**hue and cry**

by **Nikolaus Chaser**

**Summary**

The kingdom mourns the death of Princess Hannah. Castiel prepares for war, and the castle entertains some surprise guests. There is a wedding, an epic battle, black magic, and lots of drama in store for the Royal Family of Eden.

**Notes**

By the Statute of Winchester of 1285, 13 Edw. I cc. 1 and 4, it was provided that anyone, either a constable or a private citizen, who witnessed a crime shall make hue and cry, and that the hue and cry must be kept up against the fleeing criminal from town to town and from county to county, until the felon is apprehended and delivered to the sheriff. All able-bodied men, upon hearing the shouts, were obliged to assist in the pursuit of the criminal.

See the end of the work for more notes.

Dean stands on the bank of a vast lake, filmy water lapping at the shoreline and a heavy, rolling fog settled over the surface. From where he stands he can see his husband moving, kneeling beside the
longboat where Hannah’s corpse lies. He places a single lily, crisp and white, over her chest. His whole body shakes with violent sobs and he bends forward, resting his forehead against the edge of the boat as he cries. Gabriel moves behind him, long and black petticoat dragging behind him in the soft, dewy grass.

Dean doesn’t think he’s ever seen Gabriel dressed so modestly before. It’s a sight Hannah would have been delighted to see. A pain resonates in his chest so deep that it feels as if he’s going to break apart. Despite their differences Hannah had never been the enemy of Dean, and he couldn’t help but feel that he missed her nagging. Who would be there now to chastise himself and Gabriel when their pranks got out of hand?

When he looks up again he sees that Castiel is standing once more, arm wrapped around the side of his brother’s body. Gabriel’s head is pillowed on his shoulder. There is no doubt that he’s crying; Gabriel seems to be more broken up over Hannah’s death than anyone else in the castle. Dean can’t imagine the pain of losing a twin sister. He thinks it would be terrible enough to lose Sam or Adam, but the bond between twins… it’s something special. Even with such different personalities as Hannah’s and Gabriel’s, the pain of the loss must be tenfold.

Dean draws his dark cloak closer around his body and carefully makes his way towards the grieving pair. He hasn’t been able to make himself look upon Hannah’s corpse. A part of him doesn’t even want to confront the idea that she is really dead.

Castiel was convinced from the moment he entered the throne room and saw his sister, her body sprawled across the floor and still smoking when they arrived, that it was dark magic which had killed her. A consulter had come to the castle the day after her death. He determined that a curse was placed on the King’s chair in the throne room that would stop the heart of anyone who so much as touched it. He proved this by setting free several mice on the surface of the chair, and the moment their little paws had touched the carved metal of the throne they froze and dropped dead in their place. Dean had nearly fainted at the sight of the demonstration, realizing that it very well could have been his husband in Hannah’s place who had been killed by the black magic spell. In fact, Castiel is the one whose life the spell was meant to take, and Dean’s unexpected heat is the only thing that saved his husband from certain death.

The thought of it makes Dean sick to his stomach.

He steps forward, coming to stand by his husband’s right side, his hand resting at the small of Castiel’s back to make him aware of his presence. Then he brushes past him, taking the remaining three steps to the longboat, crouching down and letting his knees sink into the mud. Hannah looks like she’s sleeping. Her face and neck are covered in the thick balm that undertakers use to conceal decay, the apples of her cheeks painted red to make her look almost alive. Her eyes are closed, eyelids brushed with kohl. From his pocket Dean produces a handful of posies, placing a few on her chest along with the lily Castiel left there and the carnations Gabriel brought. Then he reaches out and pushes one of the flowers into her hair, behind her ear. A few tears roll down his cheeks, down the bridge of his nose, and Dean sniffs hard. Even now, Hannah is beautiful. She’s been so, so beautiful since the moment Dean first laid eyes on her, back at the court in the Hunterlands.

He looks down, and then he notices something peculiar. The skin on her left arm is gray and brittle-looking. There are black lines growing there under the skin, like spider webs carved into her skin and creeping up the length of her arm. The lines move, twisting and bulging under the skin, as if they are alive inside of her. Dean reaches out, ready to grasp her hand and feel the skin, but then he feels the earth shift behind him and Castiel grips his arm, stopping him.

“Don’t touch. That’s the black magic,” he says, urgently. Dean recoils, standing quickly, and steps
back into his husband’s arms. Castiel keeps one arm wrapped around his hip, and together they gaze
down on Hannah’s form. The smell of grief and pain hangs heavy in the air.

“She’s beautiful,” Dean whispers, voice choked. “Even in death.” A soft tambourine begins to
play on a flute. Then a bagpipe joins in, and Dean lets his head rest against his husband’s shoulder,
holding him as Castiel’s body shakes with silent tears. Bartholomew steps forward, as Head Knight,
and lights the end of the longboat aflame. Then he and several other soldiers push it into the water.

Within minutes, the boat is enveloped in flames. Gabriel cries loudly, tripping over himself as he
follows after the boat into the water, wading deeper with his skirt floating around him, until he can’t
go any further. Then he collapses in the water, mud and foamy water splashing all around him as he
sobs in agony. Castiel goes to step forward, but Dean pushes him back and wades into the water
after Gabriel, his own long skirt weighing him down as it soaks through. He wraps his arms around
Gabriel as he heaves against him, desperate and raw with pain, sobbing into Dean’s chest and
beating his hands against the other Omega as he pulls him up and drags him back to the shore.

“She can’t be gone,” he sobs, collapsing on the shore, covering his face with his grimy, wet hands. “I
cannot live with this pain. I am cursed, Dean,” he sobs, body shaking, and collapses against Dean’s
chest when the Omega wraps his arms around his friend. He clutches at the Omega’s bare shoulder,
pressing his forehead against his chest. “I’m cursed to watch each of my siblings die before me. I
wish God would simply put me out of my misery now.”

“Gabriel,” Castiel says, voice quivering, and he steps forward, sinking to his own knees in front of
his brother. “Brother…,” he cries, tears swimming in his eyes. “I’m sorry. This is my fault.” Gabriel
blinks up at him, shaking his head, and Castiel lets out a choked sob. “That spell was meant for me. Hannah died because of me.”

Gabriel releases Dean then, and for a moment he is slightly fearful that Gabriel is going to hurt
Castiel, but then he throws his arms around Castiel’s neck and hugs him. Neither seems to care that
he’s smearing murky lake water and mud all over both of them, they simply cling to each other, two
brothers mourning the pain of a dreadful loss.

“I’m going to Hell,” Castiel says. Gabriel whimpers, shaking his head, and presses his face against
Castiel’s neck.

“No you’re not,” he says. Castiel huffs, closing his eyes, and Gabriel squeezes his brother’s
shoulders. “You’re not, Cassie. You shouldn’t say such things.”

“Come on,” Dean whispers, standing, holding out his hands for Gabriel and Castiel to take.
Together they all stand, turning to look across the waterfront once again, watching the smoke
billowing from the longboat as it burns. The music plays on, soothing the dull ache in their hearts as
they pray, and mourn the loss of their Princess together.

Some weeks later Dean is sitting in the courtyard reading, enjoying the light autumn breeze and the
feeling of sunshine on his skin when he’s startled by the sound of horses trotting into the courtyard.
He places his book on the ground and stands, hands on his hips as he cranes to see where they are
coming from. His skirt, a layered brown and green petticoat tied with golden rope around the hips,
drags behind him as he walks towards the road, gasping when he sees a familiar white horse
approaching, and even more familiar tall, gangly young Alpha sitting atop its back.

“Sammy!” he yells, picking his skirt up so he won’t trip and rushing towards his brother. Trailing
behind Sam’s horse are three others, driven by a very familiar-looking knight and two other
guardsmen Dean doesn’t recognize. His heart soars at the sight of them nonetheless. “Benny!”

“Dean,” Sam smiles as he dismounts his horse, leaving her untethered in the closed-in courtyard as he rushes forward to wrap his arms around his brother. He looks like he’s grown a whole head taller since the last time Dean saw him. “Look at you! You are looking as beautiful as ever,” he pulls Dean into a hug and kisses his cheek. Dean blushes.

“Sam, I didn’t know you were coming for a visit,” he says with a smile. “We’ve been so... busy, here. As you know, Castiel’s sister passed away quite suddenly,” he says. He doesn’t mention that the assassination attempt which took her life was designed to kill his own husband. He swallows hard, then blinks up at his brother, a smile breaking through the serious expression on his face. “But, oh! What a relief it is to see you here, Sammy. I’ve missed you so dearly.” He reaches out, cupping his brother’s cheek, feeling the thin stubble that’s growing on his cheek. He laughs. “Look at you, becoming a young man. Soon you’ll be King of the Hunterlands!”

Now it’s Sam’s turn to blush, and he bats his brother’s hands away. “Oh, shush. It’s only been the time of ten moons since you last saw me,” he says.

“Yes, and ten moons is time enough to see a boy become a man,” Dean banters back, hands resting on his hips again. His gaze travels over Sam’s shoulder, eyes lingering on Benny’s face. Their eyes meet for a moment, but Benny quickly looks away. Dean turns his attention back to his brother.

“You are still dutifully attending your studies, I hope?”

“Yes, Dean. Father has plans to send me to study abroad in Rome next year. That is, only if Eden doesn’t go to war.”

Dean’s expression crumples, and he backs away from his brother. “Sam...,” he starts to argue, but thinks differently of it when he sees the hard-set determination on his brother’s face. He changes his tone. “Castiel and I have been preparing...” he looks around the courtyard, lowering his voice.

“There is evil at work throughout the kingdom. Cattle mutilations, crop failures. Entire cities destroyed by plague overnight — the workings of black magic. Hannah’s death, it was...” he trails off, feeling sick. Sam reaches out and touches his shoulders, holding his brother.

“That is why I’m here, Dean. Castiel wrote to me, he wants to keep us informed,” he says. Dean blinks in surprise; Castiel hadn’t mentioned any correspondence with his brother or his father. Not that he’s complaining that he gets to see Sam, but... “If Eden goes to war, so shall the Hunterlands.”

Dean feels his heart swell. He nods. “Thank you, Sam,” he says. Sam smiles, showing his teeth. He looks positively Alpha when he does, and Dean is astounded by how much of a man his brother has grown into in these short ten months they’ve been apart.

