! Are the pancakes ready?"

Lisa automatically opened the door wider so Ben could hug her legs, smiling at the much better mood her son was in. A color Sam could only ascribe to motherly love coursed through her aura, and Ben's aura responded by sidling closer to hers.

"Is everything ok?" she asked, looking to Sam, who glanced down at Ben before nodding.

"Yeah, everything's all right. Ben's just been thinking too much about monsters again and wanted to warn me," Sam said, coming up with the little lie easily. It wasn't even that big of a lie either, and he knew he came off as genuine when Lisa visibly relaxed and shook her head.

"Of course. You're so silly, Ben," she said, addressing her son as she ruffled his hair. Ben scowled at the action and ran his hands through it in an attempt to fix it.

"Well, *someone* has to," he said grumpily, tugging down on his fringe in a way that made Sam think of how he tugged on his hair.

The action didn't slip past Lisa, who pinned Sam with a knowing look. The waiter looked away awkwardly and shuffled his feet, his horror only increasing as Ben flicked his hair out of his eyes and smiled bashfully.

*When did he pick up on that of all things?*

"So can I have pancakes now, Momma?"

"Yes, you can have pancakes," Lisa responded fondly, if a bit exasperated, as Ben tugged on the hem of her coat impatiently, "Are you done talking to Uncle Sam?"

"Yup. Unca Sam, it's gonna happen soon," Ben said, looking over his shoulder as he gave his final warning. His dusky aura darkened a bit with his words, exposing how serious the four-year-old was.

Sam had no doubt that his nephew was referring to the fire, despite all the other things they'd talked about. His Winchester gut instinct said so, and that had never been wrong before.

"I got it, buddy," he said, ignoring Lisa's confusion as he stooped to clasp his nephew's shoulders, "Don't worry about it too much, all right?"

"All right," Ben said, completely trusting Sam to handle whatever would come as he smiled at him.

The Winchester nodded before straightening up. Ben couldn't do much about what was going on in Lawrence (he was only four for Christ's sake), and Sam didn't want him having to worry about it any more than he had to.

*I'll have to come clean with Dean about the dreams and sleepwalking, but it can't be helped.*

The three of them walked out of the break room, where Ben darted ahead to meet Ellen, who was waiting by the corner. She took Ben back into the Roadhouse without a word, leaving Sam and Lisa to linger in the hall in an obvious attempt to give them some time to talk.

"Is Ben really ok Sam?" Lisa asked as soon as Ben was gone, her dark eyes imploring as she looked up at him. In the slightly dimmer light of the hall, her blue aura seemed to glow around her.

"You know how Dean sleeps, Lis," Sam started, using her nickname to help soften the blow of his words, "Ben...I think he takes after us Winchesters more than we thought."
Judging by the tightening of her lips, Lisa recalled exactly how tumultuous Dean's relationship with sleep was. She had never been a fan of his sleep habits and had always been vocal about how extremely unhealthy they were.

"Dean never sleepwalked before though," she whispered urgently, crossing her arms, "At least not with me. Did he when he was younger?"

Sam chewed on his lip slightly before deciding that in order to appease Lisa, he'd have to let slip a bit of the truth. Not too much of it though, or else Dean would have his head. He'd always been adamant about keeping as much of their fucked up lives secret from Lisa from the start.

"Not so much him, but me," he confessed, "Well, I am now at least. But I didn't think it would have any connection with Ben."

Lisa blinked, clearly blindsided.

"You're sleepwalking too?" she asked, and the Winchester nodded, tugging on his hair nervously before abruptly aborting the action when Lisa honed in on it.

"Yeah, a bit. Maybe it's a weird family thing or something," he said, trying to ignore the sudden contemplative look on Lisa's face.

"Yeah, maybe," she murmured, before shaking her head slightly and refocusing, "Sam, why didn't you say anything?"

The Winchester shrugged a shoulder, and Lisa sighed, a flash of frustration marring her aura as she rubbed her temples.

"Right. You never tell anyone anything."

Sam couldn't help his slight flinch at her words. That had stung more than a little, and he always hated disappointing Lisa. Back when he'd been a reedy high schooler, he'd thought she was the greatest person ever. She had managed to handle Dean, being a young mother, and her nursing career with grace, and her opinion of him had always been more important to him than he liked to admit.

"Sorry," he muttered, and Lisa shook her head before enveloping him in a sudden hug that had him stepping back a bit in surprise.

"I'm sorry Sam, that was too harsh of me," she apologized, her voice muffled against his chest, "You Winchesters have always been secretive."

Sam hugged her back, absorbing her soft, dark blue aura like a sponge. Lisa's aura may not have been as impressive as Dean's or Gabe's, but it was still just as potent to hug her. He could still recall how caught off guard he'd been the first time she'd hugged him when Dean had brought her home to properly introduce her.

"It's fine," he said, inhaling the scent of her perfume, "But at least you know we can keep a secret."

Lisa giggled a bit, and a very familiar squeak followed from down the hall.

Sam knew who it was before Lisa even pulled away from him. There was only one person he knew that had that pink and goldenrod aura.

Great. Just another thing to add to my problems.
A flash of blonde disappeared around the corner, and Lisa frowned, tilting her head.

"Was that..."

"Becky? Yeah," Sam finished, already feeling a prickle of irritation towards the nosy waitress.

"Is she still harassing you?" Lisa asked disbelievingly, sounding very much like an outraged mom (the look on her face was filled with even more indignation), "You should get a restraining order or something against her! This is ridiculous!"

Lisa snorted at the brunette's clear disapproval of the situation, smiling wryly.

"That's actually the second time today I've been told to get one, but you know I already have one out on Jess."

Lisa's aura darkened visibly at the mention of his ex, and she huffed, crossing her arms tightly. Back when the nasty break up had been fresh between him and Jess, she had been the most outspoken about him doing something proactive against her. In fact, the only reason Sam had even gone through with getting the restraining order was because Lisa had been 100% behind him throughout the whole process.

"What a bitch," she muttered, "I still can't believe she did all of that to you!"

"It is what it is," the waiter said, feeling remarkably unaffected by the mention of Jess (since when had it stopped hurting just to hear her name?), "I don't really think about her much nowadays."

Dark blue lightened visibly in surprise as Lisa stared at him before suddenly breaking out into a Cheshire grin strong enough to instantly put Sam on edge.

Lisa's scary when she gets like this.

"Really? Does a certain P.I have anything to do with it?" she asked coyly, her dark eyes alight with curiosity.

Sam felt his cheeks warm underneath the brunette's scrutiny, and he harrumphed, suddenly feeling defensive as he responded.

"I don't see how Gabe has anything to do with Jess," he said stiffly, and Lisa snorted.

"Uh huh. Even Ben can tell something's going on, and he's four," she said, smirking slightly, "You're smart, Sam. What's really going on between you and your mysterious P.I?"

"Nothing!" Sam exclaimed, even as his stomach lurched at Lisa's insinuations (there was no way he and Gabe were like that), "We're just friends. Besides, there's no way he's interested in me."

"Because he's straight?"

"No, I'm pretty sure he's not completely-wait, why does this even matter? I'm straight!" Sam said, cutting himself off before he let the cunning brunette draw him down that line of interrogation.

"You're not straight," Lisa said, waving a hand dismissively, "Not if you're getting this defensive about Gavin."

"His name's Gabe," Sam corrected curtly, only to groan when Lisa smiled victoriously.

She did that on purpose! Death, where are you?
"As you've just proved my point," she stated smugly, "I think there's more to your adventurous, mystery-solving duo than just friendship. I know you haven't thought about your sexuality much, which is a whole other topic you need to dwell a bit by the way, but I really think there's something going on here. And I know you were really hurt by Jess-"

"Lisa-" Sam started groaning, only to be cut off by a firm shake of the brunette's head.

"No, let me finish Sam," she said, turning more serious, "Jess really messed you up, and you haven't dated anyone since her because you were burned by her so badly. I think that's playing a part in how you're viewing the potential your relationship with Gabe could have. I don't know your true feelings towards him, and I haven't even met him, but you're so happy whenever you've spoken about him that I can't help but think there's something there between the two of you."

She took a breath, "I just want to see you happy Sam, and if Gabe the P.I is who makes that happen, then so be it. Just please don't let what happened with Jess influence all your other romantic relationships. Not everyone's as heartless as her."

Sam stared at Lisa, completely flabbergasted by the uncomfortable truth to her words. Jess had fucked him up (there was no denying it; he wasn't that dense), and he had been reluctant to try again after her, but was it really affecting how he saw Gabe?

Why not? A little voice said in his head. Lisa's right, you've been much happier ever since you met Gabe, and it's not just because crime-solving is fun. And hasn't he shown interest in you? All those colors you've seen in his aura weren't just a coincidence.

The direction his thoughts were taking was entirely foreign and not something he wanted to think about in the Roadhouse of all places (Hell no), which is why he was glad when Lisa smiled knowingly and laughed.

"I pick up on things too, Winchester," she said teasingly, poking fun at the well-known fact that Sam was uncannily observant, "But I think it's safe to say that when it comes to romance, I take the lead."

"Whatever," Sam grumbled, crossing his arms in a weak attempt at defense, "I have to get back to work."

"Of course," Lisa said indulgently, sweeping her long hair behind her shoulder, "I'll leave you to it then Sam. Take care of yourself, all right?"

The stern look she fixed on him promised a painful death if he didn't take care of himself, and Sam gulped slightly. He had no doubt that she was deadly serious.

"I will, Lisa."

"Uh huh," she said doubtfully before shaking her head and walking away, "At least try to, all right? I don't want to have to lecture you every time I see you."

She smiled at him over her shoulder before rounding the corner, leaving Sam standing alone with a whole new set of thoughts filling his head. Strangely enough though, despite all the information he'd had dumped onto him within the course of the morning (Ben having the same dreams as him was definitely something that had come out of the blue), his mind kept focusing back on one thing (or person) in particular.

Gabe.
AUTHOR'S NOTE

Sam is a liar liar, pants on fire. This boy won't take care of himself at all.

Also, I'm back! After about almost a month (not quite, but almost), of horrible school, head colds, and computer issues, I have returned! September was rough, but I've pulled through and managed to get this done. This is actually the third version of this chapter (don't ask about the other two oof), and I got sick of nitpicking with it, so I've given up and finally decided to post what you've just read. Apologies for the quality.

Anyways, I have some announcements! As you've probably noticed, I have made the series like I said I would. It's creatively called 'Chromaticity' and I have to work on the summary, but it's here. It seems weird, writing an actual series, but I've done it!

Second up is the next two chapters. They will be behemoths, as the upcoming one is from Gabe's POV (which you all seem to love and adore), and the last one is, well, the last. Therefore, I'm not sure when they'll be up, but know that when they do go up, you'll have lots to read!

Third is that I've been considering delving into Gabe's POV more, because a lot of you really want to see his perspective on some things that have happened or will happen. It kind of blows my mind, but I think some side fics will come into work. That roof scene back in the beginning of this story seems to be quite popular ;)

Well, that's about it I think. Until the next, readers!
Incendiary

Disclaimer: I don't own Supernatural or any characters affiliated with the show. Now, on to the story!

Warning: Extremely long chapter, so grab something to eat or drink and prepare yourself for a long read!

Chapter 19: Incendiary

Gabe wasn't the most...law-abiding citizen. In his youth, he'd committed more than his fair share in acts of rebellion (vandalism and weed had been particular favorites of his), and he'd always chafed against any sort of rules that had been imposed against him. From the laws of the land everyone had to follow to the absurd house rules some foster families tried to set, Gabe had never been any good at following them, and bending them was a particular skill of his that he'd refined over the years.

With that skill came a skewed sense of morality that would probably seem questionable for a P.I to possess, and at the forefront of it all a complete lack of respect for higher figures of authority. It was the sole reason why Gabe hadn't gone down the traditional path of a detective; as a P.I (and a nomadic one to boot), he was largely his own boss and didn't have to worry about bureaucratic nonsense.

Therefore, he didn't feel terribly bad for swiping a few files from the conference room where Bela had set up her little taskforce. They hadn't locked the door, and really, the boxes were sitting right there. It was practically an open invitation, and as Gabe ducked into a supply closet to quickly skim them and take some pictures, he decided that it wasn't even that big of a crime since it was an open secret in the LPD that he should be on the case anyway.

"Hell, I'm doing everyone a favor," he thought as he flipped through the infuriatingly thin files.

Five minutes later, his deed was done, and Gabe slipped out of the conference room scotch free. The cameras in the surrounding area were down for maintenance (he hadn't even had to bribe Frank to do it; the cameras were down on administration's orders), and it was easy enough to look inconspicuous as he emerged back into the bullpen. Everyone was too busy talking to Bela and the little posse of detectives that were now on the case, and Gabe smirked as he left the bullpen through a side hall that led to a set of back stairs out of the building.

"That's what you get for being so busy preening," the P.I thought vindictively as he entered the stairwell. If Bela didn't have such a big ego, he wouldn't have had the opportunity to rifle through the files.

"Gabe!"

The P.I nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of the voice coming from the shadows, stumbling back slightly as he nearly ran into Garth, who had been waiting behind the door. and the one to hiss his name.

"Holy shit, dude, what's up with the jumpscare?" he asked, heart jackhammering as the young beat cop scratched the back of his neck sheepishly.

"Sorry about that. But it's important we aren't seen," Garth explained, his face uncharacteristically serious as he glanced around furtively.
Gabe tilted his head, his earlier fright forgotten as he took in Garth's tone.

"Serial killer important?" he ventured curiously, and the officer nodded.

"I can't stay for long, but I've got a message for you. Donna and Jody want to meet you at the Starbucks on the corner during lunch break. I don't know any specifics, but they seemed serious," he said, biting his lip before continuing, "Also... I happened to look through the conference room window and saw the board that they've got set up. You know the weird language the killer uses?"

"Enochian, yeah," Gabe said, becoming more and more curious by the second. Garth was usually very upbeat and positive, even if he came across something awful on his patrols. He was also part of the rare group of beat cops that didn't try to wiggle their way into an investigation beyond the natural curiosity everyone possessed. For him to be this serious and actually try to get into an investigation...

The young officer pulled out a slip of paper and handed it to him.

"I thought it looked sort of familiar when I was at WM library, so I talked to Zeke about it," he explained as the P.I. unfolded the paper, "We do so many patrols in so many different sections of Lawrence that it took us a while to figure it out, but I eventually realized that we had seen it before."

"Graffiti," Gabe murmured, finishing the puzzle that Garth had begun as he looked at the neatly written addresses, "These are all locations where you've seen it and dates?"

"Approximately," Garth said, shrugging his shoulders, "Some of them are general locations, and some dates are a little hazy, but I think most of it is pretty accurate. All of the graffiti is either in bright red or black for the most part, and a lot of it is past the Kingsford Parallel."

"Kingsford Parallel?" Gabe asked with a faint frown, "Why does that sound vaguely familiar?"

The officer smiled slightly, "It's a local nickname. Kingsford Street is pretty much the geographical marker for where gang territory begins on the western side of town."

"Right, right," the P.I. murmured, scanning the addresses on the list. He thought Castiel's apartment seemed to be within the vicinity of some of them, which made sense since the Enochian expert lived pretty close to Kingsford Street if he remembered correctly. Before the Crucifier (which was a horrible name for him; Sam was right that the killer would probably be mad about that), he hadn't had to venture in that area much save for the occasional call to a crime scene, which meant that he'd need someone local to help him out.

Sam, he thought automatically, ignoring the accompanying feeling of warmth at the thought of the hard-working waiter as he refolded the paper.

"This is great Garth, but why haven't you given this to Talbot?" he asked. He had a growing suspicion as to why the young cop had come to him with this instead of her, but Gabe wanted to hear Garth's reason for himself.

Garth grimaced, fiddling with his holster as he looked at his toes.

"I did, but she pretty much ignored me," he mumbled, "She told me to stick it in that incoming box they've got outside the conference room because I guess the graffiti locations weren't very high on their 'priority list'. There's a list in the box, but I thought it'd be prudent to give you one as well."

Stupid, Bela. That was really stupid.

Gabe resisted the urge to grind his teeth. Sometimes he wondered if he was the only sane one in the
department for not automatically worshipping the ground that Talbot walked on, but as he looked at
Garth's downcast (and definitely irritated) face, he realized that maybe he wasn't the only one that
wasn't a Talbot groupie.

And since Zeke more than likely knows that Garth has brought this to me, that means that maybe I
now have two beat cops on my side.

"Well, you did good by giving this to me," the P.I said, clapping a hand onto Garth's shoulder
appreciatively, "I had another source inform me of the possibility of graffiti, but not specific locations
like this."

Garth perked right up at the praise, only reinforcing the image of a puppy in Gabe's mind.

"Good luck with the case," the young cop said, a brief shadow flitting across his face as he slipped
by him to leave through the door, "I think you're going to need it."

It was the most ominous Gabe had heard Garth sound, which didn't help ease the itching feeling in
his shoulders that had only grown over the course of the case.

Outside, the early March sun did little to cut through the chill that permeated the air, though at least
Gabe could now see the icy patches that shimmered on the sidewalk. The P.I stuffed his hands in his
pockets and hurried down the street towards his car, which he had managed to throw into a
temporary parking space by the curb in lieu of parking in the police garage. His parking job hadn't
been the best, but as he pulled out sloppily into the street, Gabe couldn't really remember any
instance where his parking could be considered good.

Sam would probably throw a fit if he saw me now, the P.I thought as he sped around the corner fast
enough to send all the items in his back seat careening across his car.

An automatic smile spread across Gabe's face, which he immediately cursed a few seconds later once
he realized what he was doing.

He couldn't help it though. However much he hated to admit it, the...feelings (and ew, he hated using
that term) he had for the ginormous law student were definitely growing. What had once been
something of a lusty crush had developed into something much more softer and sweeter.

And dangerous.

Gabe drove aimlessly, letting the itch steer him like he usually did when he didn't know what else to
do, or didn't care to think too hard on it.

Getting attached to people was bad. It always ended badly, and he'd been burned enough that
avoiding romantic relationships was the best route. He liked to move around too much, and people
never really managed to hold his interest in that aspect for long. Why bother with romantic wiles
when he could just sleep with them and move on? Romance was something that happened to other
people; things like falling in love, sweet nothings, and all the other bullshit movies and books liked to
focus on, and if there was one thing that Gabe Milton would not touch with a ten-foot pole, it
was love.

It was different with Sam though. There were so many layers to his character and who he was that
Gabe couldn't help but be drawn to him and want to stick around if only to see what Sam was
hiding. He'd always been too curious for his own good, and Sam was the biggest mystery of a
person he'd met yet.

Who was he really? On the surface, Sam was incredibly handsome, pulling off the puppy dog,
innocent smile look well despite his large build hello shoulders. He was kind, extremely accommodating of others (too much in Gabe's opinion), and had a good work ethic (perhaps too good of one). He was a waiter, a college student, friend, brother, and uncle, and he seemed to be well-versed in juggling all of his roles.

But beneath all that was someone else. He somehow knew how to fight (and fight well), and was incredibly reflexive. His relationship with his father was in shambles, things seemed to be strained with his brother (who seemed to be into a little more than professional boxing if Gabe was right), and he had what sounded like a psycho ex.

Gabe's hands tightened on the wheel at the thought of the ex. It was dumb, being jealous (since when did he get jealous?) over someone that sounded so awful, but he could tell from what little Sam had told him when they'd first met that, despite how sour things had ended, he'd really loved her in the beginning.

There was also the weird way Sam seemed to know almost what he was thinking or feeling. Maybe he was just really attuned to people, as Gabe knew he himself was a very good people reader (he had to be), but with Sam, it just felt different. The way he looked at people or things like they were telling him something, or the way some of his observations and deductions seemed to be pulled from thin air despite their accuracy, sometimes made Gabe think Sam was more than a little empathetic.

It was all this, and the little things like the way Sam tugged on his floppy bangs when he was nervous and laughed at his dumb jokes, that made Gabe question all of his preconceptions about romance and, dare he say it, love.

But I don't... no I can't even think of the word. We just met a couple weeks ago, this isn't a fairytale story with a fairytale ending.

The itch suddenly stopped, and Gabe rubbed his neck as he looked around, paying real attention to his surroundings for the first time as he viciously pushed all thoughts of the l-word and cute waiters to the side.

He was waiting at the intersection of something that looked more residential than business. It looked vaguely familiar, and as he looked at the street signs, the P.I realized that he was in the vicinity of East Center. Not near where Sam lived, but along the border of it where Lawrence began to melt into something more suburban.

"Great. What do I do now?" he muttered to himself. He wasn't quite sure what he'd do here since Sam was busy with work at the moment, and Gabe didn't know anyone else that lived here. Not that he knew very many people outside of work anyway.

A park further down the street caught his eye, which was busy with kids and their parents since it was a relatively nice Saturday morning. It was big enough that Gabe could snag a bench and not look like a creep, so he shrugged and continued down the street, pulling into the lot and parking as best he could. Going with the flow was a big motto of his, and if going to the park felt right, then that's what he would do.

Squinting against the bright sunlight, Gabe trekked down one of the paved pathways, skirting the bustling playground filled with shrieking children. There was a small field where a few kids kicked a ball around, and a few picnic tables between the field and the playground. Gabe settled down in a park bench in this area, tugging out his journal from his bag and flipping it open with the intent to get some work done. Garth had given him that list of addresses, and he was sure that at least one of them would prove useful.
Two immediately stuck out to the P.I upon first inspection. The first that caught his eye was on the same street as Castiel's apartment building, and he'd bet money that Castiel had probably been jumped in the vicinity of it. Hell, it was probably in the same alley. He'd have to ask the Enochian expert, but he was sure Cas would confirm his suspicion.

The other was one of the few addresses that didn't lay past the Kingsford Parallel, as everyone seemed to call it. Garth had written them in a separate column, and the one that stuck out seemed to be in the same area of the internet cafe that Reynolds had been found in. Gabe checked his journal to make sure and smirked when he saw the note he'd made of it.

*Reynolds found at Jumpstart Cafe on Elm Street. Maybe Freddy Krueger is the killer?*

Gabe snorted. He didn't think the killer was anything like Freddy Krueger, except for maybe the weird supernatural aspect that lurked at the edge of the case.

He went on Google Maps to make sure and found that the address Garth had listed was about half a mile down from the internet cafe and was actually the location of an empty lot just before the street merged and its name changed. Elm Street was an east-west running street, and if followed long enough down that direction, eventually led to Kingsford Street.

It was an interesting occurrence, but Gabe wasn't sure how it could factor into the case. The killer had already proven he wasn't one to stick to a specific region in the city like a typical serial killer would, as LU was nowhere near Kingsford Street and gang territory. He made a note of it regardless, because if there was one thing the P.I had learned in his career, it was that no detail was too small to ignore.

*I'll ask Sam about it later. Since he knows Lawrence better than me maybe he can pick something out I won't.*

"Mr. Gabe! Hi!"

Gabe looked up at the unusual greeting (had he ever been called Mr. Gabe?) and saw a very familiar child running down the path towards him, waving enthusiastically as his backpack bounced against his back.

"Ben?" he asked, momentarily confused before it clicked in his head that yes, that was Sam's nephew, and no, he wasn't imagining things.

*But what are the odds I run into Ben here?*

Ben skidded to a halt in front of him, beaming brightly. With the tiniest aviator jacket Gabe had ever seen and a beanie jammed on his head, he was the picture of adorable, and also strongly reminded him of Sam for some reason.

*Odd. But the Winchesters seem to dress similarly,* he thought, thinking back to the pictures Sam had shown him and the waiter's usual attire. Multiple layers of flannels, sturdy jackets, and worn jeans seemed to be the go-to for them.

"That's me. Have you caught any bad guys?" he asked, tugging down his beanie as the wind blew.

"Not since I've last seen you," Gabe answered truthfully. He'd learned that little kids were more perceptive than adults gave them credit for, and some could see right through a lie. Ben was *definitely* one of those kids, and way brighter than a typical four-year-old, "But I'm working on it. Now, what are *you* doing here by yourself?"
"I'm not by myself," Ben said with a sigh, pointing down the path to a brunette that was jogging up the path, "I'm here with Momma. She's probably gonna yell at me now."

The lady(didn't Sam say her name was Lisa?) jogging up did seem like she was going to yell at him. She was an extremely pretty woman, and it was quite clear she was Ben's mother. They both had the same dark eyes and hair, and about the same facial structure. She was much tanner though, and there were no freckles to be shared between them. Gabe had figured Ben must have taken after his mother since he barely looked like Dean, but it was still a bit startling to see the resemblance.

"Ben, what have I told you about running off like that! And talking to strangers!" she exclaimed, boot heels clicking as she strode up.

"But Momma," Ben whined as she bent down to grab his hand, "It's Mr. Gabe, and he's not a stranger."

Lisa paused in her rant, looking at him with a curious expression that morphed into something wholly mischievous. It instantly set him on edge, and Gabe felt the itch prickle between his shoulder blades momentarily before fading.

*Why do I get the sense I'm about to have an interesting conversation?*

"Mr. Gabe, huh?" she asked, suddenly smiling as her anger seemed to melt away, "The universe works in mysterious ways. Are you by chance the very same Gabe that I've heard Sam practically rave about?"

*Wait, what?*

She sat down, plopping Ben on her lap as she stuck out her hand.

"Lisa Braeden," she said crisply, dark eyes sparkling as he managed to shake her hand(Gabe was still caught up on the fact that Sam seemed to be saying nice things about him), "I've been dying to meet you."

"Er, thanks?" Gabe said, frowning slightly as she smiled at him. He noticed that while mother and son were very similar, their smiles were quite different.

"Oh, you're probably really confused right now," the brunette said, her smile becoming bashful as she swept a strand of hair behind her ear, "It's just, Sam's been so different recently, and as soon as I heard about you, I just became so curious."

"I told Momma you were really nice and was Unca Sam's good, best friend!" Ben interjected, turning in his mother's lap to face him, "Isn't that right, Mr. Gabe?"

Lisa giggled as Gabe stared at the little kid who was gazing up at him imploringly.

"Definitely, kiddo," he said after a few seconds of rapid thought(what is going on, how did I get in this situation, am I Sam's best friend?), "At least, he's my best friend."

The words felt foreign in his mouth, as Gabe could safely say he'd never had a best friend before, thank you very much, but it didn't feel completely wrong to say it. He was certainly closer to Sam than he was with anyone else, and they did get along well like close friends should, or at least in his head, he thought they should.

*So that does make him my best friend, doesn't it?*
"Good," Ben proclaimed, oblivious to his internal conflict as he smiled cheekily and leaned in, "Cause Unca Sam said that you're his very good friend."

Lisa snorted as her son began to giggle, clearly satisfied with himself.

"I can confirm he did indeed say that," the brunette said, "Which is why I'm so curious because if there's anything I know about Winchesters, it's that they're all a secretive, mistrusting bunch that usually take years to properly open up to someone."

Gabe chuckled wryly at Lisa's apt summary. He'd learned quickly that trying to get anything out of Sam that he wasn't already willing to share was like pulling teeth with a rusty set of pliers. It was best to either just let it be and wait for Sam to open up on his own, or to be gentle and easy in his approach, however much it frustrated him to watch Sam suffer and be unable to help.

"He is pretty mysterious, but I can't say I've made any mind-boggling breakthroughs," he admitted, slumping slightly.

Lisa nodded knowingly, her eyes softening in sympathy, "He is, isn't he? You shouldn't beat yourself up about it though. It's remarkable that you've managed to get as close as you have to him in the span of a couple weeks. Sam's been having a rough go of things lately, and while I had initial doubts, they didn't last very long when I saw how enthusiastic he was about you."

Gabe perked up slightly, "Really? I know how we met sounds...dubious, but I didn't think I was doing anything special."

"Well, you are," she said with conviction, "He's been set in his routine for so long that I was beginning to worry, and don't get me wrong, I'm still a little worried about the whole chasing after a serial killer thing..."

"Understandable," the P.I responded with an easy shrug that had Lisa chuckling.

"Despite that, I think you've been good for him. The whole spontaneity of it all has been like a wake-up call for him, and I think he's starting to understand that there's more to life than working yourself to the bone," she finished, bouncing Ben on her lap a bit as he wriggled impatiently.

"Momma, can I go play now?" he asked, whining just the tiniest bit.

"Why don't we walk and talk, so Ben can have some fun?" Gabe suggested before the four-year-old could grow any more antsy (It seemed even the little genius Winchester wasn't immune to the call of the playground), "I have some time to spare still, and I guess I should get this interrogation out of the way while I've caught you in a forgiving mood."

"Sounds good. And you're right about this being an interrogation," Lisa responded, her face falling into a severe frown. Her eyes still sparkled with mischief though, revealing that she was only teasing.

A shiver of foreboding ran down the P.I's spine regardless. He got the sense that Lisa was not a woman to be messed with, which only made sense if Winchesters listened to her.

Ben darted ahead to the playground as the pair trailed behind, both of them keeping a close eye on the boy as he darted between other children to clamber onto the equipment. He had been quick with his Iron Man backpack (which was adorable in Gabe's opinion), but without it, he was even faster, and the P.I quickly lost track of him. Lisa didn't seem to be too concerned though, so he shoved down the little bubble of panic and hoped Ben was alright.

"You like him, don't you?" she asked out of the blue, nearly giving Gabe a heart attack as he...
processed what she'd just said.

*What is she insinuating? How does she know? Am I that obvious? Maybe she's not referring to Sam.*

"Like who?" he asked casually, feigning ignorance if only to buy himself a few seconds. If the situation got sticky, he supposed he could dart, but Sam would be upset if he didn't get along with Lisa.

*Dammit. Now instead of pretending my phone is ringing and skedaddling, I'm trying to appease Sam by staying here, and he doesn't even know it!*

Lisa side-eyed him with an expression that clearly showed she knew that he was bull shitting right now, but that she'd indulge him regardless.

"Sam," she said, a small smile playing at the corners of her lips, "Don't worry. I don't judge, and it's hard to resist the appeal of Winchesters."

Gabe watched her warily for a moment, still partially unconvinced despite the clear sincerity in her voice and body language. He'd been burned too much in his life to trust a near stranger off the bat on their word alone.

"You were with Dean," he said after a few tense seconds in which he thought, and relaxed a bit, because Lisa was only waiting patiently for him to speak and not judging him like he thought she might've, "You've known the Winchesters for a while. What-I don't know if I'm missing something here, but I feel like I am. Why are they..."

"The way they are?" she finished wryly, a half smile flashing across her face before she suddenly sobered.