He rides on the back of Sam’s horse with him through the courtyard and to the stables, where they tether their horses. Then, together, they all five make the trek up to the palace. Oddly enough, Benny doesn’t speak a word to Dean on the entire walk up the hill, but Dean can feel his eyes boring a hole into the back of his skull as they walk. Sam chatters on and on about school and politics and hunting and weather back at home, unaware of the tension between the people around him. But then, that was always his way.

When they reach the throne room, Castiel shews his advisors out of room and greets Sam with a fond hug and a kiss. He apologizes to Dean when he complains that he was never told of Sam’s upcoming visit; with the funeral preparations and all the other politics going on, it had simply slipped his mind. He invites Dean to join in on the debriefing meeting with Sam, but Dean is feeling peckish, so he instead excuses himself to the kitchens to prepare himself a midday snack.
He’s buttering bread when he hears the kitchen door swing open, and Benny steps into the room. He’s not clad in all of his usual shiny armor and chainmail, wearing today just a simple vest and a tight pair of riding pants, a belt looped formally around his center that holds his sword on his hip.

“Hey there, cheri,” he greets, sitting down at a stool by the table, propping his head on his chin. Dean looks up from his bread, smiling.

“Hello, Benny. Feeling hungry?” he asks, holding up some bread in offering. Benny holds up his hands, shaking his head.

“I’m fine, thanks.” He smiles, but the expression doesn’t seem to reach his eyes. “You look good, Dean. Don’t think I’ve ever seen you in such a long skirt, though.”

Dean glances down at his thick, floor-length skirt, a small blush coloring his cheeks. He shrugs. “The way of dress is very different here in Eden. Castiel has had all fashion of clothing made for me since I arrived here in Spring,” he says, picking up his snack and taking a large bite. He doesn’t bother not to speak while he chews; Benny is familiar company. Or, at least, he once was. “And ‘sides, the weather is colder up here. Not exactly warm enough outside for bare-bellied Omegas to walk about in hose and bra all day.”

Benny’s face lights up with a wolfish smile. “Still warm enough for you to walk around shirtless though,” he banters. “Showin’ off those dusky nipples o’ yours.” Dean blushes bright red, from his neck and all the way the tips of his ears, and his stomach does a nauseating flip.

“Don’t you try and flirt with me, Sir Knight,” he laughs, feeling his stomach twist with something anxious. He remembers this feeling from the time he was a young Omega, hiding behind trees in the forest and walls in the castle flirting with Benny, stealing kisses when they knew they wouldn’t be caught. It felt delicious and exciting then. Now, it feels… Dean cannot put words to the feeling. He doesn’t enjoy it, and he winds up frowning at his bread, suddenly having lost his appetite.

“So I hope that Castiel is treating you well here,” Benny says conversationally. Dean brightens at the mention of his husband.

“Oh yes, very well. He’s a very kind and gentle man. I feel as though I might be the luckiest bride in the world sometimes,” he chuckles, pushing his hair from his face when his bangs fall into his eyes. “All of those terrible rumors about him were false, Benny. You were right about him.”

Benny smiles. “Good. I am glad you’ve found happiness here,” he says mildly. Dean sets the bread in his hands down, turning to Benny, stepping forward. He reaches out to touch the collar of his shirt, frowning sadly.

“Oh, Benny,” he murmurs, eyes shifting over the Alpha’s bearded neck and face, searching his pale blue eyes for any sadness. “I’m sorry that I left you,” he whispers. Benny blinks, hands moving forward to clasp Dean’s palms in his own, twisting their fingers together. “I’m sorry…,” he continues, swallowing, ducking his head, “if I’ve caused you sadness…”

“Oh, cheri,” Benny chuckles, and he releases Dean’s hands to reach out and touch the Omega’s cheek. “All I ever wanted was to see you happy. If being in Eden has been good for you, then I am glad. I could never forgive myself if you were miserable here when I had the chance to take you away.”

Dean sniffs, lips quirking up in amusement. “You know there was never any choice in my coming here, Benny.” He sighs, turning away from Benny, leaning against the counter. “I suppose we simply were not meant to be.”
“Try not to sound so remorseful, Dean. Castiel may grow jealous,” he chuckles.

“Cas does not care for me in that way. We’re husbands but we aren’t… lovers. Well,” he pauses to take a contemplative breath, blinking at the tiled floor before he lifts his head again. “What I mean to say is that he doesn’t love me. We have a good friendship.”

Benny barks out a harsh laugh. “Is that what you’re calling it, Dean? Even I can see you two are infatuated by each other, and I barely saw you interact for five minutes.”

Dean frowns at Benny. “Well, you must have misunderstood. I am rather fond of him, but our relationship is not like that.” He says, ignoring the indignant snort that produces from Benny, “I am his Queen, and that is the purpose I serve. I am his friend too, but not… anything more. He has said it in his own words.”

Benny crosses his arms over his chest, looking Dean up and down with an appraising expression. “Is that so?” He mutters. Dean nods curtly, and Benny rolls his eyes. “So do you spend your heats together, then?”

“Benny!” Dean hisses, cheeks turning red, and he reaches out to smack his arm. Alphas should not discuss matters of heat or rut so openly, especially in a palace where any number of snooping servants or nobles could overhear their conversation. “That’s crude of you to ask. Why do you care?”

Benny is silent for too long before he answers, “I shouldn’t. I’m sorry that I asked that. I’m betrothed, Dean. Your father has arranged for me to be married in the springtime.”

Dean feels as if he’s coming up short for air at the announcement. “Well, that’s just…” He narrows his eyes at Benny and asks, “Why is my father involved? Did you ask for him to arrange it for you?”

Benny’s features crumple in an unreadable expression. “He approached me. I’m going to marry your brother, Dean. Adam.”

Dean drops the knife he’s been slicing bread with and it clatters to the ground. He stares at Benny in shock, blood rushing in his ears. His stomach twists. “My baby brother? He’s…,” Dean’s hands shake as he bends down to pick up the knife from the floor. “But he’s only a child!” He cries in disgust. He slams the knife back down on the counter as tears begin to blur his eyes. Benny steps forward, mouth open to offer an explanation, but Dean storms past him.

He comes out of the kitchens and heads to the throne room. He knows Castiel and Sam will be there, and even if Benny follows him down the hallway he won’t be able to talk about this topic and upset Dean anymore while they are all together. He stomps into the throne room, ignoring the agitated looks he earns from some of the privy council members as he loudly enters the room. Castiel looks up from the table where he’s bent over with Sam, reviewing some maps, and his lips turn downward when he sees the upset state of his mate.

Silently he holds out his hand to beckon Dean closer, and Dean goes to stand by his side without a second thought. The pain and anger and disgust he was feeling only moments before begin to melt away as Castiel curls an arm around his side. He doesn’t say anything to the sour scent Dean is putting off, simply squeezing his hip reassuringly and pointing to the map.

“I was just reviewing with Sam the lay of our land. Many of the attacks have been concentrated on the borders; in the woods and on farmland that is easy to access without raising alarm. But there are several hotbeds of activity, here—” Castiel’s finger moves down over the page, and he taps a big green blob that’s labeled Fonstowne. “Whatever coup has been forming under our noses, its
centrally located here and has spread out in the past few months to the surrounding villages.”

“Are you sending a scout party in to survey the state of things?” Dean asks. Castiel nods.

“I’ve sent orders that a troop of squires should travel down there at first light. We don’t want to raise alarm, but we need to know what we should expect.”

“These mountains,” Sam pipes up, tapping the map right beside Fonstowne, where Castiel had been pointing. “Are they habitable?”

Castiel lifts his eyebrows curiously. “You think that the rebels could be living there?” he asks. Sam shrugs.

“I just think you would have gotten word before now if some big group of barbarians came into town and took over everything. They must have some place where they are hiding.”

“It’s a good point,” Dean says, before Castiel can answer. “But you’re assuming that these are barbarians causing trouble. We can’t know for sure what we are looking at until the scouts go out and come back. Right now, it’s mostly cattle mutilations and a few missing person’s reports we’ve received, but nothing of the nature of pillaging or mass destruction.”

“What I’m most concerned about are the crop failures,” Castiel adds on. “I fear that somebody is sabotaging our farmers. If the crop failures continue at this rate, we will be looking at starvation.”

Dean frowns. “Do you think it’s a plague? Sent down by some dark magical force?”

Castiel’s features darken and he turns away, muttering something under his breath. It sounds oddly like he’s saying his sister’s name, and when he turns back to Dean to respond, he shakes his head. “After the assassination attempt, I can’t help but fear that all of this is dark magic. And that comes from sorcerers.”

Dean swallows. “Your brother…”

“Is dead,” Castiel snaps. Dean blinks at him, and Castiel sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose to calm his temper. “But he did have… a faction of followers. They were exiled after I took the throne, but who knows if they have somehow crept their way back onto our borders. Taken strongholds in the villages, persuaded the laymen to join up with them.”

Dean is quiet. “Lilith,” he whispers, after a few long seconds.

Castiel’s face goes pale and he shakes his head. “No, it can’t be…”

“But she was exiled after… after? Right?”

Sam clears his throat. “Um, who’s Lilith?”

Castiel sighs, running his hands back and forth through his hair. When he pulls his fingers away his hair is all tousled and messy, and he looks stricken. “Lilith was Michael’s mate. But I haven’t… She was never suspect in all of his…,” Castiel waves his hand around in the air in front of his face, clearly at a loss for words. “And I haven’t seen her since the day of the duel.”

Dean purses his lips. “So, then… for all you know she could be the cause for all of this. She could have been behind the assassination!” Dean shouts. Castiel gives his shoulder a squeeze, and Dean takes a deep breath, trying to temper his spirit and lower his voice. “I’m sorry.”
“Don’t apologize,” Castiel says, and he moves his hand to rub at the back of Dean’s scalp, his fingers scratching in the short hairs at the back of his neck. “Just take it easy. Right now the most important thing is to send the scouts down to survey the area, and then we will mobilize our forces. For now we don’t know who is involved.”

Dean chews his lips. “And if it is Lilith behind it?”

Castiel’s face pales and he shakes his head. “You should pray that it’s not, because that woman is wicked.”