"What do you know?"

Gabe shrugged uneasily, shoving his hands into his pockets and hunching his shoulders against the wind that was blowing against their backs.

"Sam doesn't say much, but I know about Yellow Eyes, and what happened to their mom," he began slowly, "I know well, Sam's insinuated that his father was...less than stellar, and that he's not on speaking terms with him. I know he and Dean are extremely close, but I don't know what could lead to such a close bond, or them being the way they are."

Lisa arched an eyebrow in mild surprise, "Sam told you about Yellow Eyes?"

The P.I nodded, and she blew out a breath before snorting.

"He barely mentions that even to people he's close with. The fact that he spoke about it to you..."

She trailed off, her eyes drifting to Ben, who was currently waiting in line to go down what looked like the biggest slide in the park. Gabe wasn't sure how she located him so quickly and decided it must be some special mothers-only skill.

"I still don't know all the details, because Dean was extremely close-lipped about it," Lisa began, "Even when we were together he never spoke on it, and Sam followed suit. I-I'm not sure, but I think...I think maybe John was scared for his sons after what happened with his wife and took it upon himself to make sure that they knew how to protect themselves."

Gabe stared at her for a solid three seconds as he cycled through everything that he knew about the
Winchesters (about Sam).

Sam being so jumpy and knowing how to fight well. Dean fighting professionally, and not so professionally. Sam knowing how to use a gun. Sam keeping his cool in intense situations better than the average person. The evasiveness and secrets.

"He taught them how to fight," he concluded flatly, and Lisa nodded grimly.

"I can't say for sure, but I think that's what happened. I know there was a period of time where they left Lawrence for a few years after Yellow Eyes, but they came back, and that seems to be when it began," she said, scuffing the toes of her boots through the mulch. "Neither of them have said it outright, but-it makes sense, doesn't it?"

She looked up at him, dark eyes seeking confirmation. It was obvious this was something that she'd been ruminating upon for a while, and Gabe wondered how long she'd had to keep this to herself.

"Yeah, it makes sense," he said, his stomach twisting because it did. It had been something he'd largely skirted because there were so many other things happening, but now that he was face to face with it, he couldn't ignore it, "But why wouldn't they say anything?"

Lisa shrugged helplessly, face half hidden as the wind blew her hair all about her face.

"I don't know. Winchesters are complicated," she said with a heavy sigh, "Being with Dean was like a roller coaster. Everything was very intense, and I knew he was keeping things from me, but I wasn't going to let him keep them from me forever, especially after Ben was born. That's what eventually drove us apart. He had so many issues that he refused to acknowledge, let alone deal with that in the end, all we could do was part."

Gabe pondered on Lisa's words, chewing his lip nervously as he thought of Sam.

Would Sam be like that? Always hiding a part of himself? So far, he could admit he'd done most of the prying (he was curious and Sam was an enigma, dammit), and Sam had largely avoided asking personal questions (which he respected), but would it be like that forever?

He'd be a hypocrite if he took offense to it; Gabe had so many secrets of his own that between him and Sam they probably had enough for ten people. No, whatever Sam was hiding, Gabe was willing to let him hold it to his chest because he knew how hard it was to open up and be vulnerable like that.

But relationships weren't supposed to be built around lies and secrets, right? Gabe was no expert on the matter, but that seemed to be common sense. If he even attempted anything with Sam, they'd have to have a heart to heart (or two or three). He thought it might be hard to do it, but in the end, Gabe felt he could manage to open up, as Sam was understanding and empathetic and had never made him feel awkward about it before. However, what if Sam refused to do so as Dean had? Would they crash and burn?

*This is assuming Sam even likes me that way, and that I'd ever attempt anything like a romantic relationship.*

"I sound like a Debbie Downer right now, don't I?" Lisa asked with a bashful smile.

"Just a little," Gabe said, holding up his forefinger and thumb with a barely there gap in between, earning a laugh from the brunette.

"I can see why Sam's so enamored with you. But honestly, take my words with a grain of salt," she
said seriously, "Sam's always been the more open of the brothers, believe it or not, and while he may be very guarded at first, I think you have the best chance of getting through to him."

"Why me?" Gabe asked incredulously, feeling a little put on the spot. Why did Lisa think he of all people would be able to get Sam to open up? Hell, if Sam hadn't opened up to her, then there was no way he had a chance.

And what the fuck did she mean by Sam being enamored with me?

Lisa tilted her head thoughtfully, "Do you know about Sam's sleepwalking?"

Gabe blinked, taken aback by the abrupt subject change.

"Since Monday," he replied before becoming suspicious, "Why?"

The brunette smiled triumphantly, if a bit sadly at his response.

"I spoke to Sam today," she explained as the P.I.'s confusion grew, "And he just told me about it."

Gabe wasn't sure how to respond to that (ok, so maybe Lisa did have a point), but luckily, Ben ran up at that moment to interrupt them.

"Are you all worn out already, Ben?" Lisa asked, but Ben shook his head and squinted up against the sunlight at the P.I. His expression was more serious than the man anticipated, and Gabe immediately got down on one knee to pay attention. Being on the same level as a little kid made things much easier.

"Hey Mr. Gabe, are you gonna see Unca Sam today?" the four-year-old asked.

"Tonight if all goes well. Why?" Gabe asked, feeling like a broken record with all of his 'whys'.

Ben shrugged slightly, tugging on his slightly overgrown fringe as he pursed his lips in thought. It was very reminiscent of Sam, which made Gabe think that perhaps Sam's original concerns that Ben was looking up to him more than maybe he should had some validity.

"You gotta be careful. Bad stuff might happen," he said cryptically.

Gabe blinked, then looked up at Lisa curiously, who only shrugged helplessly and mouthed, 'Winchesters'.

Winchester indeed, he thought, turning back to the boy in front of him and grasping his shoulder.

"Don't worry, we'll be careful. Taking care of your uncle Sam is a hard chore that exhausts me, but I'll keep an eye on him," the P.I. responded with a dramatic, weary sigh that had Ben giggling.

"You're really good with kids," Lisa commented as her son ran off again, "Do you have any siblings?"

Gabe got to his feet and shook his head, smiling wryly.

"Nah, I'm a foster kid. I've just come across a lot of kids in my time," he said vaguely, pulling out his phone to avoid discussing the subject anymore. His evasion tactic quickly turned into a swear as he saw the time.

"I've got to run," he said, ignoring Lisa's arched eyebrow at his word choice (son of a whore!), "I've got a meeting to get to. It was really nice to meet you though."
Gabe wasn't simply exchanging a pleasantr when he said that. It had been nice to meet Lisa, despite the fact that he had originally thought that she was Sam's baby momma(oops). She was definitely something else personality wise, and perceptive as hell.

Lisa's eyes softened as she smiled.

"It was very nice to meet you too, even if it was a bit of a shock to run into you here of all places and times," she responded, pulling out her phone, "Does this happen to you often?"

"Often enough," he responded easily. The itch was something that had led him into some truly strange scenarios and had gotten him out of sticky situations before, so he wasn't too surprised that he had run into Lisa like this. It still felt odd though, "Welcome to the club."

They exchanged numbers, and Gabe waved goodbye to Ben, who waved back from atop the short rock wall he'd climbed. With the distance and sun, it was hard to make out, but Gabe thought that maybe the main reason that Ben reminded him of Sam was because his smile looked almost exactly like Sam's.

Jody and Donna were already waiting with coffee and food by the time Gabe arrived at the Starbucks a few minutes past 1:30. The LPD lunch breaks typically began at noon and extended to around 2:30, and administration didn't care when people used their hour-long lunch as long as everyone didn't leave at the same time. Jody and Donna always took their break at 1:30 to avoid the initial rush, and today was no different as he slid into the seat opposite the pair.

"You guys bought me coffee? I feel so special." Gabe remarked, eyeing what looked like a caramel frappuccino and a chocolate chip muffin in front of him.

Donna smiled easily as always in greeting while Jody grunted, barely looking up from the files in front of her.

"Don't get too big for your britches, Milton. What the fuck did you say to Castiel Novak?" she asked abruptly.

Gabe arched an eyebrow at the brunette's sharp attitude, glancing over to Donna questioningly before he unwisely antagonized Jody by retorting in some manner('What crawled up your ass?' was forefront in his mind).

"It's been a rough couple of days," she explained, glaring pointedly at her grumpy partner, "Bela is being really obnoxious-"

"More like being a prissy little bi-"

"Anyway," Donna interjected, clapping her hands primly over her much thinner pile of paperwork, "Bela is being quite difficult, and one of the tasks we were assigned was to go question Mr. Novak about the Enochian."

Gabe nodded, sipping on his frappucino to hide his sudden nervousness. Sam had said that Dean should've woken earlier this morning, but what if he didn't? While it wouldn't be the end of the world if Dean had still been there when Donna and Jody had, he knew that Sam would fret and worry regardless.

So now I'm worrying over hypothetical situations involving Sam. This relationship thing is going just great, Milton.
"I'm guessing Bela didn't place too much importance on your little mission?" he inquired, earning a confirming grunt from Jody, who took over the story.

"She was entirely dismissive about it. She's convinced Hoffman and Olsen will provide more leads, so all her efforts are there right now."

"Wonderful," the P.I muttered, picking at his muffin. He had already expressed how idiotic it was to put those two under such heavy lock and key when Sam, Kevin, and Adam (who were all just kids), were just walking around with potential targets painted on their back.

"Your friend was quite defensive when we walked in," Jody said, rubbing her forehead, "It took a solid five minutes just to get him to open the door, and then there was all this dust! How can someone live like that?"

Gabe nearly choked on his beverage as he began to laugh, nervousness evaporating as it was apparent Dean hadn't been there when they arrived.

"Sounds like Cas. Did he throw stuff around his kitchen?" he asked, laughing even more when that set Jody on a whole new tangent.

"It sounded like he just-I don't know- threw everything out on the floor, just to come back and say his coffee machine was broken!" she exclaimed, "He answered maybe two questions in the near hour we were there, and then his cat tried to claw me when I attempted to sit in the armchair. Did you tell him to harass any LPD members or something?"

"I would never," the P.I said, propping his chin in his hand and grinning, "But Cas is a very particular guy. It's not my fault he got used to me and my incredible work methods."

"How he prefers you over normal people I'll never know," Jody grumbled, sipping angrily at her hot coffee, "I have half a mind to beg Bela to put you back on the case just so you can handle him legally."

"Oh, hush Jody. That's not what we're here for, and we don't have much time," Donna interrupted, fixing an almost stern gaze at the brunette. Almost being the key word since Donna hardly ever did 'stern'.

Gabe tilted his head curiously as Jody sighed and picked an old looking file out from her more recent ones.

"What do you know about Yellow Eyes?" she asked suddenly, running a finger over the edge of the file. It was manila, unlike the blue ones the LPD currently used, and it looked as if it hadn't seen the sun in a long time.

That, coupled with Jody's question, instantly set Gabe on edge and made his shoulders itch.

"This case and Yellow Eyes have no criminal similarities to make it relevant to the investigation. And why would they want to speak to me alone about it?"

"The basics," he said slowly, looking between the two of them, "But this isn't about Yellow Eyes."

Donna tugged on a blonde strand of hair nervously as Jody grimaced. Gabe straightened a bit in his seat and unconsciously planted his feet firmly on the ground as the brunette began.

"Sam Winchester. When you first brought him to the scene where we found Cork, which was really pushing protocol, by the way, I thought the name was vaguely familiar," she admitted before
"I was still in school, but Jody was in the police academy then," Donna said as Jody pulled out a picture, "We both remember it though, and...well, we just thought you should know if you didn't what happened."

"I know," Gabe said evenly before frowning, "Why are you so concerned about it though? It's almost 20 years in the past, and Sam doesn't even remember anything about it."

"We're just concerned, that's all dear," the blonde said gently, and the P.I bristled as he read between the lines.

The sudden wave of anger was unexpected, though not undeserved if the two detectives really thinking the worst of kind, sweet Sam. It still caught him off guard how intense it was, and that he was so mad on Sam's behalf. Gabe had to stop himself from completely crushing his muffin, though he couldn't stop his other hand from crinkling his coffee cup a bit, or his mouth from moving.

"If you think Sam's some weirdo that's working with me cause he's into serial killers in some fucked up way, or-or that he's obsessed with it, then I'll have you fucking know that-"

"That's not what we're getting at Gabe," Jody said bluntly, uncharacteristically using his first name as she slid a picture towards him, "Mary Winchester's disappearance is what's concerning."

Gabe's jaw clicked audibly as he shut his mouth (And Jesus, was it hard to do that when he just wanted to set them straight) and looked down at the picture in front of him.

A pretty blonde and blue-eyed woman looked back with a smile, an infant held in her arms. It was a summer picture judging by the blue sundress she wore, taken somewhere in downtown Lawrence. There was a child clinging to her knees, dirt smudged across a freckled face and big green eyes framed by a bowl cut.

Sam's mother, he thought, picking up the picture tentatively. Sam's face was pretty tiny, and with his shock of dark hair and jaunty summer hat to match his mother's dress, he was pretty cute. Even Dean looked cute, and Gabe internally bemoaned how the elder brother could somehow manage to pull off a fucking bowl cut.

"What about it is so concerning?" he asked as he refocused and thought back to what Sam had said in regards to the whole affair.

'They fucked up almost twenty years ago with Yellow Eyes, and they're going to fuck it up this time with this Death dude.'

"It doesn't make sense. It was hypothesized that Yellow Eyes took Mary sometimes around nine to ten, and yet the first call about the abandoned stroller was at nearly three," Jody started, flipping through papers in the aged file that belonged to Mary Winchester, "This was in broad daylight, and while it was a bit chilly that day, they were in a park. No one noticed the abandoned stroller at all? Not to mention the fact that Sam was found about a half hour later by a civilian's dog that had gotten off track, which meant that he had been there nearly all day."

Gabe frowned, fiddling with his straw. Sam had said that he had been in the woods a while, but for that long?

"And the fact that no one witnessed anything, despite the clear signs of a struggle and chase..." Jody trailed off with a sigh, "All the other disappearances were pretty clear-cut. Two were witnessed from
a distance, and the other two were caught in some form on surveillance camera. But Mary's is a complete mystery."

"That is pretty weird, but since she's ruled as Yellow Eye's fifth victim, they had to have concurred that she was taken by him," the P.I mused unable to help himself, "There was that calling card where Sam was left after all, right? How many people knew about that?"

"Yes, but...she wasn't ruled one of his victims to begin with," Donna said as she bit her lip.

"What do you mean?" Gabe asked, now confused, and Jody ran a hand through her cropped hair.

"They thought she had faked it," she explained, "The primary theory was that she wanted to get away from her husband, despite the fact that A, their home life was pretty average, and B, Yellow Eye's calling card was never publicized, which means that Mary couldn't have known what that was to fake it."

'They made mistakes with Yellow Eyes, and I don't trust them not to mess up somehow this time around.'

"Are you implying that the LPD didn't want to investigate Mary's disappearance in connection to Yellow Eyes because they didn't want to cause a panic?" Gabe concluded incredulously.

Donna nodded grimly, "It seems that way. The news outlets were stirring up a frenzy with the whole thing, and it seems the LPD was trying to do damage control. They clung to the whole 'faking it' theory for a good 24 hours before they finally classified her as the fifth victim. And, as you know, by that point, any leads they could've possibly uncovered probably went stale."