Dean is sitting out in the courtyard again, weaving roses and thin vines together for a crown. When he goes into the village with Castiel he likes to bring them and pass out to the young Omegas, and tomorrow when they send the scouts off they will be making their weekly trip to the Lower Town. He’s humming softly to himself, allowing the methodical looping and tying of the vines to distract him from his thoughts and relax him. He’s not even sure why he’s tense, because there are so many reasons for him to be. Benny’s getting married to his baby brother; his husband is inside strategizing plans for their country to go to war; and he’s… sitting out here, tying flower crowns like a child. He lets out a frustrated sigh and throws the half-finished piece to the floor, crossing his arms over his chest. Shouldn’t he be doing something more productive than this?

“Hey,” Gabriel is jogging across the courtyard, and Dean has to stifle a groan. He’s already aggravated enough as it is, and though he loves Gabriel, he doesn’t have time for any of his silly antics right now. Thankfully Gabriel simply plops down beside him, smiling gently at Dean and picking up the half-finished crown from the floor. He places it on his head and nudges Dean in the side. “What’s got you looking so down?”

Dean sighs, offering Gabriel a tired smile as he picks up some new roses and a few strips of vine. “I’m that obvious, huh?”

Gabriel licks his lips and shrugs. “Yeah, sorry.”

Dean chuckles, shaking his head. He looks down at his hands, pretending that tying the crown requires all of his attention so that he doesn’t need to meet his brother-in-law’s eye.

“It just feels like everything is kind of closing in now, doesn’t it?” Dean asks, lips turned down in a contemplative frown. “Castiel is preparing to send troops down to Fonstowne if the scouts bring back bad news. My brother’s grown from a boy to a man in the year I was apart from him… my other brother, who is just a child, is getting married in the spring. It feels as though a million things are happening at once and I don’t… I don’t know what to make of it.”

Gabriel shifts beside him, folding his legs under his butt and picking at the petals of a stray rose. “Feels like the weight of the world is crushing you down and you don’t know how to make it stop,” he whispers. Dean nods in agreement.

“I just don’t know what to do. And I feel so useless, sitting here tying flowers together like a child. But what else is there for me to do?”

Gabriel frowns, pursing his lips. He flings the stem of the now petalless rose across the courtyard, and lays down on his back on the stone floor, letting the golden sun tan the bare skin of his exposed chest. “Well, I suppose there isn’t much you can do about Castiel and his troops. Simply stand by his side and support his actions. Be his Queen.”
Dean huffs, rolling his eyes. “That isn’t really doing much of anything. That’s something I do everyday, anyway.”

He shrugs. “Then, good. You’re doing your job as my brother’s mate. You think that doing your duties as Castiel’s wife is anything to sneeze at? I spent one week with Balthazar in his rut and I don’t think I’ve ever been so exhausted in my entire life.”

Dean rolls his eyes and growls, frustrated. “Gabriel, I’m not talking about sex here…”

“Neither am I!” Gabriel says with a small laugh, whacking Dean in the side with his palm. Dean glares at his fellow Omega through his lashes. “I’m talking about emotional commitment, man. Making sure that your mate relaxes, that they smile every now and then. Sex is easy; giving emotional support and relief is the hard part of having a mate,” Gabriel stretches, smiling slyly up at Dean. “Trust me, I’ve been mated for like a whole moon phase.”

Dean snorts, shaking his head. “How’s that going, by the way?”

“You mean how’s Bal?” Gabriel asks, sitting up, shaking the dust and dirty from his messy hair. “Doing well, according to his letters. I think he’s certainly more concerned with how I am fairing, considering what... happened to Hannah,” Gabriel says, letting out a tired sigh. “He was very upset that he couldn’t make it to the funeral. He’s making the trip up at the beginning of the next moon phase. I am eager to see him.”

Dean smiles. “Good. Being around your mate will do you good,” Dean says, and he reaches out to pet Gabriel’s cheek. Gabriel smiles at him and sighs, dropping his head against Dean’s shoulder and swaying so that they both move from side to side.

“As being around you does Castiel good,” he says easily, “and vice versa. Perhaps you should go find him, he’ll cheer you up,” Gabriel says. Dean rolls his eyes.

“There isn’t much he can do to help me in this situation. He doesn’t have any power over the decisions my father makes. He barely even had any say over what went on at our own wedding, there is no way that he could influence my brother’s…”

“Sam’s getting married? Or are you talking about your other brother?”

“My Omega brother,” Dean says darkly, looking away, “Adam. He was born after my mother died, from one of my father’s consorts. He is only ten and four years old and now he’s going to be Benny’s wife”

“Benny? That big knight you were hanging out in the kitchens with?” Gabriel asks with a frown. Dean narrows his eyes at him.

“How do you know we were in the kitchens together?”

Gabriel shrugs, smirking. “I have eyes all over the castle,” he says, then laughs when Dean elbows him. “Dean, that man must be at least five years your senior. Why would your father marry Adam off to him?”

Dean growls. “I don’t know. If he wanted Benny for one of his son’s mates, he should have chosen me. Now he’s giving Adam away to him and it’s just… it’s disgusting!”

Gabriel lifts his eyebrows, tipping his head back and side-eyeing Dean curiously. “Ohhhhh. So that’s why you’re so upset about this.”
Dean’s forehead creases, his eyebrows pinching. He narrows his eyes at Gabriel, glaring at him from under his eyelashes. “What are you on about, now?” he snaps, but he can already feel his underarms sweating, and it’s not because of the warm weather. Gabriel smirks, shaking his head and tutting at Dean.

“Dean, Dean, you silly Omega,” he says. Dean growls, clenching his fists. Gabriel throws his hands up in surrender and backs away, though he’s still smirking. “So, you and Benny, huh? In the kitchens? Behind the stables back at home? Creeping about behind your father’s back all these years, hoping that one day daddy might let you marry him instead of some uptight noble you don’t even know?”

Dean snarls. “Gabriel, shut up. You know nothing!”

Gabriel shakes his head, still tutting. “Oh, brother, I think I know more than you realize.”

Dean hisses and reaches out, shoving Gabriel onto his back and climbing on top of him. Pinned, Gabriel has the wherewithal to finally shut his mouth, and Dean presses his elbows into the Omega’s chest and glares at him.

“No, you don’t know anything. Benny is nothing to me. Not now and… not ever, really. If he wants to marry my kid brother then so be it, but I won’t allow him to do so without my standing protest,” he says, then rolls off of Gabriel’s chest, planting himself in the dirt and crossing his arms over his chest petulantly. “I mean, for a man to marry a child like this, it is truly despicable.”

He hears Gabriel huffing behind him, and a few long moments pass before he feels the Omega’s arms bracing on the back of his shoulders, his chin resting against the back of Dean’s neck. “Well, if we want to talk about how pathetic our ex-lovers are today, I do have quite a list.”

Dean chuckles, shaking his head. “We were never… intimate, in that way. In my childhood, I was very guarded. I never took any lovers, like you. I wish I had. I offered myself to Benny,” Dean whispers, a quiet confession. Gabriel hums against the back of his neck, nonjudgemental. “He wouldn’t touch me without my father’s blessing. Ugh,” Dean snorts, disgusted, and shakes his head. “And now, apparently, my father has given his blessing for him to touch my baby brother. I want to throw up.”

Gabriel makes a soft noise. “I’m sorry.”

“I don’t miss him. I’m happy with my relationship with Castiel.”

“Just happy?” Gabriel asks. Dean shrugs, chuckling.

“Not all of us can fall in love with our mates at first sight, Gabriel,” he says snappily. The courtyard becomes quiet, the only sound to be heard that of the birds chirping and singing. Suddenly, Dean feels the wind knocked out of his lungs as Gabriel violently pushes him down face first into the dirt and straddles his back. He feels knees pressing into the back of his ribcage, and he knows that he deserves this for what he did to Gabriel earlier. He groans, and Gabriel releases a triumphant cry.

“I win!”

“HEY!”

Dean turns his head, cheek pressed against the cobblestone, and sees his brother running across the courtyard towards them. He grins, chuckling, and opens his mouth to say that Gabriel should probably get off his back now. But he’s not quick enough, and in a single leap Sam has tackled Gabriel to the floor, growling in his face.
“Bro, get off him,” Dean calls, but there’s nothing urgent about his proclamation. Truthfully he wouldn’t mind if his brother threw Gabriel around a bit, and he knows that Sam would never kill or seriously injure him, but he also doesn’t want the guard to spot their crown prince being straddled by a strange Alpha and go after Sam. Sam growls, rolling off of him, but he’s still glaring at Gabriel as he does so.

“This is Gabriel,” Dean says with a flourish in his brother-in-law’s direction. “Gabriel, this is my little brother Sammy. The other little brother.”

“Other?” Sam scrunches up his nose, and Dean shrugs. Gabriel sticks his hand out to shake Sam’s. “We were just talking about your baby brother Adam, big guy,” he says, shaking his hand roughly. Sam narrows his eyes at Gabriel deliberately, and Gabriel flashes him a big smile back. His eyes roam up and down Sam’s body, and he lets out a low whistle. “Boy, Dean, you didn’t tell me your brother was such a stud.”

Sam blushes, yanking his hand away, and Dean rolls his eyes. “Lock it up, Gabe, you’re a mated man.”

He smirks. “Well, what Balthazar doesn’t know won’t really hurt him…” he says. Sam makes a disgusted face.

“Gross.”

“He’s joking, Sam,” Dean says, then reaches out and grabs Gabriel by the shoulder, yanking him away from his brother. “Dude, stop scaring my brother.”

Gabriel grins maliciously. “But it’s so much fun…”

“What on earth were you two just doing?” Sam asks, brows furrowed, as he settles in and takes a seat beside his brother and Gabriel. Dean shrugs, reaching for some discarded roses to resume tying the crowns.

“We’re making crowns for the children in town. Castiel and I will be making our weekly trip tomorrow morning, when we see the scouts off for Fonstown.”

Sam holds out his hand, and Dean places a handful of roses and some vines into his palm. As children, Dean and Sam used to spend hours weaving baskets and hats and crowns from all manner of plants and flowers, so Dean doesn’t need to teach his brother how to do this. The three of them sit in companionable silence in the courtyard, until the sun goes down, tying flower crowns and laughing at private jokes that probably won’t make sense in the morning.