"That's...that's fucking disgusting." Gabe said, suddenly feeling that burning anger again, and above that, a terrible sense of sympathy for Sam. The waiter had said he wasn't fond of the LPD, but this?

Jody sighed, slumping a bit as she took back the cheery picture of Mary Winchester and her children and replaced it in the file.

"It is, which is why we wanted to talk to you like this," she said, drumming her fingers on the table, "To provide context I guess, or to show you that history is prone to repeating itself."

Her brown eyes shifted pointedly around the Starbucks, and Gabe followed her gaze to see the other LPD employees gradually coming in and out of the cafe. It was easy to distinguish them from the regular crowd of citizens, as they either wore the uniform or were wearing the business casual wear of detectives and had their holsters peeking out.

Not the best place to talk about this, but if we had gone out of the way for lunch and someone had seen us it would've been even more suspicious, the P.I thought quickly as a few pairs of eyes slid towards them, And a lot of these people either report back to Talbot or admire her enough that they'd snitch.

Gabe wasn't unfamiliar with the concept of corrupt police departments. He'd worked all over the country and at too many of them to not see a sign of it here and there, but he'd never really stuck around long enough to get caught up in it. As a drifting P.I and consultant, he was able to keep his hands largely clean(save for the moments when he willingly dirtied his hands), but now that he was in Lawrence...

The P.I jostled a leg as he took in the eyes watching them, making sure to keep his expression completely normal and nonchalant. There were a few honest people in the department, people like Jody and Donna, and Garth and Zeke, but if Jody herself was saying that the LPD may not be
completely on the straight and narrow, then he should listen.

"And what does it have to do with me?" he asked casually, finally eating his now slightly smushed muffin as Donna slipped the manila file and some others away out of sight.

"You know Sam Winchester," the blonde remarked, doe eyes uncharacteristically somber, "And you're in a unique position because of it, and because you're a P.I. If you're still working this with Sam, and we know you are because you're as stubborn as they come when it comes to interesting cases, then you're probably our best chance at this case not becoming like Yellow Eyes."

"Dead in the water and infamous for its cold status. You really think Bela will muck it up that bad though?" Gabe asked curiously. While he was hardly Bela's biggest fan, he had to admit(and this was very grudgingly) that when she wasn't walking around with her nose in the air and a stick up her ass, that she was a decent detective.

Jody shrugged a shoulder, "At the moment, it could go either way. I know that if it was up to me, you'd be on the task force at the very least. Neither of us thinks that the LPD is going to be able to handle another serial killer seeing how Yellow Eyes went, and..."

The brunette trailed off, a strange mix of constipated and disgruntled crossing her face. Donna nudged her with an elbow, nodding encouragingly, and she sighed before shaking her head slightly.

"...and we're also positive that if anyone's going to bring a stop to this sicko, then it's you. You're scarily good at what you do despite your age and work attitude," Jody finished, sounding truthful despite her uncomfortable expression.

Gabe stared at the women sitting across from him for a moment, completely taken aback. While Donna had always marveled at his skills and was nice(she was nice to everyone, even him), Jody had always been a bit more on the brusque side. He had never minded it, as it made poking fun with her that much better, and Jody was just like that sometimes. Sure, Jody saw him as immature at times and definitely not professional, but he'd never lost a night's sleep over it since he was familiar with being seen like wherever he worked.

"Was...that a compliment, Jody? Wow, never thought I'd get one of those from you! Are you feeling alright?" he asked dramatically to cover up his shock, and even worse, his genuine pleasure at receiving such a thing from the detective.

"I need Advil," Jody groaned as she threw her hands in the air, and Donna chuckled on her partner's behalf.

They wrapped up the meeting quickly after that, as more and more LPD employees were beginning to enter, and more importantly, stay inside the Starbucks. The ladies went back to the station to get back to work("If it wasn't so imperative, I'd use some of those sick days I have saved up. God, Bela's annoying!")', while Gabe hopped back into his car and drove back to North Heights.

It was only once the P.I stepped into the apartment that the itch faded away and he could really relax. Dropping the facade he'd been keeping up for what felt like all day, Gabe toed off his shoes and collapsed onto his bed, feeling almost light-headed from all the information that had been thrust upon him today.

Groaning, he ran his hands through his hair before he drew them back down over his face. Things had just gotten a lot more complicated on all sorts of fronts.

Strangely enough(or maybe not so strangely), Sam was at the forefront of his thoughts.
Meeting with Lisa had been auspicious for sure. She'd also been a treasure trove of information, and Gabe felt that he understood the mysterious Winchester a little better now. Not completely; heavens knew what sorts of secrets Sam kept, but learning about him from the perspective of someone that had known him and his family for years in an intimate way was helpful.

_Maybe something I learned today from Lisa can help me talk to Sam._

Gabe frowned unconsciously as a sharp stab of worry tainted the distinctly rose-colored thoughts that always came with thinking of Sam. He didn't think he'd been imagining the darkening of the circles under Sam's eyes or the way his brow seemed to crease more and more throughout the week. It was clear he was stressed and worn out, probably from all the stuff he'd had thrown his way and the new episodes of sleepwalking he seemed to be dealing with. He could still remember how disoriented and cold Sam had been when he'd first learned of the sleepwalking that Monday.

The problem was that Sam wouldn't appreciate him showing the worry and concern he felt. He'd picked up that much over the course of the couple of weeks he'd known the waiter, and Lisa had only confirmed his suspicions when they'd spoken. If the Winchesters were raised to be so self-reliant and independent, it only made sense they wouldn't handle concern shown on their behalfs very well. It was a very familiar concept to Gabe, but he avoided thinking any more on that tangent with an abrupt roll towards his nightstand.

He located his red journal easily, but instead of opening it, he simply let it sit by his side as he thought.

Lisa had said that Sam was 'enamored' with him, but was he really? Sometimes it seemed like it, especially when the Winchester blushed or smiled at him with those dimples, but other times Gabe wasn't sure. It was a frustrating scenario, as usually, he was very good at deducing this sort of thing (he had to be if he wanted to get laid so much), but with Sam, he just...couldn't tell.

In a sudden fit of frustration, Gabe tossed the red journal towards the large floor-to-ceiling window that had awed Sam so much when he had first brought him here. It bounced off the glass with a dull thunk, earning a scowl from the P.I.

He didn't know what was so special about Sam to him, but it was killing him. The amount of patience and effort he'd invested into the college student was, quite frankly, astounding on his part. Gabe knew himself very well when it came to this sort of thing, and he knew that he was doing the complete opposite of what he usually did when he was trying to seduce someone. He kept things hot and fast, but when it came to Sam, he was suddenly on tiptoes, treading around boundaries carefully and uncharacteristically unsure of the waiter liked him back. Despite all of that, he still found himself sticking around for more like some sort of masochist, or at the very least a love-struck idiot-

The slightly sour mood that had gripped Gabe suddenly loosened as he caught himself thinking of the L-word.

"Fuck no," he said, sitting up abruptly.

He didn't like Sam _that_ much. No one could after meeting after such a short period of time; media be damned. It was unrealistic and foolhardy even for him, not to mention an extremely big risk in the emotional department.

_But you definitely like him a lot more than you want to admit. Maybe not love, but he's not just another potential fuck to you._

Now even more emotionally conflicted than he was before, Gabe got out of bed and made a bee-line
to the couch, practically throwing it back in his haste to reach for one of the canvases he kept tucked away from view.

Art had been one of the few constants Gabe could rely on in his childhood. He'd always been a bit better than average at it from a young age, and while he'd never deluded himself into thinking he was the next Picasso (as a foster kid a career option so uncertain was a big no-no for him), Gabe had always found comfort in one of the few talents he could call his own when material things were always so uncertain.

Pulling out a piece he'd been working on for a while, the P.I ran back to his room and pulled out the easel and paints he kept hidden in his closet. While Gabe knew logically that there was no reason for him to go through all of this effort and keep everything hidden, a part of him still felt like the elementary school kid that hid his sketchbook from the older kids in the hopes they wouldn't tear it up like they did with all of the stuff he drew.

Once he'd set everything up in the living room by the window and put on some music (his Spotify playlists were as prolific as the CDs he kept in his car), Gabe picked up a paintbrush and simply worked.

Time slipped past in a blur like it always did when Gabe worked on a painting. While he had dabbled in various mediums over the years, painting was easily one of his favorites. It was messy and hard to control, but when he did manage to make it work and produce something worthwhile, the sense of satisfaction was like no other.

The piece he was currently working on was some unknown male figure with wings, though the more and more he worked on it, the more it looked like Sam. It was almost embarrassing how the features were coming together, and the only consolation Gabe had was that the Winchester would never, ever see it; not if he had a say in the matter.

Between short breaks for food and switching playlists every now and then, the P.I's mood gradually returned back to normal. With a clearer head, Gabe set aside his work to let it dry and returned to his room, picking up the unfortunate journal he'd hurled earlier.

"Sorry buddy," he said as he flipped it open, tugging a pen out from his jeans and writing as he strolled aimlessly around the apartment.

*Solving the case is the number one thing right now since everyone seems to think I'm the man for the job. Talk about responsibility. Check out the rest of the addresses Garth gave me with Sam. Somehow get Sam to take it easy a little, while simultaneously solving the case with his help.*

Gabe snorted at the last sentence he wrote. He hadn't been the best at English, but he was pretty sure that was an oxymoron.

'Sugar We're Goin' Down' suddenly began to play, and it took the P.I a second to realize that it was coming from his phone and not his current playlist. It didn't take him nearly as long to connect the ringtone to Sam, and he nearly tripped over his easel in his haste to grab his phone.

"Hiya kiddo, what's up?" he said, flushing slightly as he managed to right his canvas before it fell over. It was almost embarrassing how giddy he'd gotten, and his flush only deepened as he heard Sam laugh on the other side.

"Hey, Gabe! I didn't think you'd sound so eager to hear me."

*If only you knew kiddo,* the P. I thought as he flopped back onto his couch, *If only you fucking knew.*
"I'm always eager to hear from my dear Watson," he said instead, "Is everything alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, everything's fine," Sam said quickly. It sounded like he was outside the Roadhouse, as there was only a murmur of background chatter compared to the louder ambivalent noises of Lawrence, "I'm just on break right now, and I figured I'd call just to check and see if you were still coming?"

Gabe didn't like the Winchester's insecure, questioning tone one bit. He had to physically stop himself from saying an assorted number of things that were either incredibly sappy or would have Sam instantly slamming up those walls of his in the face of his dire enemies, 'concern from others' and 'people caring about me'.

"Of course I am, kiddo, I'm in dire need of some liquor. A fruity margarita sounds mighty fine right about now," he said light-heartedly.

Judging by Sam's responding laugh, his easy words had settled the waiter's worries.

"I've got little paper umbrellas just for you," he joked back. Gabe could practically envision the Winchester tugging on his hair bashfully as he smiled, "Though perhaps I could convince you to try something less sugary tonight?"

The P.I had to get his mind out of the gutter with that particular phrase(Get it together, Milton!), but luckily, his ever sharp tongue kept things going even as his brain stuttered to a halt.

"Are you suggesting I drink something plebian like a Corona?" he asked, sounding as scandalized as he possibly could.

"No, no!" Sam laughed, "Just something stronger, or at least something I don't have to shake up. My arms start to hurt after mixing so many drinks."

All Gabe could think about were Sam's incredibly well-built arms(biceps, triceps, hotceps!) and had to hide his wandering thoughts with a haughty sniff.

"I see. Very well, I'll drink something a little stiffer this time, just for you," he replied in a faux-snootty voice.

"Thank you, old chap," Sam said, mimicking him, "I'm ever so grateful for your generosity towards me."

The two of them laughed, and there was a very brief lull in conversation before Sam picked it back up.

"We're open 'till two tonight, so stop by anytime," he said, "Unless whatever you've been doing all day has you needing a drink or three."

"That's an understatement," Gabe quipped, pinching the bridge of his nose as he thought of his very hectic day, "I'll probably stop by sooner since it's..."

He drew a blank on the time, and Sam seemed to pick up on that.

"Seven," he interjected helpfully, "Lost track of time working?"

"Definitely," Gabe said, looking around to realize that his apartment was now much darker than when he'd started, with only the light of his computer and the living room to go off of, "Jeez, I didn't even realize."
"It happens," Sam said kindly, "Finish up what you're working on, and then come on down so we can talk. I'll have a whiskey waiting."

His tone of voice sounded so welcoming and soft that Gabe simply had to revel in it a moment before responding.

"That sounds good kiddo," he said softly, catching himself before he could sound anymore enamored (Lisa's word, not his), "And you better save me a spot! I had to use all my darting and elbowing skills the last time I went!"

"I will don't worry," Sam responded, "It's definitely going to be crowded tonight, so you might wanna wait a bit before you come."

"Should I arrive at midnight to the ball?" Gabe asked teasingly.

"I guess your car does vaguely resemble a pumpkin..."

"Hey!"

There was a sudden pause on the line, and then Sam was talking to someone else. Gabe couldn't pick up on much, but he thought he heard, "Ok, I got it," and a general tone of irritation before the waiter returned.

"Sorry about that," he said apologetically, "Becky just asked me something even though I'm clearly busy."

A faint warning bell rang in the P.I's mind, and he mentally raced through all the female workers he could recall from the Roadhouse.

"That's not the redhead, right?" he asked, remembering that particular waitress from the last time he'd been with a stab of jealousy, and Sam hummed.

"No, that's Anna. Becky's blonde and, uh, kinda creepy," he admitted.

Gabe arched an eyebrow, "Creepy as in stalker creepy?"

"Yeah," Sam said before continuing tentatively, "She's really...tenacious. But I can handle it."

If Sam's purposefully airy tone was anything to go off of, Becky was much more than tenacious, but the P.I decided to let it go for now. He made a mental note to discuss it with Sam later though, just to make sure everything was ok.

"If you say so, Sam-a-lam," Gabe responded, "Now, go set some drunk fool straight with your super ninja powers."

"Roger that," the Winchester quipped, "See you soon?"

"See you soon, kiddo."

They hung up, and Gabe promptly reached for a pillow to smother an inarticulate noise of excitement and frustration.

It's official. I'm in way too deep.

At that thought, he made the sound again. The proof was staring him right in the face, and while Gabe was hesitant to call it romance, he was a P.I. If all the evidence was there, then why try to deny
He sighed and stared up at his ceiling. So maybe he was enamored with Sam; Gabe could admit that now. No amount of stressing or trying to refute it could change the fact that he lived for the banter between them and Sam's smile.

But was Sam enamored with him?

... 

It took Gabe an embarrassingly long time to get ready. Between his desire to dress decently (this wasn't even a date, so why did it suddenly matter what shirt he wore?) and his nerves at facing Sam with his newfound understanding of his feelings (ugh), the P.I. didn't leave North Heights until just before eleven, and it took him the better part of an hour to get to the Roadhouse due to a ridiculous number of traffic accidents along the way. By the time he managed to pull into the parking lot, Gabe was grumpy, in dire need of a drink, and 99% positive he'd put a new dent in his front bumper when some asshole had tried to brake check him on the highway.

"Fuck this," Gabe muttered as he eyed the bursting rows of parked cars before looping around to the back of the restaurant and pulling up by a set of fenced in Dumpsters. Back here, the restaurant looked much more shady, especially since it was long past sunset, but Gabe didn't give two flying fucks about it as he got out and stomped around to the front. All he wanted to do was see Sam and hope the waiter wouldn't be too mad about him showing up so late.