In the morning, they will go to war. But for now, all they can do is laugh.

Dinner is tense, but Dean isn’t sure why. Castiel is brooding over something, pushing the cabbage and potatoes around on his plate fretfully. Gabriel even tried to break the silence with a joke-- a crude one about cabbages and dirty water and something something a maiden giving head-- but the glare Castiel directed him was enough to silence even Gabriel. Under the table he kicks Dean, nodding his head towards the angry Alpha. He wants Dean to fix this. But how is Dean supposed to fix what he doesn’t know is broken?

“So,” Gabriel clears his throat when it looks like Dean isn’t going to say anything to disrupt the tension. Dean casts a side-eyed glance at him, wary. “Dean is pregnant!” he shouts.

Castiel drops his fork with a clatter, and across the table from him, both Sam and Benny look up in
shock. It remains silent for all of about three seconds before simultaneously, all of them but Gabriel outburst.

“Congratulations!” cries Sam, beaming at his older brother with an innocent smile.

“Dean?” Castiel asks, eyes narrowed in confusion and disbelief at his husband. Dean has to admit that he’s just as confused by Gabriel’s admission as his husband looks right now.

“What do you mean he’s pregnant?” Benny snaps. Castiel’s head jerks at the outcry, and he turns his head to glare at Benny, lips raised to bear his teeth at the other Alpha. Benny looks startled by the display of aggression but he doesn’t back down. If anything, he postures more and puffs his chest out in a display of dominance, and a feeling of dread coils deep in Dean’s stomach. Gabriel nudges his ankle with his foot and Dean stomps down, crushing the Omega’s bare toes with the hell of his shoe. He blesses God and all of his angels that he chose to wear shoes today, if for no other reason than to deliver Gabriel this painful comeuppance.

“What did you say, boy?” he growls. Benny goes stiff, and Dean feels the need to speak up and end this nonsense before it becomes violent.

“Castiel,” he says, and his mate looks at him with suspicious eyes. “Your brother thinks himself a jester. I am not pregnant,” he says urgently. Some of the tension eases from his shoulders but he continues to glare at Benny, who scoffs.

“Good thing,” he grunts. Castiel growls and stands up, pushing his chair out with a screech against the tile, the setting at his place clattering as he moves.

“Who are you to speak of my mate like that?” he snarls. Gabriel jabs Dean in the side and wiggles his eyebrows, but Dean remains unamused and glares at his brother-in-law.

“I should pull a stunt like this when Balthazar comes to visit,” he hisses. Gabriel’s face pales, but he shrugs in Dean’s face.

“Balthazar would be thrilled to hear we’re expecting,” he says, and pats his decidedly flat stomach dramatically. Dean rolls his eyes and turns away, just as Benny musters a reply to Castiel.

“I was just saying, Your Majesty, that it wouldn’t be good timing. We are going to war soon, after all.”

“Dean’s health is no concern of yours, Knight,” Castiel snarls, fists clenched against the table top. “I should remind you that you are a guest in my kingdom, and should accord my mate and I the respect entitled to us as the King and Queen of Eden, and as your hosts. And it is none of your business to have an opinion on whether or not my mate should be carrying my child.”

“It is my business what he chooses to tell me about your relationship,” he answers resentfully. Dean and Gabriel both gasp sharply, and then Dean turns his glare back on Gabriel. He looks much too pleased with himself, and Dean is going to get him back so hard for this. He is going to pour honey all over his undergarments, or shave his head while he is sleeping. He is going to make him pay for this mayhem.

“Don’t worry,” Dean interrupts, because it looks like Castiel is about ready to launch himself over the table and strangle the insolent knight. “Even if I was expecting a pup, I would not be sharing any information of the sort with you, Sir Lafitte.”

Benny looks kindly offended by the statement, but he offers a curt nod in acquiescence to Dean’s words.
Castiel continues to growl, and it isn’t until Dean reaches out with gentle fingers to touch his mate’s side that he settles back into his chair. He’s still glaring at Benny from under his eyelashes, and the rest of dinner passes in an even more uncomfortable silence than before.

“So be it.”

“Why must you always cause trouble?” Dean mumbles under his breath as he stabs a piece of meat onto his fork. Gabriel shrugs.

“It would get bored here without some maelstrom every once in a while.”

Dean scowls. “And why must I always be the recipient of your tricks?” he snaps. Gabriel responds with a shrug and a devious smirk, and Dean ends the conversation. Dean has never hated his brother-in-law so much in his life. He doesn’t want to speak to him for the rest of the week.

It’s a relief when they all finish eating, and the servants clear away their dishes for washing. As the room empties out, Dean is happy to be alone with his mate. Castiel still looks so upset, and Dean knows that he is the only one who can comfort him.

Dean leans down and kisses the side of Castiel’s mouth, peppering his lips and chin with gentle kisses and swipes of his tongue. Castiel gasps, mouth opening, and he stays still and allows for Dean to kiss him. His hands come up to rest on Dean’s shoulders, and gently he eases him down until he’s sitting on the edge of Castiel’s lap, their arms all wrapped around each other.

“What’s this?” Castiel asks, humming softly when Dean silences him with another kiss and shoves his tongue right into the Alpha’s mouth. Castiel groans, tipping his head back, fingers clinging and digging into the meat of Dean’s thighs.

“You’re so tense, Cas. You need to relax,” he says. Castiel gazes at him with a solemn expression.

“I can’t relax,” he says with a frown. “My country is going to war, and I don’t even know who we’re fighting against.”

Dean’s smile falters, a frown threatening to capture his lips. Instead he presses forward again and kisses Castiel, and this time the Alpha receives him greedily, pushing his own tongue past Dean’s lips and taking, taking, taking.

“That’s why you need to relax. Gabriel says it’s a mate’s duty to ensure that their Alpha is happy,” he says, curling his arms around Castiel’s neck and peppering his cheek with kisses. Castiel groans, tipping his head back and exposing his neck, and so Dean begins to lick and bite and suck at the skin there too.

“Please don’t take relationship advice from my brother,” Castiel implores. Dean chuckles darkly, teeth grazing Castiel’s jugular, and then suddenly the Alpha stands and scoops him up in his arms as he goes. “Come on, we’ll take this to our chambers. Don’t want any servants peeping on us.”

Dean lets out a loud squawk as Castiel unceremoniously slings him over his back, and he immediately takes a grip of Castiel’s hips, fondly watching his butt sway as he treads lightly down the hallway. There’s no real urgency to his walk, and when Dean spots a few servants and other workers watching them as they walk past, he knows that it’s because his Alpha is taking his time purposely to show him off. To show everybody what a strong Alpha he is, carrying his Omega off to their bedroom like a treasure he won in battle. He rolls his eyes and pinches Castiel’s rear end, laughing when the gesture is returned with a swift spank to Dean’s right buttock.

They arrive in their chambers without any interruption, and as soon as Castiel drops Dean on to the
bed he crawls forward, splaying his legs and hiking his skirt up to expose himself to Castiel. The Alpha growls low in his chest, a happy sound, and drops onto the bed beside him. He grabs Dean by the ankle and pushes his legs further apart. He nips at Dean’s calf, all sharp teeth and possessive growls, and Dean feels himself growing wet with slick in response to his Alpha’s rough treatment.

“Good Alpha,” Dean praises, and a rumble escapes Castiel’s throat. He noses a path up along Dean’s calf and thigh. He drags his tongue like a cat along the sensitive flesh there, his head disappearing under Dean’s skirt, and the Omega gasps and moans vulgarly when all of a sudden he feels Castiel’s skilled, pointing tongue swirling around the head of his small penis. Dean jerks, whimpering softly as Castiel takes him into his mouth, sucking gently at his cock and poking his tongue against the flushed, salty tip.

“Dear Lord, Ca- Cas …”

The Alpha responds with a low snarl, digging his fingers into the soft flesh of Dean’s thighs and pushing them apart. In all the times that they have been intimate (and though it doesn’t happen often, there certainly hasn’t been a lack of intimacy between them) Castiel has never done this. In bed together, on their wedding night and during his heat, the act of sex has always been about getting Castiel’s knot inside of Dean’s body. Never before has Castiel used his tongue on Dean’s flesh like this, never brought him so much pleasure … Dean didn’t even think it possible for his body to feel this luxurious.

And here, he meant for this tumble to be about taking care of Castiel, not himself.

Castiel spends another minute or so licking around Dean’s hard penis and his balls, tongueing at his slick opening and spearing his tongue on Dean’s hole. He’s not in heat right now, so it takes some coaxing to get him wet and prepared enough to take his Alpha’s knot. Still, with the smell of Castiel so heavy in the air and his tongue dragging hot across Dean’s sensitive skin, it doesn’t take much effort to get himself to the point where he is slick and begging for his mate’s knot.

“I want you,” Castiel says, unbuckling his breeches hastily and kicking them off of his legs. He kneels between Dean’s spread legs, pushing his skirt up and out of the way, his heavy cock dipping between Dean’s cheeks and pressing against his wet hole.

“You have me,” Dean gasps, and he gyrates his hips, moving his body down so that the head of Castiel’s cock breaches his hole. He hisses and drops his chin to his chest, feeling his entire body pulse with the need to mount and fuck his mate. Claim, claim, claim him and possess him and bring him so much pleasure because his body belongs to Castiel. Instead, he breathes deeply and moves with Dean, rolling his hips and thrusting shallowly into the Omega’s tight, hot body.

It’s over sooner than either of them would have liked to hope, Dean toppling over the edge hard and fast, consumed by the feeling of being so full of his mate; their bodies so close and hot, Castiel’s hands all over his most sensitive parts. Castiel follows shortly after, groaning as his knot fills Dean and he falls down on top of his mate, crushing him with the full weight of his body. They roll over together, kissing chastely as they settle comfortably into the pillows to wait out the knot. Because this sex is outside of heat or rut, they won’t stay locked together for nearly as long as usual.

“Not that I don’t mind the affection,” Castiel huffs, dragging his hands through his hair and pushing some loose strands away from his sweat-soaked face. His biceps flex as he moves, and Dean quietly appreciates the view. “But why now?”