The doors were propped open, rock music drifting out into the night along with the chatter of voices. Gabe huffed sharply at the sight of the packed tables before sticking out his elbows and beginning the trek through the teeming crowd.

It was uncomfortably warm from all the body heat, but the P.I. didn't dare shrug off his black jacket. Not only did he look far too good in it, but it also hid his holster, which he now carried with a very much loaded gun. While he was allowed to carry it around since it had been LPD approved despite it being a personal firearm, Gabe didn't want to draw attention to himself with it, since being pegged as some sort of law enforcement employee was the last thing he wanted on Saturday night.

After what felt like an eternity of navigating the maze of tables and bodies, the P.I. finally emerged by the bar, eyeing the filled up stools with a fierce scowl. This was quickly growing ridiculous, and he was about to let loose a string of creative expletives before he caught an eyeful of muscular Winchester by the far corner of the bar.

Damn.

Sam was in his element, the sleeves of his dark blue henley shirt rolled up to reveal corded forearms and smooth skin. His hair was swept behind his ears, the silver studs that usually hid during the day gleaming under the yellow lights. Even with Sam's clear (or at least to him) fatigue, he was still eye-catching as always. Gabe watched as Sam twirled a bottle expertly in his hand, biting his lip as he idly swept a used glass up with his free hand.

Someone bumped into Gabe from the back, abruptly knocking the man out of his impromptu trance. He swore, ready to turn around with a fierce scowl and some sharp words, but before he could, Sam glanced up from the counter and seemed to spot him.

Gabe froze as a large smile spread across the bartender's face. He'd heard of people lighting up before, but he'd never really put much thought to the term until now as Sam's face visibly brightened upon spotting him. His tense shoulders relaxed, his brow smoothed out, and his face became more
inviting as the bartender leaned forward on the bar, running a hand through his dark hair as he tilted his head and just grinned.

Aw fuck, Gabe thought, striding forward as he felt a smile appear on his own face, I'd have to be a heartless bastard to resist that.

"It's about time you showed up," the Winchester said in greeting, still leaning on the bar with his elbows.

Gabe mimicked the position, ignoring the people on both sides as he leaned in close to hear Sam better over the noise of the Roadhouse. At least, that was the reasoning he told himself. It certainly wasn't because Sam smelled amazing, or because his eyes were an alluring shade of dark blue-green tonight.

"I'm all about making dramatic entrances," he responded, pitching his voice a little lower as he dared his luck by leaning in a little further, "Any chance I can get my whiskey now?"

Sam blinked, then blinked again before the flush from working darkened just a little further on his face and spread to pinken the tips of his ears.

Gabe took in the reaction and suddenly felt a little more hopeful on the 'Is Sam enamored with me?' front. He had to physically grasp the cuffs of his jacket to keep his fingers from reaching out and touching to see how warm Sam's face was, or from perhaps pulling him just that bit closer and-

Get it together Milton!

"Uh, yeah, of course," Sam said, clearing his throat slightly before fumbling for a glass, "Here, there's a free stool further down and, uh-do you want ice, or...?"

"Nah, getting here was a bitch," Gabe proclaimed, quickly reverting to his usual cocky self and trademark smirk to avoid any wandering thoughts, snagging the sole empty stool and propping his head in his chin, "Not one, not two, but three car crashes tonight! What's up with that?"

"Sounds like Lawrence," Sam quipped, pouring his two fingers of whiskey and sliding it to him. He seemed more composed now, much to the P.I's amusement, "Besides our shitty traffic though, how was your day?"

Gabe knocked back the drink in one go, ignoring Sam's arched eyebrow as he winced and exhaled sharply against the burn in his throat.

"That bad?" the Winchester asked sympathetically, and the P.I gestured for him to refill his glass as he cleared his throat.

"That was stronger than I anticipated by the way, but my day wasn't bad. Just...eventful," he said as he wisely sipped on the drink this time.

Sam hummed, "Serial killer eventful?"

"Perhaps," Gabe teased upon seeing the glint in Sam's eye. It really was a waste that he was going to school to become a lawyer, as he had proven not only that he was clever enough to make deductions, but that he also had the aptitude to be a detective as well, "But first, tell me how your day has gone. You've spent it working, right?"

"Pretty much," the bartender said casually, "Lisa and Ben dropped by in the morning, and I did throw out a drunken patron about an hour ago, but beyond that, it's been pretty normal."
"Because throwing out drunk people is perfectly normal."

Sam snorted, "It is if you're a bartender and makeshift bounc-dammit, here she comes."

"Here who comes?" Gabe asked as the Winchester stiffened and stepped back a little, only to have his question answered in the form of a petite blonde waitress materializing by his side, ignoring him completely as she stared at Sam.

"Are you sure I can't serve any drinks, Sam? I'm sure Ellen wouldn't mind," she said, blue eyes wide and fixed on Sam far too intently for Gabe's liking.

The P.I glanced over at Sam, whose jaw had tightened minutely as his bright expression changed to something more irritated.

"Becky, you know Ellen doesn't want you handling drinks. You've broken too many glasses," he said, sounding perfectly polite, if a little colder than his usual mannered self.

"But Sammmm," the girl whined(who was this chick?), clasping her hands as she pressed up against the counter, encroaching upon his personal space as she batted her eyelashes.

Sam shied back just a bit, his eyes darting to Gabe for a fraction of a second. That was all it took for the P.I, who had already been moody to begin with and irritated himself by the weird girl. He wasn't sure if Sam was really asking for help, but it was clear the girl made him feel uncomfortable, and he wasn't just going to sit back and let it happen.

It also helped that he was feeling just a little bit of jealousy at the blatant way she was trying to flirt, but he shoved it aside and blamed the alcohol in his system as he tapped the girl's shoulder brusquely.

"A no is a no...Becky," Gabe said firmly, glancing downward at the girl's nametag, "So stop harassing Sam."

Becky blinked as if just noticing him for the first time before she frowned and crossed her arms defensively.

"I'm-I'm not harassing him," she responded, "I work with him!"

Gabe felt his anger tick up a notch as he reached inside his jacket for the badge he hardly used, flipping it open with a clean flick of his wrist. He could feel Sam's eyes on him and was acutely aware of the way the bartender shifted a tiny bit closer to him.

"As a detective, I can say with 110% certainty that you are harassing him, and I kindly suggest you back the fuck off," he retorted with a burning glare that made the blonde flinch a little.

"But-"

"Shoo! Scram! Does this mean nothing to you?" Gabe asked, shaking his badge in her face to emphasize his point. Her tenacity was almost impressive, but the protective streak he felt for Sam was flaring up now, and he wasn't standing for any of it tonight, dammit. Watching the redhead waitress flirt with Sam the last time he'd come here had been bad enough; this Becky chick was the last straw.

Gabe knew he was letting his more selfish side show, which was a big risk with Sam, but he couldn't help it. When it came to Sam, he wasn't interested in sharing, even if he hadn't quite made the Winchester his yet.
"Oh no you don't," Gabe practically spat as the overzealous girl tried to reach for the bartender, who stared with wide eyes as the P.I stood and shoved him back out of her reach (Gabe didn't want to risk an assault charge if he grabbed Becky), "Don't you dare touch him!"

Something in his voice must've penetrated her incredibly dense skull because Becky finally stopped. She scurried off with a terrified squeak as if she'd been scalded, and Gabe watched her go triumphantly (good fucking riddance) before settling back into his stool.

"Well, that was fun," the P.I said, slipping his badge back into his jacket and tugging imperiously at his jacket as if he hadn't just chased off one of Sam's coworker's in a jealous fit, "You alright kiddo?"

Sam blinked at him, his gaze slightly unfocused. It was that deep, far off look he got while being particularly empathetic that always confused Gabe, but it was only there for a second before the bartender shook his head and snapped out of it.

"Yeah, I'm alright. Thank you for that, even if it was a bit much," he said with a sweet, bashful smile that had Gabe shifting and rubbing at his now warm neck.

"I think it was a perfectly acceptable amount of force," he sniffed, earning a laugh from the Winchester.

"If you say so," Sam said indulgently, eyes shifting to a more hazel green hue as he leaned forward and clasped his forearm, "I'm gonna go make my rounds, but I'll be back soon."

Gabe was vaguely aware of the fact that Sam was refilling his glass, but he was far more focused on the warm hand on his arm, and the fingers that trailed down the back of his hand as Sam moved away.

He waited until the bartender had left before he let out a definitely not stuttery breath and reached for his glass, knocking the drink back in one go.

*I'm so screwed.*

Gabe groaned and dropped his head down onto the counter, letting the heavy drumline playing overhead thrum through his head. Completely and utterly screwed didn't even begin to cover it.

One of the lights set into the bar began to buzz, and the P.I picked his head up curiously in time to see all the overhead lights in the Roadhouse dim. After a few seconds, the lights in the back went out, and then the lights in the front followed suit, taking the music and the TVs tuned to sports channels with them in one fell swoop.

A chorus of protests ran through the Roadhouse at the sudden lack of power, with some people pulling out phones for light, but Gabe wasn't one of them. The itch was prickling his skin now, barely noticeable, but still there. No one else seemed to think anything of the blackout, and it could just be a power surge or something, but he still found himself attempting to seek out Sam in the dark regardless, suddenly on edge. He hadn't gotten this far in life without being a little paranoid, and not paying attention to the itch had never worked out well for him.

*Like with the Enochian. Look how well that worked out for me.*

Beams of white light cut through the glass windows in the front of the Roadhouse, blinding after the minute or so of darkness. Gabe squinted against the sudden onslaught of light in confusion, matching the dozens of others now turning towards the front. The high-pitched, whining buzz of motorcycle
engines filled the air, drowning out the now confused murmurs of the patrons. Gabe thought he could hear faint yells outside as well, and the faint silhouette of helmeted riders, but if he could see them that meant they had to be right up against the Roadhouse.

*What the-*

In one simultaneous movement, the motorcyclists suddenly turned off their lights, leaving spots dancing in Gabe's vision. One lone spot didn't go away after his furious blinking though, only growing bigger and bigger before shattering through a window in an orange arc of light and landing on a table.

There was a brief moment where no one moved, not even the P.I. People had been so busy complaining about the lack of power and light, that the sight of a Molotov cocktail sailing through the window and setting a very *wooden* table on fire wasn't fathomable.

One of the people at the table shrieked as the rest of the occupants began to scramble back, the shrill sound cutting through what little chatter remained after the window shattered. *That* seemed to set everything else off, because the next thing Gabe knew, he was being shoved back against the counter as everyone began to run for the nearest exit.

"Fuck!" he gasped, trying to scramble up onto his stool to avoid the instantaneous stampede that had formed. He could hear more windows shattering, and the orange glow of fire was quickly spreading from multiple points, adding dark shadows to the already horrible lighting situation.

*Dammit, think fast!* he thought, trying to take gauge of the rapidly devolving situation. It didn't help that his last drink had started a pleasant, but now distracting buzz of inebriation. It had slowed his reaction time just enough to throw him off balance, and he didn't even want to think of all the raging drunk patrons in the Roadhouse right now.

Engines roared over the sound of the panicking crowd, and Gabe managed to see darkly clothed riders speed off by firelight; at least a dozen that had now finished their job.

*A hit, it was a hit! Was it the Dead Eyes? Didn't Sam say that they might-*

The sheer amount of fear that clogged his throat easily shaved five years off his life as Gabe was suddenly thrust into panic mode, trying to find the one person he knew and cared about in the sea of people trying to escape.

"Sam? Sam! Sam, where are you?" he yelled over the din, climbing onto the counter and standing on it in the hopes of somehow spotting the bartender, or at the very least making *himself* visible to him. He was suddenly terrified, the fear making his heart race far more than the sudden onset of the fire, "Sam!"

The sound of sirens was barely perceptible over the panicked yells and screams of people. Gabe could see people funneling out through the front doors, which were still somehow fire-free, and some out through the back, but he couldn't see Sam anywhere.

*Shit, shit, shit, where are you?*

Smoke was beginning to form, shrouding the front of the Roadhouse in a gray haze that was now affecting visibility. Gabe knew logically that he should leave while he can, but despite the itch between his shoulders and his brain screaming at him to *get out*, his feet remained firmly planted on the ground. He just *couldn't* leave without Sam, and so he stayed, tugging the collar of his shirt up and searching desperately for the Winchester from his perch on the counter.
"Gabe? Is that you?"

The P.I just managed to hear his name and saw Sam shouldering his way against the flow of the stampede to reach the counter. Gabe could've cried with relief at the sight of Sam's face, but instead gasped as the bartender leaped up onto the counter and pulled him into a bear hug. He barely had time to wrap his arms around his favorite set of shoulders before Sam was swinging him off his feet with the force of his hug.

"Jesus, it's good to see you," the Winchester said into his ear before wrapping an arm around his waist and tugging them both down onto the bartender's side of the counter.

"Good to see you too, kiddo," Gabe responded breathily, not even attempting to sound composed as he clung to one of Sam's shoulders. The Winchester's arm was still around his waist despite the fact that they were both now pressed on the floor, so he tossed caution to the wind and held on. Hell, they were in a life or death situation anyway, so why not?

"I sincerely hope you have a game plan, Sammo," the P.I continued nervously as the smell of smoke intensified. Judging by the growing crackle of the fire, the flames were spreading fast. He was already sweating from the heat, and it was only going to get hotter the longer they stayed.

Sam's brow furrowed as he looked around, eyes sharp and calculating. It brought to mind the relatively calm disposition he'd had in the WM library despite his encounter with the serial killer, and how Sam always seemed to stay level-headed through all the drama of the case.

I think maybe John was scared for his sons after what happened with his wife and took it upon himself to make sure that they knew how to protect themselves.

The words had been hard to believe then, but in that moment, Gabe knew that Lisa was on the right track of thinking as he watched Sam keep his cool. How many people could just... shove away their panic, much less a supposedly normal college student? Even he was struggling to keep it together, and he'd been in more than his fair share of harrowing situations.

"Get out from behind here first, since the alcohol is going to make things worse," Sam said, nodding at the rows and rows of liquor bottles, "Then get out the back, since the front is going to burn fir-"

The loud groan and crack of wood from somewhere up front made Gabe want to look over the counter and see what had just surrendered to the growing blaze, but Sam kept his face down with a firm hand on his neck.

"I don't want you inhaling smoke," the Winchester explained, tugging Gabe's collar up over his face as he peered over the counter.

"But-what-not fair!" the P.I finally managed to splutter, hissing as Sam shoved him back down when he tried to get up and look with him, "Sam!"

"Right now, it's my job to keep you safe," Sam stated once he ducked back down, grabbing a towel and reaching for a bucket of now half-melted ice.

"Oh, is it? I didn't know that the Roadhouse paid you to do that. You're just a jack of all trades, aren't ya kiddo?" Gabe hissed, ignoring the tremulous quality to his anger. Lashing out to hide the fact that he was scared shitless for them was most certainly not what he was doing.

Sam seemed to see right through him though because the hardened look in his eyes softened as he reached out to grasp his face in icy, wet hands.
"Ellen may not pay me to do it, but it's my job anyway," he said softly, but firmly enough that it settled most of the panic tightening Gabe's chest and quieted all his more prominent protests, "Now, wrap this around your face, and whatever you do, hold on tight."

Gabe took the soaked towel but frowned at the Winchester's last words.

"What do you mean by-holy shit!"

The P.I barely had time to register the fact that Sam had literally swept him off his feet like some sort of damsel in distress before they were on the move, charging through darkening billows of smoke and knocked over tables.

"Ohhhh my God," he mumbled behind his towel, clutching onto Sam's shirt like a lifeline as he darted down the back hall. The Roadhouse was almost unrecognizable in the front, but the back seemed mostly intact as Sam burst through the broken back door and into the cold night, where people were already milling around looking lost in the back lot.

"Sweet Mother of Mary, we made it!" Gabe exclaimed, beginning to cough at the air difference as Sam set him down gently by his car, which he had luckily parked far enough away from the roadhouse that it wasn't in immediate danger.

He was vaguely aware of sirens wailing up front and someone rubbing his back, but the P.I was too busy trying to remain upright against his car, mumbling incoherently as he grasped at his poor car. The relief of making it out alive with Sam was almost strong enough to make him collapse, he was that glad.

"...abe. Gabe!"

At the sensation of gravel beneath him, Gabe realized that he had indeed collapsed and that Sam was crouched by him, grasping his face in concern. In any other situation, he would be ecstatic at the action, but the P.I was suddenly finding it hard to breathe, let alone marvel at how gentle Sam could be.

"Can you hear me? Gabe? Shit, just hold on."

"I'm...fine, Sam," Gabe managed to say, but Sam didn't seem to be listening, because he was up in the air again and pressed against a very warm, solid chest. At this vantage point, he could see a bit of Sam's jaw and the night sky, which was glowing orange and obscured with smoke.

Note to self: Life-threatening situations lead to lots of physical contact with Sam. Consider entering more of them for moments like this.

"...smoke inhalation. Can someone...oxygen?"

Something was slipped over his face, and then the fog in his mind and the burning in his throat that Gabe hadn't realized was plaguing him was replaced by a rush of pure air that had him coughing again. A hand ran through his hair, lingering on the back of his neck, and he leaned into the touch as he clutched onto the oxygen mask.

"Better, right?" a voice asked, and Gabe squinted up to see Sam's worried strained face looking down. Behind him, there was various emergency personnel running about, leading coughing and injured people this way and that.

"Uh huh...what 'bout you?" the P.I asked, and the Winchester's face contorted. Behind him, the orange glow of the now roaring blaze exaggerated his expression into something almost agonized.
"I'm fine. This is all my fault anyway," he murmured mournfully, and Gabe frowned, feeling like he was missing something. How on Earth could this be Sam's fault?

"What do you mean-"

A cry for help rose above the chatter, and the duo turned to look at the front of the Roadhouse, which was quickly charring and half collapsed. The doorway was still intact though, and Gabe thought he could see a figure somewhere inside. Whoever it was sounded female, but the smoke thickened and the figure was gone from sight almost as soon as he'd seen it.

Sam's face changed, and the P.I knew, knew before the stupidly brave, moronic idiot darted forward and before he could reach out a hand to stop him, that he'd go.

"Sam, no wait! Don't!" he called out, trying to scramble to his feet and failing when the oxygen mask tugged him back sharply. He cursed violently, ripping it off and starting after him, only to be held back by what sounded like a paramedic.

"No, let me go! Let me go!" he demanded, straining desperately against his restraints as another person grabbed him. Sam was almost there now, and Gabe bucked even harder as the Winchester darted past officers and firefighters.

A small part of the P.I held out that one of them would grab him and drag him back to safety, but Gabe knew he'd be too fast for them. He was proven right when none of them could touch him. Sam was like lightning, tugging up his shirt and dodging the stunned people as he got closer and closer.

No, no, no-

In a whirl of smoke and flame, Sam jumped without hesitation into the inferno and was gone from sight.

"Sam!"

_____________________________________________________

AUTHOR’S NOTE

I am completely unapologetic about that cliffie btw. Roast me in the comments if you want(haha get it?), but I stand by this particular cliffhanger. This chapter has also been very quickly edited, so apologies if the mistakes are more glaring than usual.

Also, I'm backkkkk! I've been reduced to updating monthly these past few chapters, which I loathe myself for btw, but it is what it is. As I'm writing this author's note, I'm on my way back from Florida, where I've been since Saturday due to a very short notice trip. My life has gotten extremely busy as of late, not to mention the internet issues I've been having at home that are now solved thank goodness. The only consolation I have for you guys is that this chapter is 15k and from Gabe's POV, which you have all been obsessed with.

Anyway, Chromaticity is almost done! The next chapter will be the last for this installment, but never fear; I've already started rough planning for the next 'book', which I will get into more in the next author's note. I already have plans for a few Gabe POV oneshots that will tie into the series(AKA the rooftop scene during the chase that I've been requested to do maybe 20 times), as well as some separate, non-Chromaticity oneshots I've been working on in between this bad boy.

There's too much in this chapter for me to really comment on here save for more Sabriel interaction that I know you guys have been waiting so patiently for, and it only gets better in the next chapter!
Well, that's it I think. As always, tell me your thoughts, however inane they may be, and hang in there!

I'll see you in the last chapter readers!
Chapter 20: Things We Lost in the Fire

He should've known. Should've fucking known it would be the Roadhouse as soon as that headache began to plague him at the beginning of the night, and even more so when the power had gone out. Hadn't his Winchester gut instinct been twinging all night? Hadn't he thought it odd that Meg's ex hadn't retaliated yet with his posse? Hell, even Ben had seen something, and yet here he was. For someone who supposedly saw the future, he was pretty shitty at it.

A cry for help, a slumped body in a doorway. Screams chase him, echoing as he tries to find his way out. Where was the exit? He knew this place; knew where it was.

It was hot; overwhelmingly so. Smoke clouded Sam's sudden double vision as he burst through what was once the proud doorway of the Roadhouse and into the interior, which was blackened and nearly consumed by the growing fire. He winced, but didn't dare to stop and clutch his head; to do so would waste precious time that he didn't have. So he just blinked the images away furiously and kept going.

Sam ignored the pang in his chest as Gabe's distressed cries as he forged deeper into the burning building, sidestepping dangerous patches of flames and charred furniture. Gabe would kill him when he got out, but the most important thing was that he'd managed to get him to safety. The feeling of panic when the P.I had collapsed to the ground had almost broken through the mindset training had given him, and it had taken all of his willpower to keep his wits about him and get a wheezing Gabe to the front. Sam didn't think he'd ever felt such a horrible mix of stress and worry in his life, and it made him think of Lisa and the little conversation they'd had about how maybe he was more interested in Gabe than he was admitting.

"Hello? Hello! Who's still in here?" the Winchester called out, trying in vain to push thoughts of Gabe and feelings out of his head. He was in a risky situation now, and one wrong step meant that he might not get out of here at all.

He'd run through a couple of practices involving fire back in the peak of his training, and while he'd never done very well with them(one had given him a spectacular burn on his arm that had taken forever to heal), Sam knew enough to know that rescuing someone from a burning building and getting yourself out was much trickier than the movies looked. Even John had only ever made them run through a handful, and small fires at that.

Sam looked around at the angry orange flames consuming the walls, and decided that this was definitely a few levels above a 'small' fire.

"Over here! Shit, who's there?"

A huddled figure beneath what was left of the bar counter caught his eye, and Sam cursed before weaving through the flaming furniture. He thought he could see a glimpse of a purple-gray aura, but the smoke was making it hard to distinguish auras, and he couldn't be sure.

If it was purple though, then that means...
It was Meg, just as he suspected. Her face was soot-stained and eyes red from the smoke, but her distinctive purple aura, now pale with fear, confirmed it was her. She was bleeding from a head wound, and the Winchester took one look at it before determining that she needed to get out, now.

"Sam, is that you?" she asked before dissolving into a coughing fit, and the Winchester winced before offering a hand, about to grasp hers before he stopped.

Her hands were burned; not severely so, but enough that Sam didn't want to grab them anytime soon. The skin was red and tight, and he frowned before grasping her forearm, which was relatively unscathed.

"What happened?" he asked over the roar of the fire, and Meg shook her head, dark eyes wide as she turned to look at the kitchen. Something like guilt flickered across her aura, but it was too fast for Sam to catch, and she was already talking.

"Benny-he's still in there!" she explained through gasped breaths, "He's gone crazy! I-I tried to get him out, but-"

She began hacking again, and the Winchester shoved her closer to the ground and further beneath the counter, where the smoke was a little less thicker and she could regain her breath. As he did, he looked at the kitchen, already calculating the best route to get to Benny.

"All right, come on Meg," Sam grunted, reaching to pick her up, but she planted her feet in protest, shaking her head vigorously as she tried to slide past him and towards the kitchen.

"No, what about Benny!" she cried, "We need-Benny-"

"I'll get him," the Winchester said firmly before she dissolved into hysterics. He had never seen Meg like this before, much less in concern over someone else, but then, she *had* been spending a lot of time with Benny, and the cook had always been a kind, genuine person. Maybe they'd bonded more than anticipated over the week or so she'd been staying with him.

He grasped her face, turning it away from view of the kitchen, willing her to look at him and to focus. They only had some much time before the roof of the Roadhouse collapsed (the wood beams were cracking; Sam could hear it), and Sam needed Meg to get it together enough for him to get her out.

"I'll get him. But right now, I need to get you out. It's what Benny would want," he said strongly, hoping his stern voice would cut through her panic.

It did, at least to some extent. Meg stopped struggling, but her eyes remained fixed on the kitchen as he scooped her up and stood.

Sam took one glance at the front and decided that was a no-go (with Meg in tow at least), instead darting down the back hallway, which was more smoky than fiery. As they passed the closed doorway of the kitchen, Meg pressed her face against his chest and clutched her injured hands close to her chest, trembling slightly.

"It'll be ok, Meg," he said soothingly as they emerged into the night. There were a few emergency personnel back here herding the patrons who'd escaped this way towards the front, but no firefighters yet. Two officers immediately rushed forward, and Sam handed Meg off to the strongest looking of the two, ignoring their questioning as the waitress's aura began to grow more violet.

"Please get him out, Sam," she pleaded, her usual smirk and uncaring face completely gone. She was clearly terrified for Benny, and Sam swallowed heavily before nodding, feeling resolute as his
training came back to him. It was just like the old days, where John would give them a clear-cut mission and expect them to complete it.

Except this time, failure isn't an option.

"I'll be back," he said before turning on his heel and rushing back into the Roadhouse, ignoring the officer's yells for him to stop as he reentered the blazing building.

The double doors of the kitchen were closed, something Sam didn't think he'd ever seen before save for the few times he'd seen Benny actually clock out. One of them was hanging partially off of its hinge though, more jammed into place to keep it closed than actually shut. Sam frowned (why were they shut?), before raising his voice.

"Benny? Benny, you in there?" he asked, but he didn't hear the cook respond.

Sam bit his lip before eyeing the metal handles. The burns on Meg's hands came to mind, and he realized that she must've tried to get Benny out before retreating to the counter where he'd found her.

He must be in here if Meg went to such extents to get him out, Sam thought as he raised his leg, If he's been in here long enough, he's probably passed out from smoke inhalation.

"Hopefully he's not by the door," he muttered under his breath before kicking at the jammed door.

The door fell back with little resistant, hitting the ground with a clatter loud enough to probably be heard over the fire. Sam stepped in, tugging his shirt over his face and sweeping the room with sharp eyes. It was almost fire-free save for the flames eating at the serving counter that opened into the main dining area of the Roadhouse, and Sam realized why as he took in the kitchen.

There was water and ice everywhere. The icebox looked as if it'd been completely emptied, and all the freezers were wide open. Water rushed from the overflowing sinks, sloshing down to the floor and soaking it in a thin layer that Sam had to carefully step through to reach Benny, who was tossing water onto the serving counter like his life depended on it.

"Benny, what the hell?" the Winchester asked, but the cook barely looked up from his task, continuing to throw water at the steadily approaching flames. His aura was unyielding with determination, rippling silver cutting through the usually undisturbed navy blue and shining against the haze of smoke in the kitchen.

The image was so absurd and unbelievable that Sam simply stared for a moment (what is he doing?), completely blindsided before he stepped forward and grabbed the cook's shoulder.

"Benny, we have to go! Come on!" he said, wincing as the acrid smell of smoke stung the back of his throat. It was getting worse now, and it was a miracle Benny was still going in all this heat and smoke. His aura was making Sam nervous, as he'd never seen any other color but some variation of blue within it.

"Can't," Benny grunted, sweeping a pot through the overflowing sink to fill it. He was covered in a sheen of sweat, and in the firelight, he looked far too manic for Sam's liking.

Please don't tell me he's lost it. He's too level-headed for this sort of thing!

The roof was groaning ominously now, and the dining area was almost consumed at this point. Only the blackened skeletons of furniture remained, and flames were beginning to leap hungrily out of the broken windows along with smoke. Sam could hear faint yelling outside, and he thought he could hear water hoses, but he wasn't sure. Either way, the Roadhouse was losing the battle with the fire,
and soon there'd be none of it left.

Sam pressed his lips together as he looked out onto the dining area he'd served for so many years. Watching such a familiar, well-loved place burn was hard, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"Benny, we have to go. Come on man, the Roadhouse is done for," the Winchester said, tearing his eyes away from the front.

"No," the cook said stubbornly, gritting his teeth, and as Sam watched the cook sweep water repetitively over the flames threatening to reach the kitchen, he suddenly understood.

The kitchen was Benny's place. Everyone that knew him knew that the kitchen was his domain, and when people saw Benny they automatically associated him with the Roadhouse's kitchen. Sam had seen Benny slave away for hours making food, and the man spent so much time in the kitchen that people rarely saw him leave. He truly cared for the Roadhouse, and Benny had put so much effort and time into maintaining its kitchen that to see it be burned down...

*It's hard enough for me to see the Roadhouse burn, but for Benny, it must be even worse.*

In the dining area, a roof timber suddenly broke free, falling on top of a barely intact table and shattering it. Embers leaped up in a shower of red and orange, and Sam cursed, scouring his mind quickly for something to snap Benny out of it and to go. He could already feel his lungs protesting the amount of smoke he was inhaling, and the heat was almost unbearable.

*Something more important than his kitchen...*

Sam suddenly thought of Meg, and her burned hands. Her desperation to get Benny out. She could've left with the initial wave of people, or told someone else and foist the problem onto them, but she hadn't.

"Benny, Meg needs you!" Sam yelled, grasping the cook's shoulder again and squeezing to get his attention, "She's outside right now. Come on!"

The pot suddenly stopped sweeping through the water, and Benny gave him a side glance that seemed a little more put together.

"Meg?"

*Bingo.*

Sam latched onto it, his tone becoming more urgent as he tried to coax Benny out of the kitchen.

"Yeah, Meg."

Silver began to ebb away as the overly rigid structure to Benny's aura relaxed a bit. The cook looked into the sink, where the water was dancing with the wild reflections of fire.

"She's pretty scared, Benny. I think she needs you," Sam continued, watching as the cook's aura began to slowly change back to a more normal navy blue.

Breathing hard, Benny looked down at the pot in his hands before suddenly letting it go, stepping away from the overflowing sink with a grimace and a hand to his trademark cap.

"Sam-I don't-"
"Never mind that, let's go, now!" the Winchester exclaimed with a voice husky from the smoke. They really didn't have much time left.