Dean purses his lips and draws the sheets up over his bare body, feeling the sink cling to the curve of his hip and torso. “What do you mean, ‘why now?’” he asks, and he looks away from Castiel’s face as he finishes, “I was just feeling a little lustful.”
Castiel crosses his arms over his chest. “Oh,” he says, “Are you sure it doesn’t have anything to do with what I said to Benny?”

Dean sputters, scandalized, but the blush on his neck and face gives away the fact that his mate has caught him in a lie. He scowls, reaching out to violently fluff his pillow before he slams his face into the downy cushion. Despite its softness, the force he uses to faceplant still gives him whiplash, and his neck instantly aches.

“My sexual appetites haven’t got anything to do with Benny,” Dean huffs out the side of his mouth, blinking owlishly at Castiel. “There’s no need for any eldnyng, Alpha,” he tacks on, bitterly. Castiel frowns, features softening, and he reaches out to touch Dean’s shoulder. He doesn’t miss his flinch, but Castiel pushes on with the touch, rolling closer to his husband and gently rubbing his hand back and forth across his back.

“I don’t harbor any envy for that brutish Alpha,” Castiel insists, though he doesn’t shy from keeping the antipathy from his voice. “I’m only concerned for you, Dean. When you came in from the kitchens today you smelled so…,” he trails off, searching for the word, and Dean blows out an exhausted breath into his pillow. He closes his eyes and focuses on the feeling of Castiel’s hands on his body. He’s rubbing his neck where he just hurt it and it feels so good.

“He’s marrying my brother,” Dean finally says, and the confession comes along with an angry sob. He grits his teeth to keep the tears from pouring out onto his pillow; he doesn’t want to have to wash it and make it lose its cushion if he cries too much into it. “My baby brother, Cas! He’s only ten and four years old. Barely out of puphood and Benny is taking him as his God-damned wife.”

Castiel frowns. “I’m… sorry, Dean.”

“It’s disgusting,” Dean sniffs, rolling over so he can look up at Castiel. He looks into his eyes, tears swimming in his own, and shakes his head. “All the Alphas to sell Adam off too, and my father chooses Benny,” his lips twist, nose wrinkling. “After all those years… when he knew how I… how I wanted…” He stops, glancing up at Castiel self-consciously and then turning his face away. It doesn’t take him long to figure out what Dean is refusing to say.

“Your father knew this and decided to engage him to Adam regardless.”

Dean sniffs, nodding once. Then he winces. “When I was sixteen I went to my father and I begged him to let Benny court me. He knew how I felt about him,” he swallows hard, feeling his stomach flip and twist at the memories. His lips tremble, “and he wouldn’t let us be together. He said that I was the first born Omega and I shouldn’t go about who— whoring myself to some soldier, because a better offer would come along someday.” Dean snorts, rolling his eyes. “And I guess he was right, because three years later you came along and bought me right up.”

Castiel frowns, and he pulls his hands away from Dean’s body. If that is how Dean sees their relationship-- as one of ownership and servitude-- how can Castiel bring himself to touch him? Dean blinks his eyes open and looks up at Cas, throat bobbing. He looks apologetic.

“I didn’t mean to deride you, Castiel,” he whispers, and his eyes fill with tears again. He sniffs, trying to hold them at bay. “You have been nothing but good to me, from the moment we met…”

Castiel shakes his head. “Don’t apologize, Dean. I think that…” he lets out a heavy sigh, scrubbing at his face with his hands. “I think you are owed an explanation for why I agreed to marry you. As you can probably tell from living with me for this past year, I am not the biggest proponent of
arranged marriages.”

Dean snorts, “I think that’s a bit of an understatement, Cas.”

Castiel smiles a little bit. “Hannah was the one who arranged our marriage. After I killed Michael… the kingdom was in disarray, falling apart. This black magic coup we are seeing rise up now is not the first since his death… though it is certainly the most powerful. My personal reputation was tarnished as well. I am sure you’ve heard terrible rumors about me before we met. But that… it’s all par for the course when a government is in transition. There will be uprisings, there will be discourse. I was handling it fine on my own.

“Hannah went against my orders and sent out letters to the surrounding kingdoms, asking for eligible bachelor and bachelorette Omegas. She thought that finding me a wife would help with my image and settle the political discourse. Give people something to be happy about rather than focusing on my brother’s death so much,” he sighs. “In part, I suppose she was correct.”

“She told me about that. The first night when we camped out on that hill,” Dean says. Castiel perks up at that, and Dean lets out a dry, humorless chuckle. “She said there were all these rumors that you were a homosexualist, and that I was going to disprove that lie by bearing your pups.”

Castiel winces. “She said that to you?” He asks. Dean shrugs, because it was really not a big deal then and it’s certainly not a big deal now, and Dean knows not to speak ill of the dead. Castiel shakes his head and sighs, then carries on.

“With my reputation what it was, and still is in many respects, there were very few responses. I was relieved by this, but Hannah… well, you know her. She insisted that I marry.

“Your father refused to let me meet you before the week of the wedding, which I felt was entirely unfair to both of us. Particularly unfair to you. I can’t imagine what kind of anxiety you were feeling,” Castiel says, and his tone is apologetic. Dean shrugs, a single hot tear sliding down his cheek.

“I didn’t exactly have time to get myself very worked up,” Dean snorts. “My father only told me about the marriage contract a few days before the wedding. I think you had already arrived in the Hunterlands by the time I found out.”

Castiel snarls, and Dean flinches away again, hard. Castiel reigns in his temper, but he’s still scowling. “That bastard,” he mutters. “You know that the way he treated you was unfair, don’t you, Dean?”

Dean bristles. “Don’t be pedantic. Of course I know,” he snaps. Castiel opens his mouth to apologize, but Dean carries on, his voice now shaking. “But--but my father did love me. He did as best as he knew how. It wasn’t his fault that he didn’t know how to react when I presented as an Omega.”

Castiel goes stiff at that. “How did he react?”

Dean shrugs, closing his eyes. “He just wanted to protect me. He locked me up during my first heat and I thought I was dying. I didn’t even know what was going on, but he… he knew. And after that he was never the same to me,” Dean says, his voice shaking. “I remember wondering what I did wrong, because suddenly I couldn’t do any of the things I loved any more. My fighting lessons, shooting, horseback riding… I couldn’t do those things anymore because those are things that Alphas do. And then I learned new things. To play instruments, to dance…,” he swallows, tears blurring his eyes. “And I liked those things, don’t get me wrong! My dad never deprived me.”
Castiel grits his teeth. “Dean,” he breathes, “Yes, he did deprive you. Just because you’re an Omega doesn’t mean you should be treated any differently. I mean….” Castiel bites his lips. “I mean, yes, Omegas are meant to be kept safe from stray Alphas and others who seek them harm, especially during their heats, but you’re still people. You aren’t an object and that’s what your father treated you like. If you wanted to learn to fight or shoot or to ride horses or do anything else your heart desired, you should have been allowed.”

Dean bites his lips. “Well, just because he banned me from doing those things… doesn’t mean I didn’t still do them,” he says, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. “Sam would let me borrow his bow and arrow, and we’d go hunting sometimes at night. Benny would take me riding every day whenever my father was away on business. My childhood… it wasn’t ideal, but it was good.”

Castiel smiles fondly a Dean recounts the good memories of his childhood. “Did your father ever find out?” he asks. Dean’s expression darkens suddenly and he looks away again.

“Sometimes,” he mutters darkly. Castiel scowls and they both fall silent, the tension in the air between them thick as smoke.

“On our wedding night,” he whispers. “You had bruises.”

Dean closes his eyes and turns away. Castiel lets out a quiet whine, startling Dean, and then his arms are wrapped around Dean’s torso and he’s pressing his face into the side of Dean’s chest like a child. He stares at him with the same troubled expression, and after almost a full minute of silence he gently clears his throat.

“I’ll kill your father. I’ll kill him and Benny and your brother. Any Alpha that ever dared to hurt you,” he swears. Dean rolls his eyes and flicks Castiel in the forehead.

“Get off of me, you big lug. And stay away from my brother, he never laid a finger on me nor does he even know a thing about it,” he says quickly. Castiel scowls.

“It? By ‘it’ you mean the occasions on which your father would beat you?” he asks, frowning. “How often did he do this to you, for you to mention it so casually?”

Dean shrugs. “I didn’t keep track.”

Castiel scowls, narrowing his eyes. “Did Benny know?” he growls. Dean sighs.

“Of course. He was the one who patched me up after,” Dean says. Castiel growls again, but Dean is too busy scrubbing the tears from his eyes to look up at his mate again. “I used to beg him to take me away from there. Once Sammy presented Alpha… I knew he’d be alright. And he could take care of Adam, too. I used to tell Benny that I’d sell my clothes and jewelry and things and we’d have enough money to start over together somewhere.” He sniffs, dashing at his cheeks. Castiel settles in beside him, watching Dean’s face.

“You love him?” he whispers. Dean shakes his head.

“No,” he answers. “Not since I was a child. But I knew that he was my only chance at freedom. And I was fond of him,” he hiccups, staring at the ceiling. “I thought that if he made an offer to my father to buy me from him, we could get married. But he never would do it. He never would do anything against my father’s wishes,” he cries. Castiel frowns, saying nothing.

“Now my father asks him to marry Adam, and he says yes. I swear, he must be doing it on purpose! Or else he thinks that because I am married now, I won’t have anything to say on the matter. But, oh!”
Dean shoots up in bed, throwing the covers off his body and flouncing over to the dresser. He sits down in front of it, naked, and draws up a paper and quill. “I’m going to write him a letter and give him a real piece of my mind.”

Castiel cranes his neck to look at Dean. “Do you think it will make much of a difference?” he asks. Dean deflates, turning to look back at Castiel over his shoulder.

“Well, no,” he sighs and stands up, making his way back to the bed. He crawls onto the mattress, making his way to Castiel’s side of the bed and depositing himself into his arms. Surprised but never reluctant, Castiel wraps his arms around Dean and holds him.

“Are you unhappy here?”

Dean blinks. “No,” he answers. “I’m very happy here.”

“If you wanted to leave I would never stop you.”

“I don’t want to leave, Cas,” Dean insists. Castiel presses his nose to Dean’s hair and breathes a sigh of relief.

“If Benny offered, would you leave with him now? Run away and marry him in some other country, far away from here?”