Now that he was back to normal (or mostly so), Benny didn't hesitate twice. With sweat pouring down their faces and water sloshing around their feet, the two left the kitchen behind. Sam politely ignored the overwhelmingly sad look on the cook's face, and the glance back Benny gave to the room.

"Which way?" Benny asked as they paused in the hallway. Both ends were now shrouded in thick billows of smoke that made it hard to see, and Sam bit his lip as he tried to figure out if the back exit was still clear, or if they could somehow pick out a route and leave through the front. Benny had a higher chance of keeping up, but which way was best?

*Don't hesitate Sam. Hesitation leads to a mistake. And a mistake leads to death.*

John's voice came a second too late in Sam's head. Overhead, the roof groaned, and Sam only had a split second before with an almighty crack, the section of ceiling above their heads gave way.

*Shit-*

His hands flew out on their own accord, driven by an instinct that had no clear thought process behind it. All Sam knew was that Benny wouldn't *couldn't*, react in time. Not like he could.

Benny's face was almost comical as he flew forward, thrust past the collapsing ceiling and down the hall. Sam barely had time to scramble back before a pile of broken rafters and aflame insulation poured down, sending up a new wave of sparks and embers that glowed between the now separated duo.

"Sam!" Benny yelled, scrambling to his feet after the initial shock of being shoved hard had worn off.

"I'm good!" the Winchester yelled back, rubbing his arms. It had definitely felt hot, but his sleeves had kept him safe, and any damage was superficial at most.

*But now I'm on the wrong side of things.*

"What do I do?" the cook asked desperately, and Sam shook his head, squinting through the growing flames in front of him.

"Go, just go! I'll come out this way!" he said, gesturing wildly for Benny to get out while he still could.

Benny didn't move immediately though, obviously torn as his gaze flicked this way and that to try and find some sort of route through the blockage separating them. Sam made a frustrated noise, ready to yell at the cook again to get him going, but Benny's indecision only lasted for a few seconds before his shoulders slumped.

"I'll send some help Sam!" he yelled, taking his cap off momentarily to run a hand over his cropped hair before replacing it, "Sweet Jesus, Dean's gonna *murder* me."

With those parting words, the cook took off down the hall, quickly disappearing in the smoke.

Sam couldn't help but laugh at Benny's words, but his temporary amusement quickly faded as embers leaped up to try and eat at his shirt.
"I'm so fucking screwed," he muttered, swatting at his shirt as he turned around to try and take gauge of the situation.

Everything was on fire, which was a pretty obvious fact at this point, but Sam had never been in a true fire before. The tiny little dry runs John had put him through were nothing compared to this inferno, and for the first time since the fire started, Sam felt a very, very small twitch of nervousness.

Don't let that grow. You're alright; you can still breathe properly, and you know where the exit is. Now you just have to get out.

"Gee, thanks Dad," Sam said snidely under his breath before he froze, realizing his slip of tongue.

"Aw, fuck-

Above, the roof groaned, and the Winchester looked up warily before deciding that he'd deal with the John issue later(why was he even talking with the dumb voice in his head anyway?). Right now, he had to get out before the whole roof finally gave in.

Sam found though that thinking it and actually doing it were two completely different things as he braved the flames.

Between the random hotspots where furniture was alight, the growing danger of the bar filled to the brim with alcohol(How it hadn't ignited completely yet and blown the Roadhouse to kingdom come was a mystery that Sam was all too grateful for), and the collapsing infrastructure, Sam wasn't making too much progress. The smoke was irritating his lungs more and more, and he was forced to duck, bob, weave, and contort his body into numerous positions when a section of ceiling suddenly collapsed or a sudden lick of fire got too close.

Minutes crawled by in this manner, and Sam was growing more and more concerned, even if he hated to admit it. He should have made it to the door by this point, out into the blessedly cool night where Gabe was probably waiting for him with...with...

Sam bent over, drawing his shirt up over his nose as a sudden coughing fit hit him. His eyes were streaming, mingling with the sweat he'd worked up, and it took everything in him to not just collapse on what was left of the floor and stay there.

That's not how a Winchester thinks! Get up!

The floor was looking mighty inviting though, and Sam was feeling tired. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if he just took a short break to catch his breath and regroup. Surely he could spare a few seconds to get his thoughts together.

"Sam? Sam!

It took the Winchester a minute to realize that someone was calling out his name over the fire and that it wasn't just a figment of his imagination.

It sounds like...Dean though.

"Sammy! Dammit, where are you?"

"...Dean?" Sam called out questioningly, frowning as he struggled to place where his brother's voice was coming from. What was he even doing here?

A flash of apple green stood out against the deep oranges and dark grays of his surroundings. It was
just a brief flit of Dean's aura, but enough for Sam to locate his brother in the quickly deteriorating building. He had a flannel tied around his nose and face like a scarf, and his leather jacket was nowhere in sight, leaving him looking more different than he should've without something as dumb as a piece of clothing.

"Sammy!"

Sam gaped as Dean spotted him and promptly kicked a roof timber to the side, sending it careening to the side in a mess of splintered wood.

Dean was strong; stronger than anyone he'd ever met, and much stronger than someone his size and build usually was. But had he ever been that strong?

His older brother didn't seem to be fazed at all by his abnormal show of strength, his aura swirling around him in a fierce show of greens that contrasted his surroundings violently. The feeling of security, worry, and protection that swept over Sam nearly had him falling back as Dean grasped his shoulders and hauled him up, unwinding his wet flannel and pressing it against his face.

"Here, take that Sammy. I'm going to get us out of here," Dean said gruffly, wrapping one arm around his waist and grabbing one of Sam's to drape it over his shoulders, "How do you feel?"

"Fine," the younger Winchester said distractedly as they began to make their way towards the back of the Roadhouse to presumably exit through the back door, "Dean, how- isn't it blocked that way? What are you even doing here-"

"Ellen called Bobby, who called me, and I was in the area with Cas," Dean explained, practically dragging Sam; he was supporting so much of his body weight, "Sammy, what the hell were you thinking?"

"Benny and Meg were stuck inside," Sam said, frowning as they entered the back hall and passed where the blockade the collapsed ceiling had made. It looked as if Dean had kicked his way through here too, but that was supposed to be impossible. There had been at least two large roof timbers, but the evidence was looking right back at him in the form of broken pieces of wood.

So Dean came here, accompanied by Castiel, and proceeded to smash his way through everything like the Hulk to get through me. And since when does he call Castiel Cas?

The smoke must have affected Sam more than he thought because he suddenly started to laugh at the idea that his brother had given the clearly antisocial Enochian expert a nickname. That particular conversation must've been priceless.

"You call him Cas?" he asked between breathless huffs, and Dean looked down at him curiously, his aura shifting just enough for Sam to notice.

"Why does it sound like you know him?"

Ah, shit.

"Er, long story," Sam said evasively, ignoring the squinty suspicious look his brother was now giving him, "Let's get out of here first."

"Damn straight," Dean muttered, smoke and embers whipping past them as a doorway loomed up ahead.

The cold night air was like a slap to the face, and Sam shivered as the sweat coating his skin cooled
significantly. Out here, breathing was much easier, though they were still close enough to the Roadhouse that there was a distinct haze of smoke blurring everything. Sam could see people running up now, but couldn't make out much more than disjointed voices and auras, as he was suddenly feeling quite lightheaded.

*Well, I did stumble around in a raging fire like an idiot and inhale a crapton of smoke, so it's to be expected,* he thought as he began to sag further into the support of his brother.

"Easy there, champ, let's get you settled somewhere," Dean grunted, somehow easily accommodating the sudden shift in weight as people began to gather around.

"Is the green giant alright? He doesn't look so good."

"Meg, you should be with a paramedic, get back here!"

"Dean, that was *extremely* foolhardy of you."

"Is that Sam? Get out of my way! Sam!"

Through the clash of familiar voices and washes of aura, gold stood out most, and Sam lifted his heavy head as Gabe shoved his way through the impromptu crowd that had clustered around them. With all the sensory overload around him in the form of sirens and voices and moving people, it wasn't hard to just shove it all to the side and fix his attention on the P.I he had grown so close to.

"Gabe," he said, feeling rather stupid as he just *stared* at the man standing in front of him.

His eyes were alight with the reflection of the fire behind him, blazing gold against the dusty soot stains that marked his face. The haze of smoke did little to dull the flare of his aura, which was spread out wide in the wing shape that was so distinct and unique. Whites and golds were forefront, though oranges and deep reds swirled at the base of the wings, matching the faint embers that were being spun about on the chilly night wind.

Everything else seemed to fade into a background buzz as Gabe's angry, concerned face shifted to one of utter relief, even if a bit of frustration lingered. It perfectly matched the feelings his aura were radiating, though there were other emotions Sam was practically getting blasted with. Worry, lingering panic, and something close to-

"You're such an idiot, Sam-a-lam," Gabe said softly, breaking the monumental(and it certainly *felt* monumental) moment.

Sam snorted before tugging down the flannel around his face so that the P.I could see his wry smile.

"I thought you'd already figured that out," he responded with a voice far hoarser than he would've liked.

Gabe shook his head in exasperation that was definitely on the fonder side. In fact, many of the emotions swirling through his aura were on the fonder side, and Sam pulled away from his now confused brother, knowing what was coming.

He sighed as Gabe darted forward to hug the living daylights out of him, wincing slightly as his lungs protested the tight embrace. The soothing, warm colors that washed over him quickly countered whatever physical discomforts the fire had left him, though he found that the lightheadedness didn't quite go away. Sam rubbed the man's trembling back, ignoring the flare of Dean's aura somewhere behind him and Castiel's rumbling ocean voice as Gabe clutched at his shirt.
"Don't do that again," the P.I mumbled, sniffing suspiciously, and Sam hugged him tighter, tucking his chin momentarily into Gabe's messy, smoke smelling hair.

"I'll try," he responded, knowing full well that it was the best he could give the man. He was a Winchester after all, and troubled followed them around like the plague, "I'm glad you're ok."

Golden eyes peered up at him, the burning fire abating into something much softer and subdued. Gabe's muscles relaxed, and he sighed before burying his face in his chest.

"Me too Sam. Me too."

Sam was vaguely aware that his brother was quickly going from confused to downright irritated, and that they were still standing ridiculously close to the fire, and that they probably only had a few minutes, if that, before emergency personnel completely descended upon them. He also knew that he'd have to come clean to Dean about his sleuthing with Gabe and that things had suddenly gotten much more complicated with the burning of the Roadhouse. He didn't need to be some sort of clairvoyant to know that, but Sam found that he really couldn't bring himself to care about any of those things at the moment.

For now, he was simply content to hold onto Gabe and let the fire win the battle with the Roadhouse behind them.

Sam and Gabe were perched on the hood of the Beetle, watching the firefighters beat the now much weaker flames back with jets of water.

After Sam had been treated with some much needed oxygen and gotten his superficial wounds cleaned up by a tutting paramedic (they wanted to take him to a hospital; he begged to differ), he'd had to face Dean, who by then had been taken care of himself and was wearing his 'you-better-spill-the-beans-now' look that had always cowed him in his youth. While he wasn't quite so intimidated by the piercing green look as he once did when he was 10, he couldn't help but shuffle his feet sheepishly as he explained how he knew both Castiel—or Cas, and Gabe, and what exactly he'd been doing the past couple weeks, starting when he'd met Gabe during his late night shift at the Roadhouse.

Dean had taken it all...surprisingly well. He hadn't had a major meltdown, even if he had interrupted every two seconds with demands and questions (certain events like chasing the serial killer and encountering him again on campus earned Sam an extra eye twitch and stressed aura flare). In all honesty, he had expected Dean to instantly put his foot down and whisk him back under his protection mother-hen style like he'd done when they were kids, but Dean ended up being grudgingly accepting, if clearly disapproving, of what Sam had been up to.

He suspected Cas' calming presence was what had kept Dean from blowing his top off, as his brother's aura interacted interestingly with the Enochian expert's. Sam was so exhausted by that point however that he could barely exert enough brainpower to explore the phenomenon more closely beyond marveling at the gentle blending of greens and blues at the very edges of their respective auras. He had certainly seen auras do that in close relationships such as friends, family, and couples, but Sam didn't think he'd ever seen his brother do it with someone he'd recently met.

Unfortunately, Dean and Gabe didn't get along nearly as well. As he'd predicted, the two were just the type to butt heads and rile each other up. It hadn't been awful per se, but it hadn't been the best first meeting that could've happened.
"So you're the guy dragging my baby brother around Lawrence chasing serial killers, huh?" Dean had asked about a quarter of the way through the convoluted story when the P.I had returned from talking to some cops. The older Winchester's tone wasn't overtly hostile, but the way he crossed his beefy arms and eyed Gabe like John had taught them to eye potential suspects said it all.

Gabe paused in his approach to Sam, taking in Dean's narrowed green eyes and bristling demeanor, before smirking slightly. His aura had settled back down from its flared wing shape, which made the mischievous streak that ran across it more noticeable.

At that, the younger Winchester groaned, knowing exactly what was going to happen. Once Gabe got that look and that color in his aura, there was no way to deter him. Sam bemoaned his luck internally before carefully placing himself close by to separate the two if necessary, all while Cas looked upon the impending train wreck of a first meeting obliviously.

Here we go.

"And you're the protective older brother, huh? I must say, Ben certainly takes after his mother."

That had set Dean off on a new tangent(What do you mean, he's met Ben?), and it had taken both Sam and Cas' combined efforts to keep the two men from throwing excessive potshots at one another. Luckily, neither of them seemed to be interested in starting something more violently inclined with so much police around, and for that Sam was grateful. He was not grateful for the new addition to his headache in the form of two people he cared for bickering with each other. Even Cas seemed to be a bit frazzled by it all, and after the thirteenth interruption to his explanation with yet another childish remark and sneers, Sam had finally snapped.

"Just shut up, and get along for God's sake! There are more important matters here than whatever childish little rivalry you're trying to start, like the fact that the Roadhouse has fucking burned down due to a gang hit!"

Dean had frowned and opened his mouth to argue back, but one stern look from Cas had him complying for the time being, and he backed down. Gabe seemed more contrite and had remained much quieter after that, though it hadn't stopped the two men from shooting each other loaded looks. It was clear they were both sizing each other up, and if Sam hadn't been so annoyed at being interrupted so many times, he would've found all the posturing and overt machoness to the whole interaction amusing.

"When you said he was overprotective, I didn't think it'd be like this."

Sam snapped out of his thoughts and looked over at Gabe, who nodded to Dean. He was standing by the Impala, which was parked about twenty feet away, glaring suspiciously as Cas tried to calm him down. At least, that's what he got from the soothing way the man's ocean aura continuously brushed up against Dean's like waves.

"He can be pretty overbearing, but it's not his fault," the younger Winchester admitted, "It's just the way we were raised. Dean had a lot of responsibility."

Gabe frowned, crossing his arms. A trace of fierce protectiveness that still clung to his aura flared brightly against the gold.

"Still makes him an ass," he muttered, swinging his feet through the air. Much to Sam's amusement, the P.I's feet didn't quite touch the ground.

Sam hummed noncommittally before looking down at his hands and sighing heavily. Now that the
chaos of the night was dying down (along with his initial adrenaline rush), he was almost overwhelmed by the implications of the Roadhouse burning down.

_The worst is that now I'm now unemployed._

"Fuck," he muttered, tangling a hand in his fringe and tugging as he acknowledged the fact that he was now out of a job, not to mention the fact that a lot of his friends were as well. Ellen, Jo, Benny, Meg. Shit, even Ash.

A hand came up to gently tug on his wrist, and Sam let go of his hair automatically at the warm feeling of gold against his skin.

"I'm sorry Sam," Gabe murmured, so softly that even Sam had trouble hearing him over the gushing spray of the water hoses. The P.I hadn't let go of his wrist, which the Winchester let sit on his thigh instead of tugging away, "I-Well, you've been working at the Roadhouse for so long..."

"That's an understatement," he huffed, hunching his shoulders against the blustery wind blowing past. While the fire gave off some kind of heat, at this distance, the cold night (or early morning really) was far more prominent, "Ellen's out a restaurant. Meg's probably gonna have a death warrant out on her now. I've got no job, and my savings aren't the best, which means I'm screwed. I'm _screwed_, and we're no closer to solving _any_ of this than we were in the beginning-"

"Sam," Gabe cut him off before he could spiral even further down his depressing train of thought, throwing an arm around his shoulders and turning so that he faced him more, "We'll figure this out, ok? I'm not going to let you go broke, and we've made loads of progress in this case, more than the LPD have actually. This isn't the end."

His eyes remained fixed on Sam's, strong and steadfast. With Gabe's familiar aura draped over him, the Winchester found that he could relax just a little, and did so under the weight of Gabe's arm. He pressed up against the P.I hesitantly, and when Gabe didn't back away, he moved even closer until they were pressed up side by side.

"Cold?" the P.I asked as they practically huddled together on the hood of the Beetle, and Sam snorted, snaking an arm out to wrap around Gabe's waist.

"Winchesters don't get cold," he responded with a cheeky grin as Gabe made a strangled noise of surprise, his aura swirling faster and brighter as the Winchester tightened his hold. As he did so, his hand brushed against a very familiar shape through the jacket, and Sam pulled the man's jacket far back enough to spot the holster.

"Is it loaded?" he asked, ignoring the noticeable shift in mood Gabe's aura had taken (that was a lot of cherry red) in lieu of peering more closely at the gun. It was the same gun Gabe had had back in his apartment.

The P.I nodded, clearing his throat as he ran a hand through his hair.

"Yeah, I made sure to this time. Shit ton of good it did tonight though," he said bitterly, and the Winchester smiled wryly.

"Guns can't win against a fire," he remarked, letting go of the P.I's jacket before he gave some closer thought to what Gabe had said.

"What did you mean by not letting me go broke?" Sam asked curiously before glancing up to see if Dean was watching and seething by the Impala. Being this close with Gabe was probably ringing all sorts of alarm bells in his head, but to his surprise, both Dean and Cas were nowhere in sight.
Better off that way. Otherwise, Dean would've been stomping over and raising a big fuss over nothing.

A tiny voice said that sitting this close to Gabe wasn't exactly nothing, but Sam paid it no mind, too busy focusing on the unsure turn the P.I's expression had taken.

"I, uh, well, I'm not a millionaire, but if things get really bad, I'm willing to help out. Financially," he muttered, eyes downcast as fidgeted with his free hand.

"Gabe, no," Sam denied automatically, the response almost reflex-like, "That won't be necessary. I can handle it-"

"Oh, fuck off with that Winchester bullshit!" Gabe exclaimed suddenly, pulling away with a scowl. He took away a lot of body heat and his even warmer aura with him, and Sam tugged on the sleeves of his shirt as the P.I's aura grew a bit more orange.

"I know you have issues taking charity and shit, and I get that. I get it, ok? But I'm not going to let you revert to-to ramen noodles and one-ply toilet paper and scrape by on rent!" Gabe exclaimed, gesticulating wildly, "So if you need some money or a place to stay if it gets really bad, I am offering. No, actually I'm insisting. Offering makes it sound like I'd accept a denial, and I'm not."

Sam stared with wide eyes as Gabe huffed and puffed in irritation, his exhales obscuring his face in the cold night. He could see more than enough of his aura though, and it told him that the P.I's sudden outburst was something long coming and only exacerbated by the situation.

"Gabe...wants to take care of me? Or get me to accept his help?"

"Ah, a lover's quarrel. He looks like he's gonna blow a gasket, Sam."

The duo whipped their heads around to see Meg standing a few feet away, a mischievous smirk lifting her tired face. Her head was bandaged, along with her hands, but beyond that she looked like she usually did any other Saturday night: uncaring of the world around her and smug as can be.

"I'm not going to blow a gasket!" Gabe retorted in outrage, and Sam stared for a moment (he hadn't said anything about the lover's bit) before focusing on Meg's anxious violet aura.

"What's wrong Meg?" he asked.

The brunette scuffed her toe in the gravel before sighing and poking an absent-minded finger against her head bandage, her dark eyes even darker as she grimaced.

"I saw Kyle," she stated bluntly, "Before the...the fire. I was in the back, catching a smoke when he-he came up around the back."

The (mostly) joking atmosphere the two had fallen into dissipated quickly as Gabe leaned forward, eyes narrowed slightly.

"What did he say to you?"

Meg looked up sharply, her expression confused before a flit of recognition crossed it. She must've recognized him as a patron, but probably nothing more beyond that. She glanced over at Sam, and he nodded, answering her unspoken question.
"Gabe's helping out. You can tell him."

"It's my job," the P.I added, and this time Meg's eyes narrowed.

"You a cop?" she asked, her violet aura taking a more wary turn, and Gabe quickly shook his head.

"P.I."

The brunette grunted but seemed to accept it, as she relaxed a bit and continued on with her story.

"He confronted me on the stoop," she said, nodding back to what was left of the Roadhouse, "I backed up, and he stepped forward. His goonies left, and it was just us in the back hall. He was going on about me leaving him, but then he suddenly turned to other things."

"Other things?" Sam asked curiously, unable to help himself.

The sudden collapse of a large chunk of the roof made the three of them look back at the Roadhouse, which by this point was unrecognizable. Charred and half collapsed, it was a far cry from the reliable diner/bar that half of Lawrence loved to frequent.

Meg's expression was unreadable as she stared at the ruined building, but her aura exposed a fair amount of guilt and regret, mucking up the vivid violets with something blue-green and heavy.

"He started rambling. I've-well, I'm well versed in Kyle's moods, and he seemed stressed. Something about things getting fucked up, and that the Crucifer had been messing with them too much. He wasn't really making much sense by the end of his rant cause he got madder, but he did say that burning the Roadhouse was killing two birds with one stone before he gave me a good conk on the head. I woke up in the break room to the smell of smoke, and the rest is history."

"It's fucked up, but we knew he wanted to get back at you," Sam stated before frowning slightly, "What would be the other reason though?"

Meg shrugged, "Fuck if I know, but he implied the second reason was something bigger."

"Wonderful," Gabe muttered, and the Winchester sighed before leaning back slightly.

_Something bigger? What's bigger than burning down a whole restaurant and possibly killing multiple people in the process just to get back at an ex?_

"That about sums it up," he remarked, letting his gaze drift up to the billows of smoke hanging overhead before sighing, "I really, _really_ hate gangs right now."

"Tell me about it," Meg said with a snort before her expression sobered, "Sam..."

The Winchester perked up as the brunette stepped forward. He could sense Gabe tense as she reached out one bandaged hand to rest on his shoulder, barely touching him since she was using the unburned side of her hand.

"You're a good guy," she said unexpectedly, completely catching him off guard with the sincerity of her words, "Annoyingly so, but you're also a stubborn little shit, and I know you won't let this go."

She glanced between the two of them, "I just want to let you know right now, these guys don't mess around. The Dead Eyes used to be minnows in the grand scheme of things, but lately...there's been a shift in things."

"Meg! There you are; you're always giving me the slip."
The brunette sighed slightly as Benny jogged up, and she patted Sam's shoulder awkwardly before pinning him with a look.

"Whatever you guys are up to, I want in so I can stick it to Kyle," she said in a lowered voice, a faint smirk playing on her face, "And I know you guys are up to something."

With that, she stepped back to meet Benny, who shot them a curious look. Sam nodded at the cook, and Benny decided not to ask questions as he led Meg away, his navy blue aura leaning towards the softer side as he spoke in hushed tones to her.

"Is she usually so..." Gabe started before trailing off, obviously trying to find the right word to describe Meg.

"Abrasive? Blunt? No fucks to give?" Sam suggested, "Yeah, that's Meg."

Gabe sighed, leaning back and shaking his head slightly. Above them, the sky was gradually lightening as early morning approached, the pre-dusk sky muddied by lingering smoke.

"What a night. And all I wanted was a drink," he said morosely, earning a snicker from the Winchester.

"Don't you have anything at home?" he asked, elbowing the older man lightly.

Gabe's eyes slid over to him, appraising him for a moment. At this angle and with his trademark cockiness returning in spades, Sam could almost imagine he hadn't been a part of the fire if it weren't for the soot stains.

"I might have something lying around, though it's not like you'll be able to partake in anything legally," he said slowly before smirking, "We can always do something else though."

It took everything Sam had to keep his mind from going to the gutter with that line, and judging by the cherry red streak in Gabe's aura, he knew exactly what he was saying.

And he's been doing this the whole time. I've seen that red before; hell, how much have I seen it at this point?

"Well, what are we waiting for then?" he asked to save face, sliding off the hood of the car and walking around to the passenger's side.

The P.I had to scramble off much less gracefully to keep up, stumbling slightly as he trailed after him.

"What about your brother?" he asked, scowling slightly as Sam laughed at his momentary clumsiness.

"What about him?"

Gabe glanced at the Impala before looking at Sam, who sighed and shrugged.

"I'm an adult, and I've already said what I wanted to say. For the moment at least," he said, adding the latter as he thought of the weird sleepwalking and memory flashback to the cabin he'd had. He'd conveniently skimmed over all that, and hadn't even bothered mentioning the premonitions he and Ben had been having.

He knew he should've; it wasn't even that he didn't want to, because he definitely did. Dean needed
to know what Ben was going through (not so much him really), but it didn't seem right at the time. Dean and Gabe had been too snippy with each, and to toss in that bombshell along with everything else would've been too much.

*I'll tell him later after I've gotten some sleep. Or at least taken a fucking shower.*

Fingers tangled through his, and Sam looked down to see that Gabe had grabbed his hand in what seemed like an impulsive move if his faint blush and swinging aura was anything to go off of. Sam didn't react adversely to it though, only squeezing back as he laced their fingers a bit tighter together. Focusing on Gabe's hand was nicer than trying to work out his thoughts.

"It'll be alright Sam," the P.I murmured, the wind threatening to flip up the collar of his back jacket, "You're a strong guy."

A sudden surge of emotion threatened to overwhelm him. It must've been the adrenaline crash finally hitting him properly, or just the cumulation of the past crazy couple of weeks ending with him jobless, but he suddenly felt the urge to curl up and soak up as much of Gabe's aura as possibly while possibly crying.

*That's dumb,* he thought automatically, even as the idea grew more and more appealing in his mind.

Gabe's aura was steady, like a lighthouse in a storm, and Sam clutched onto him like a lifeline as he struggled to give some sort of voice to his internal struggle without coming off as weak or lame.

"What if—what if I can't be strong?" he asked, wincing almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth.

Gabe seemed momentarily caught off guard, but his response seemed to come like second nature as he grasped his other hand.

"Then I'll be strong for the both of us."

*Oh.*

*That* sounded vaguely romantic, and their hand-holding didn't help either, but Sam found that he didn't really care as he latched himself onto Gabe in a grateful hug, squeezing the living daylights out of him.

"You're such a dork," he said as he lifted the P.I off the ground in his exuberance (that statement had made him ridiculously giddy), and Gabe smacked his shoulder, whining jokingly as he was swung around like a rag doll.

"I'm amazing and you know it," he said with a huff as soon as he was set down.

The duo got into the Beetle, and as the engine started, Gabe side eyed Sam before turning to face him.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked suddenly, golden aura flowing in a more serious manner to accompany the sudden mood change.

"About what?" Sam asked, momentarily thrown off.

Gabe gestured to the Roadhouse, still surrounded by flashing sirens and fire trucks. Much of the activity had died down though, as a lot of people had either been shuttled off to a nearby hospital at this point or had gone home once it was clear the fire department had a handle of the situation. There
"The case. All this. The stakes have gotten higher," he said, looking like he did when he interviewed someone. Soft aura, serious expression, and searching eyes, "I know you're capable of taking care of yourself, but if we keep going with this, you might lose more than your job."

Sam gazed back steadily at the P.I, largely unaffected by the ominous turn Gabe's words had taken. It resonated strangely with his childhood, back when John would give Dean and him a criminal to take down before the night ended. He was used to high stakes, and while he hadn't done anything of that sort since he'd left home, Sam wasn't so rusty that he felt deterred by the burning of the Roadhouse. If anything, it only gave him the drive to keep going and to catch the bastards that had burned it down.

*The Dead Eyes better watch out.*

"I'm still in," he responded before smiling and extending his hand, "Are you, *Sherlock*?"

Gabe blinked before grinning, the edge of his smile and aura illuminated orange by the glow the dying fire gave off.

"Wouldn't want it any other way, *Dr. Watson,*" he said, clasping Sam's hand as they made their pact.

Sam grinned back, feeling a surge of excitement and resolve push back the negative thoughts he'd been focusing on. The Dead Eyes would quickly regret burning down the Roadhouse, and Death (or the Crucifier as the majority of Lawrence knew him), wouldn't find himself getting away for long.

He and Gabe would take them all down. Together.

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**AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I'm not really sure what to say. You guys know I usually have some kind of witty remark or comment about the story. I guess because it's the last chapter. Well, one thing actually. The chapter title is a song title, but from which band you'll have to guess!

This is it! Chromaticity is officially completed, and will continue in a next installment called Reactivity! It'll pick up where this story has left off and will be faster paced since this was really just a bunch of world building/exposition in a way? That's all I'll say on Reactivity for now, as it's really just a bunch of vague plot points in a notebook right now lol. I'm thinking I'll get a start on it sometime in February or March so I can have enough time to get the story right.

Thank you so much to everyone that's read and reviewed, and even chosen to keep following this story! I appreciate all the support, and it's so odd to think I could've just left this languishing on my computer.

Anyway, so sorry for the delay! My computer has officially died after struggling for the past few months. Not gonna miss it since it kept erasing parts of this chapter lmao. Luckily my sister was kind enough to let me use her computer to finish up and post. Never fear; I backed up all my files so I still have my stories and all the lil one-shots I've been working on*hint hint* Hopefully, Christmas will be kind to me this year and I find a useful present under the tree ;)

For those interested, I do have a Tumblr now! Fun fact: I made it just a few weeks before they announced their new policy, and I'm still not sure how I feel about it as I was never really into Tumblr, but I couldn't think of any other social media that I'd use as a writing blog? If you guys have any suggestions, let me know, but until December 17th, check out crossroads-consoul. I plan to use it
to rant about writing and whatever I'm working on so my author's notes won't be so long!

I think that's about it? Once again, thank you so much for those that have made it this far! Happy holidays to everyone and I hope to see you guys soon. This experience has been lovely, and I hope to keep it going in the future.

End Notes

This is my first time posting anything I've written, so I hope you've enjoyed it so far and will continue to read. I plan on updating this, I swear.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!