The question gives Dean brief pause, but it doesn’t take him long at all to settle on an answer. “No,” he says. “You know… I used to think that Benny was the best Alpha out there. He was everything I wanted in a mate, everything I wanted my brother to grow up to be. Strong, and righteous, I thought, and he always knew what to say. Like I said I did love him for a fashion, but it was a childish love. I know what a good Alpha is now, because I married you. And you take care of me without expecting anything in return. You protect me from harm; you don’t just show up to clean me up after I’ve already been hurt. You give me the things I want and you listen to me when I talk. You respect me and Gabriel and every other Omega and every other Alpha that you interact with. You’re a good Alpha, Cas. I love being here with you. I wouldn’t trade that for anything.”

Castiel smiles a soft smile and he bends down to kiss Dean on the side of his mouth. He lets his lips linger, nosing gently at Dean’s cheek.

“If you still want to write that letter in the morning, I will help you. I fear that however you word it may be a little too…”

“Abrasive? Condescending? Disdainful?”

Castiel chuckles, and Dean smiles against his neck. “You know that’s the reason my father wouldn’t let you meet me before our wedding night, right? I’ve always been too insolent for his taste, he was worried I’d scare you away.”

Castiel rolls his eyes. “Well, he was wrong. I love you just the way you are.”

Dean blinks at Castiel in the dim candle light, surprised by his words. He leans forward and presses a chaste kiss to his Alpha’s lips in lieu of saying any words, and leans over his body to put out the candle on their night stand. He can hear his husband fall asleep shortly after that, snoring loudly into the night, but Dean can’t sleep and he lays awake, propped against his Alpha’s chest until the wee hours of the morning staring up at the dark ceiling of their bedroom.

His husband loves him. Benny was right, and Castiel Milton loves him. Who would have thought?
Since Hannah’s death, Gabriel has been a ghost of himself. He is drawn and tired, his eyeballs sunken into his face and his expression weary all of the time. He still jokes around and laughs and smiles, but it’s with empty eyes or a smell of sadness about him. Sam’s arrival at the palace has given him fresh blood to pull jokes on and test out his more elaborate pranks, but the joy on his face is only fleeting for as long as it takes to make Sam huff and storm out, exasperated.

He misses his sister.

Today, Gabriel is happier than Dean has seen him in probably a month. It’s because Lord Balthazar is supposed to arrive today, Dean knows. He holds Gabriel’s hand on the castle steps while they wait, seeing the cavalry approaching on the horizon, and Gabriel bounces on his heels.

Castiel brushes past them, fingers brushing the back of Dean’s neck while he passes. He is wearing a modest doublet that’s brown and black, with paisley teardrops embroidered with golden thread up and down the front. He has on a dark blue cloak today, the fabric thick and rough, good to protect him against the wind that is rustling leaves on the trees and flattening his long, messy hair against his head. Dean smiles fondly at his husband as he watches him briskly walk down the path, towards the approaching horses and men.

“They were childhood friends,” Gabriel says suddenly, and Dean jerks his head, watching curiously as a beautiful black mare pulls ahead of the rest of the crowd, and a man in full battle gear dismounts from the horse. He takes off his hat and Dean sees now that it’s Lord Balthazar; he embraces Castiel with gusto, and Castiel returns the gesture kindly. “Had the same school-master. They learned their numbers together. Used to spar in this courtyard when they were babes.”

Dean chuckles to himself. Balthazar backs away from the embrace and takes a deep bow in front of Castiel. “A fact that has served you well, I’m sure,” he notes dryly. Gabriel jabs him in the side with his elbow and Dean snickers, tugging on Gabriel’s arm so that he will follow him down the path. Because Gabriel and Balthazar decided to break so many rules in their mating, it’s important that now, on Balthazar’s first visit to the castle and the eve of their wedding, that they respect tradition. Dean presents Gabriel to Castiel, who holds his arm and introduces him to Balthazar, like they don’t already know each other so well. Balthazar takes another deep bow, this time his eyes glued to Gabriel, and the Omega smiles jovially, practically vibrating with anticipation. Castiel lets go of him and he bounces forward, tossing his arms around Balthazar’s neck. The Alpha wraps his arms around his waist and presses his nose to his neck, inhaling his rich, chocolate scent and sighing because he finally, once again, has his mate in his arms.

“I missed you,” Balthazar says into the mop of messy blonde hair atop Gabriel’s head. The Omega lifts his chin, lips wobbling when he looks up at his mate. Balthazar raises his hand and strokes Gabriel’s cheek with his thumb, and then suddenly the dam seems to break and he collapses, body trembling in Balthazar’s arms. His body trembles against his mate’s chest, sobs muffled by the chainmail his face is pressed against.

“Come on,” Castiel urges quietly, taking Dean’s hand and turning them away from the couple embracing on the lawn. Dean goes willingly, clinging to his husband’s arm and only glancing back at Balthazar and Gabriel once more as they walk back up the path. Gabriel’s head was cradled in his mate’s arms, their faces mere inches away from one another while Balthazar said something to Gabriel that would make him stop crying. “Come on,” Castiel repeats, tugging Dean forward. He finally looks away. “They will meet us inside when they’re ready.”

“Shouldn’t they have a chaperone?” Dean asks, but there’s no conviction behind his words. Castiel
looks at him curiously, and then his lips tip into a small smirk.

“I don’t think there is anything they could do to each other now, which they have not done already. Besides, they are in the public courtyard. What do you expect them to do in front of all these people?”

Dean chuckles. “Well, you weren’t at Berea with us when they nearly had sex on top of the dinner table. And that was in front of me, Lady Hester, the Royal Guard and all the servants.”

Castie’s features darken minutely, but then he shakes his head and offers Dean a slightly amused smile, and a shrug. “Well, I wasn’t there and I did not just hear anything you said. So I think it’s safe for us to leave them alone in the courtyard for just a moment,” he says. Dean smiles, suddenly filled to bursting with fond affection for his husband, and he surges forward to plant a kiss on the bolt of his jaw. Castiel blushes, then smiles a little, and then looks at Dean curiously. Their eyes meet and Castiel sighs sadly.

“Balthazar brought the cavalry with him.”

Dean nods. “I… saw. But the scouts have not returned yet. Are you not going to wait for them before you mount an expedition to the south?”

Castiel frowns. “I want to be prepared for the worst. It has been almost two weeks and we have not even received a messenger pigeon from the scouts. If they do not return to us within the end of this week… I can not wait any longer, Dean. Our people are dying. Something must be done.”

Dean nods solemnly, taking a seat on the bench in front of the antique clavichord that sits in the entrance hall. Castiel slowly makes his way over, sidling up behind Dean just as the Omega’s fingers come to rest on the delicate keys of the large instrument. The entire base of the clavichord vibrates when he taps his finger against one of the keys, a deep sound ringing throughout the lobby. Castiel’s hands come to gently rest on Dean’s shoulders, thumbs rubbing circles at the base of his neck. Dean tips his head back, leaning comfortably into the touch, and timidly begins to play an old song he learned from his tutor when he was still a babe himself.

“Something is bothering you,” Castiel says, kneading gently at the tense muscles in Dean’s shoulder. He ignores him, and begins to sing.

“Go and catch a falling star, Get with child a mandrake root, Tell me where all past years are, Or who cleft the devil’s foot…”

“Oh, woe, not that song,” Castiel groans. Dean smiles a little bit, pressing more heavily on the keys, leaning more willingly into husband’s arms.

“Don’t tell me you didn’t love to sing this as a child,” he says. Castiel huffs, but says nothing more, and Dean chuckles as he continues to play.

“Ride ten thousand days and nights, Till age snow white hairs on thee, Thou, when thou return’st, wilt tell me, All strange wonders that befell thee…”

“My darling,” Castiel says, squeezing Dean’s shoulders and leaning down to bite at the flesh of his ear. “You’re carrying on quite out of tune.”

“I would like to see you sing the song better.”

Castiel makes an exasperated sound, but then he leans down and in Dean’s ear as he continues to play, he whispers, “And swear, No where Lives a woman true and fair. If thou find’st one, let me
know, Such a pilgrimage were sweet; Yet do not, I would not go, Though at next door we might meet…”

Dean drops his hand on the clavichord, making a terribly loud noise that breaks the rhythm of his song, and he turns so suddenly in his seat that his forehead actually hits Castiel right in the face. He bounces backwards, but Dean reaches up and catches him, cupping his face and pulling him in for a long, slow, soft kiss. Castiel goes still, fingers still digging into Dean’s shoulders as he lets his Omega kiss him carefully, thoroughly, almost desperately.

“Dean--”

“You’re going to go to Fonstowne,” Dean says when they pull apart, his fingers still clutching at Castiel’s collar, nails digging into the rumpled fabric. “You won’t let your men go fight while you stay here.”

Castiel licks his lips. “That’s right,” he says quietly. Dean jerks his head, nodding.

“Okay. Okay,” he says. “You’ll come back to me,” he says. Coming from Dean’s lips, it’s more of a statement than a question. Castiel nods solemnly.

“Yes, Dean. Of course.” He says, then eases onto the bench beside Dean, wrapping his arm around his waist and resting a hand on the small of his back. Dean nods once, curtly, and they sit and wait in comfortable silence for Gabriel and Balthazar to come back inside. Sam wanders into the hall with an apple in his hand shortly after, smiling brightly when he spots Castiel and his brother sitting by the clavichord. He walks over, squeezing in on the small empty space at the end of the bench and loudly crunching his apple.

“Good day. Benny’s gone to take his horse for a gallop down by the aqueduct. I saw the cavalry outside-- I take it Lord Balthazar has arrived from Berea?”

“He and Gabriel are… reacquainting in the courtyard now. It’s been almost ten minutes, actually, so they should be coming inside shortly.”

Sam snorts, “Oh boy, I cannot wait to meet this man. Any Alpha who mates with Gabriel must be a real gowlpenful-o’-anything.”

Castiel whips his head around, peering at Sam curiously. He tilts his head to the side, eyes narrowed. “What?... What does that even mean?”

Dean rolls his eyes, elbowing his brother in the stomach sharply. “Shut your trap, Samuel. You’re rude.”

“You’re not my mammy, De,” Sam spits back. Dean pinches his earlobe and Sam flinches, wincing, and swats his brother’s hands away. Dean smirks.

“I just don’t even know what that word means,” Castiel says plainly.

“It means that Sammy’s got a little crush on Gabriel, and he doesn’t want to admit it so instead he’s going to blindly spit insults at his new mate.”

Sam sputters, too flabbergasted by Dean’s words to even try to defend himself. Castiel tuts softly, shaking his head. “I would not insult Balthazar if I were you, Sam. He is very brutal.”

Dean laughs and Sam turns red in the face, embarrassed. At that moment the door opens and Gabriel and Balthazar tumble into the hall together, joined at the hip and followed by all the men of the entire
cavalry. The three of them stand up from their bench seat and make their way over to greet everybody. Dean takes a kiss on the cheek from Balthazar and congratulates him on the upcoming wedding, to which Balthazar beams proudly in response and reaches out to take Gabriel’s hand in his own. As he walks past the royal couple to go greet the cavalrmen, he sees his brother out of the corner of his eye going to shake Lord Balthazar’s hand. He must refrain himself from rolling his eyes at his brother.

Silly Alphas.

Preparing for Gabriel’s wedding feels so surreal. Going about preparing for a feast and a celebratory ceremony in a time like this seems like a self-contradiction for all those in the castle who know what hardships will be coming in these next few days, months, years. It’s also awkward for Dean, who can’t help but remember the few short days he had to prepare before his own wedding, when he was scared and angry and sad that he would have to be marrying Castiel and moving to Eden. This wedding, even with the prospect of war looming over the heads of everyone in the castle, will be different.

Seeing Gabriel in his wedding clothes is an experience all of its own. Balthazar says no to his first pick- nothing else but a lavish and revealing skirt fashioned entirely from gold thread with finch feathers hanging off the hems and slapping his bare thighs with every step- and tells him to go pick something that is a little more modest and a little whiter. Dean never thought he would see Gabriel submit to the will of an Alpha, but Gabriel never fails to amaze him. In the end he decides on a long, starch white floor-length skirt that trails behind him when he walks. It hangs so low on his hips that when he moves, Dean can see the sparse blonde curls on his hips and belly that lead down to his groin. On his chest he dons a white top piece that drapes over his left shoulder. He wears a sash of daisies and anemone across that same shoulder, and the vine loops around his bare belly and hips and trails behind him. In his hair he wears flowers too, and Kali crushes berries on his lips and cheeks that make him look pretty and bright and young.

The sun is already high in the courtyard when the wedding ceremony begins. There isn’t much pomp and circumstance: this is a royal wedding, but it’s also a wartime wedding. And since the scouts still have not returned from their journey to the south, Castiel is making plans with Balthazar and their men to march at first light tomorrow.

Three maids play the harpsichord, the dulcimer and the flute respectively, creating a mellow and melodious rhythm as the soundtrack for Gabriel’s entrance to the courtyard. Balthazar is standing in the grass with the priest waiting for him, wearing tight, black leather pants and a matching black vest, his ceremonial sword stuck into his thigh holster, his family crest proudly adorned on his chest. Gabriel walks down the palace steps, barefoot, Castiel guiding him forward. When Gabriel sees his husband he smiles unabashedly, his joy contagious, and the crowd that has gathered to watch them be wed seems to bolster with every step closer to the wedding altar he becomes.

“Who gives this Omega away in marriage?” the priest asks as Gabriel and Castiel approach. Castiel releases Gabriel, who is quick to take up the hands of his mate and soon-to-be husband.

“I, King Castiel Milton, give away my brother Gabriel Milton in marriage.”

The priest bows to his King, then nods towards the sideline. Castiel steps that way, joining his own wife to watch as the priest blesses the couple standing before him, and they exchange vows. Balthazar leans forward, giving Gabriel’s hands a tight squeeze. “You look so beautiful,” he whispers. Gabriel blushes.

“Lord Balthazar Cosair,” the priest enunciates. “Do you take Prince Gabriel Milton to be your lawfully wedded wife and Omega mate?”
“I vow you the first cut of my meat, the first sip of my wine, from this day it shall only your name I cry out in the night and into your eyes that I smile each morning; I shall be a shield for your back as you are for mine, nor shall a grievous word be spoken about us, for our marriage is sacred between us and no stranger shall hear my grievance. Above and beyond this, I will cherish and honor you through this life and into the next. And in the act of exchanging these vows, I do take you, Prince Gabriel Milton to be my lawfully wedded wife and Omega mate.”

The priest nods and then turns to Gabriel, urging gently, “And do you Prince Gabriel Milton, take Lord Balthazar Cosair to be your lawfully wedded husband and Alpha mate?”

“You cannot possess me for I belong to myself, but while we both wish it, I give you that which is mine to give. You cannot command me, for I am a free person, but I shall serve you in those ways you require. And the honeycomb will taste sweeter coming from my hand. And in the act of exchanging these vows, I do take you, Lord Balthazar Cosair to be my lawfully wedded husband and Alpha mate.”

The priest smiles. “By the power vested in me by the Kingdom of the Eden I now pronounce you wed,” he cries. “You may kiss the bride.” But even as he says it, Gabriel is already pulling Balthazar forward by the lapels of his vest, and their lips meet to the raucous applause of their plenty guests. Balthazar surges against his mate, pushing back against his claiming kiss and growling viciously into his mouth. Gabriel melts against him, happy and soft in his mate’s arms, and the crowd goes wild. Dean smirks and glances at Castiel; his mate’s expression is stuck somewhere between uncomfortable panic at the scene his brother is creating, and fondness and joy at the fact that his brother is so happy to finally be marrying his mate.

The feast begins almost as soon as the ceremony ends, trays and trays worth of breads and meats and cheese and pastries making their way out to the courtyard, carried by servants three at a time they are so heavily laden with food. There is a rush for the food and a rush for the bride and groom; everybody wants to get their fill of the feast and congratulate the newlyweds. Dean lingers behind, the feeling of Castiel’s warm body standing close by always a comfort.

He watches with amusement as his brother fumbles over to Gabriel and shakes his hand and says, “You look b-beautiful, Gabe. Really-- real pretty,” he stammers. Gabriel smiles and laughs, and Sam’s cheeks blush bright red when Gabriel pulls him into a tight hug, his head pillowed against his breast. He rushes away after that, glancing nervously over his shoulder as he goes, and as he disappears into the crowd he can see his brother stopping by one of the long tables to stuff biscuits into his crimson face.

Silly, teenage Alphas.

The music plays well into the afternoon. Balthazar and Gabriel take the first dance: a slow waltz across the grass that isn’t so much an elaborate display as it is the two of them clinging to each other, whispering in each other’s ears as they sway. Castiel impresses Dean by offering a hand and taking him out onto the lawn, and spinning him around and around in a fancy dance that leaves him dizzy and panting and happy. They dance well into the afternoon, until after the sun has begun to come down, and then the spirits come out and they get drunk.

“Lo!” Somebody shouts, pointing towards the horizon where the yellow sun is sinking over the mountaintops. Five horses ride up at a steady pace, and Castiel sets down the carafe of beer he was drinking at the call. Balthazar stands with him, hand on his dagger, but Castiel raises a hand for him to stay at ease. Together they walk up the courtyard path, pushing through the crowd of celebrating nobles and servants alike. Benny and Sam stand from their seats at a nearby table and rush forward to join them.
“It’s Inias,” Bartholomew calls over the crowd, sticking close to his King’s side. “The scouts have returned. Let’s hope they bring good news,” he says breathily. When the scouts had gone, they needed protection: Inias had volunteered, and though Bartholomew had begged that he be allowed to go as well, it was necessary for at least one of the Head Knights to stay behind at the castle to guard the Royal Family. Castiel casts a side-eyed glance at Bartholomew, unable to share his enthusiasm for the scout’s late return.

“If those are our scouts, they should have been here three days ago. Or at least sent a bird our way with news.”

“I’m sure there’s good reason for their delay,” Bartholomew insists, and Castiel refrains from rolling his eyes. Bartholomew would never speak an ill word against Inias. They are best friends (and Castiel always suspected, perhaps more than that). Balthazar casts a troubled glance their ways, then steps forward with his sword unsheathed. Sam appears beside him, dagger in hand, eyes ablaze with raw excitement.

“What are we drawing swords for?” he asks. Castiel’s lips set into a grim line, and he reaches out, snatching the dagger from the young Alpha’s hands.

“If you do not know the reason that men are drawing blades, you should not respond by drawing your own,” he says solemnly. Sam purses his lips into a pout that looks eerily similar to Dean’s, stepping forward and thrusting his hand in Castiel’s face.

“That sword was a gift from my father,” he says. Castiel’s eyes narrow into slits, but he deposits the blade back into Sam’s palm.

“Put that away,” Benny whispers to him, pulling Sam over to where he is standing, a few feet behind Balthazar. He thankfully listens and sheaths the weapon, tucking the blade into the loop of his belt.

The horses draw closer, the first one to ride up a smoky gray stallion sat upon by Inias himself. He slows as he approaches the large crowd, quick to dismount and amble his way over to Castiel, Balthazar and Bartholomew. He walks with a limp, and Castiel can easily see that there is a significant wound on his calf, but Inias seems to pay no mind to it. He bows in front of his King, and behind him the four scouts ride up on their horses and flank him from behind.

“Welcome home, Inias. You are injured. Do you bear news from Fonstowne?”

Inias stands, sparing a cursory glance at the injury on his leg and wincing at Castiel’s mention of it. “A mere scratch, My Lord. The state of Fonstowne is much worse. Burned to the ground, not a live person in sight for miles.”

Castiel’s frown deepens, and he tilts his head to the side. “What took your journey so long? We missed you here, we thought you dead.”

Inias huffs, shaking his head. “We were… attacked,” he says, and gestures dispassionately towards his leg. “On the road. Some marauders snuck up on our camp in the night. They pilfered us. It set us back a few days; we had to wander off course to seek medical attention.”

Bartholomew looks Inias up and down, a skeptical eyebrow raised. “A few marauders got the best of you, brother?” he chides sportively. Inias’ nostrils flare and his lips curl up in an aggravated half-smile, half-scowl that looks positively feral. Castiel glances at Bartholomew vexedly, because now is really not the time for jokes, and he clears his throat.

“Why didn’t you send word? I sent you with a messenger pigeon.”
Inias’ mouth twists, and lets out a sound that sounds eerily like a laugh but in fact could be mistaken for the sound of an old man hacking, or a child screaming or a cat yowling. He tilts his chin up, eyes glittering with something depraved as he answers, “We killed it.”

Castiel’s mouth falls open around unformed words, but his breath gets stuck in his throat. What is he meant to say in response to that? Bartholomew clears his throat.

“Because the marauders took your food. Because you were hungry, yes?” he supplies. Inias turns his cold gaze on his friend, and Bartholomew backs away, terrified.

“Cas! He has a blade!” Balthazar shouts. Inias lunges, right arm swinging towards Castiel’s neck with a dagger pointed straight for his jugular. Reflexively Castiel sticks up his own arm, sword in hand, and he deflects Inias’ attack with a swift thrust of his own blade. They both stumble backward; Bartholomew and Balthazar draw their weapons and the scouts climb off their horses, swords unsheathed as well. The crowd around them is in pandemonium, drunk people scrambling to flee the courtyard, screaming, calling out to their friends and family, trampling each other in their haste to escape. Castiel spares a fleeting thought for where his brother and mate must be right now, but then Inias is swinging at his neck again with his sharpened dagger and Castiel brings his full attention back to the battle at hand.

“Getting rusty?” Balthazar banters, leaping forward and swinging his sword at Inias. Castiel snorts, gripping his own sword with expert finesse and rushing forward to impale one of the scouts who is blindly stabbing at the crowd of passersby, a pile of dead and wounded already at his feet.

“Oh, you would like that, wouldn’t you?” Castiel calls back, turning just in time to block another scout’s blade, the tip mere inches from his chest. He swings his arm with brute strength, raising his foot and pushing the other man away with a swift kick to the stomach. He stumbles but maintains his footing, and Castiel grunts as he swings his blade forward to spar. “I could still beat you in a One verses One any day, Zar.”

“That sounds to me like a challenge,” he grunts back, groaning when Inias lands a hard punch directly to his kidney. He knees him in the stomach in retaliation, and Inias stumbles enough that Balthazar can take some space back. He lifts his sword and jabs it forward, crowing triumphantly when it hits its mark and sinks straight through Inias’ stomach. Inias coughs, blood oozing from his lips, and falls to his knees. And then he laughs, and he grips the blade with his bare hand and he rips it from his gut, blood and entrails spilling out onto the cobblestones. He tosses the sword to the side and it clatters on the ground, five feet away. He grins at the horrified look on Balthazar’s face and he stands, limping forward, blade still gripped steadily in his right hand.

“You can’t kill me. That ship has sailed. I’m unstoppable now,” he snarls. Balthazar’s eyes widen and he reaches for his belt where his own dagger lies, but he isn’t fast enough. Inias moves like a snake, striking hard and fast, and in a moment Balthazar is lying flat on his back with Inias pinning him down by the shoulders. This close, Balthazar can see his clammy-looking skin; gray and cold beneath the dirt on his face, black vines crawling across the skin on his neck and face like poisonous spider webs. “It’s okay,” Inias snarls, raising his blade, “When you die, then you’ll be like us. One of Lilith’s Children, saved.”

“No,” Balthazar gasps, and he grunts in pain when an unbearable pressure falls on his chest; he closes his eyes, he cannot bear it, he’s dying, Oh dear God he is dying--

“Get up,” Castiel grunts, tugging on Balthazar’s shoulder. He opens his eyes and looks around. Inias is on the floor, dead, his head lying bloody and detached several inches away from his body. Balthazar lets out a relieved sigh and takes Castiel’s hands, shrugging the heavy corpse of the man off his body and climbing to his feet. A few feet away Bartholomew delivers a fatal blow to one of
the scouts, who falls in a crumpled heap at his feet. Benny withdraws his sword from the neck of another, who clutches at his wound and gasps desperately for air before he finally falls to the ground at the large knight’s feet, dead. Benny kicks him for good measure and he rolls away, gray skin of his face and neck bloating with the telltale sign of progressed decomposition.

“Castiel,” Balthazar pants, grabbing at his arm. “They’re not… they’re not human. Inias took my blade like it was a fly biting a horse.”

Castiel frowns at Balthazar, gaze sweeping the courtyard; it’s all but empty now, save for the piles of bodies scattered on the ground. Inias’ corpse, the other scouts, the party-goers, all…

“Oh, no,” Castiel gasps, springing forward, sword raised above his head as he runs. He scales the courtyard in just four valiant leaps, and swings his sword down, decapitating the last scout just before he plunges his own bagger into Sam’s chest. Sam quickly springs up after that, wincing when he moves his arm.

“Sam,” Castiel gasps, grabbing the boy by the shoulders. “Are you hurt?”

“He sliced my hand,” he grunts, flexing his fingers. There’s a nasty tear in the skin there that’s dripping with fresh blood, but nothing some sutures won’t take care of. “That’s when I dropped my blade, and he got me down…”

“It’s okay,” Castiel says, wrapping an arm around his shoulder. “Have you seen your brother? He can mend it for you.”

“Dean and Gabriel were taking people into the castle the last time I saw them.” Sam says, wincing when his hand throbs. He grabs at it, squeezing it tightly to stop the bleeding. Castiel glances down at him, and Sam grimaces. “Hurts,” he explains. Castiel nods, patting him on the shoulder.

“You’ll be fine. We need to get inside now. Who knows if there will be more where they came from.”

They walk back towards the center of the courtyard. Bartholomew is knelt there on the ground beside Inias’ body, his head in his hands, tears rolling down his face. He looks up at Castiel as he walks over, lips wobbling and pain in his bright eyes. Castiel reaches out to touch his shoulder.

“I’m sorry Bart.”

Bartholomew says nothing, shivering, and he drops his head to conceal his tears. His hand cups the side of Inias’ pale face, bloody fingers smearing red over his cheeks when he moves his hand to close his eyes. Inias must have died days ago-- the real Inias-- if his pale, gray skin and sunken eye sockets are anything to judge by. But today they all saw him still walking, along with the rest of the undead scouts, black vines of dark magick crawling across their gray and rotting flesh like spiders spinning their webs in a seldom-used doorway. They stand there in silence, the only noise in the courtyard the occasional sobs that Bartholomew cannot hold in.

Sam lets out a pained cry, suddenly, and drops to his knees with his hand clutched to his chest. “Holy--! Something is wrong,” Sam gasps, and he pries his trembling fingers away from the wound on his hand. The place where the sword cut his skin has all but healed over, oddly enough, and its swollen now to twice the size of what it should be. Black coils twist and move around underneath the skin by the site of the wound, and Sam’s mouth drops open, heart thudding in his chest. “God’s bones,” he breathes. Castiel rushes to his side, helping him up and dragging him towards the palace stairs.
“Don’t faint on me, Sam, you’re too big.”

“Oh God, I’m going to die,” Sam cries, and he bends over, wretching all over the cobblestone that are already soaked with the blood and entrails of the dead. Castiel grimaces, but tugs Sam along nonetheless.

“No you won’t. Calm yourself and walk with me, I cannot drag you like this.” Castiel growls, frustrated by the heavy weight of the Alpha teenager leaning on his body. He knows that his injury is grave, but must the kid be so overdramatic? Teenagers are positively the worst.

Inside the castle’s large foyer, where there is usually nothing but polished marble flooring and empty space, there are a few dozen men and women lying about on cots that have been haphazardly set up in response to the mayhem outside. The floor is slippery with blood and fluids and Castiel does not even want to know what he is stepping through as he and Sam hobble inside, the boy sweating and whining against his side all the way.

“Dean!” Castiel calls frantically. From the other side of the foyer, crouched beside a fat man lying on a cot and tending to a gash on his shoulder, his brother Gabriel pops up.

“Castiel,” he calls, and rushes forward when he sees Sam hanging limply in his arms. “Sam? What happened?” He arrives in front of them and guides them towards an empty cot nearby, where they both help him lie down. He whimpers and twists in their grips, trying to keep them away from touching his arm.

“Sam, we are trying to help you,” Castiel says in an exasperated tone as he pins the young Alpha down by the shoulders. Sam jerks against him, whining and crying.

“You’re going to take my hand! Please, please don’t take my hand,” he sobs, hot tears dripping in wet streaks across his gritty cheeks. Castiel casts a worried glance at his brother, who finally succeeds to grabbing Sam’s arm and pinning it to the cot. He winces at the sight of it; the black magic is spreading, twisted vines crawling up the length of Sam’s hand and inching towards his wrist.

“Dear God, what happened to him?” he breathes. Castiel opens his mouth, but his words die on his lips when he spots Dean arriving back in the foyer, straight from the kitchens and carrying hot towels and a bowl full of herbs. Dean spots them from across the foyer and he drops the bowl, fresh herbs scattering everywhere, and he runs to his brother’s side.

“Sammy,” he gasps, falling to his knees beside his brother. Sam turns to him and reaches out, gripping his bare shoulder with his viable hand.

“Please, Dean,” he chokes, trembling. Dean looks him up and down, searching for his injury. Castiel clears his throat.

“We need to act fast. He was stabbed with a poisoned dagger… It must have had some curse on it. His hand must be removed or his whole body will soon be afflicted.”

“No!” Sam cries, and jerks up, trying to get away. Gabriel reaches out and with one swift sinking of his fist he punches Sam in the nose, and knocks him out. The boy collapses back onto the cot, twitching. Dean glares at his friend like he’s going to kill him for hurting his brother, but Castiel snaps his fingers to get his attention before he can act out any violence against Gabriel.

“In our bedroom, go fetch one of my belts.”

“Shouldn’t we wait for the Court Physician? He will have a proper tournequitt, and he’s already on
his way from the Lower Town--"

“There is no time,” Castiel insists, eyes narrowed at his mate. “Look at his hand, Dean! The magic is already spreading. If we wait until the physician gets here, his whole arm will need to be removed.”

Dean stares down at Sam’s hand and feels bile rise in his throat. The skin has already turned completely gray like a stone, and the dark black webs twist and move under the skin in the same way they had on Hannah’s corpse at her funeral. With a frown he looks back at his brother’s face, his eyelids fluttering and twitching, a trickle of blood dripping from his nose where Gabriel hit him. He pushes Sam’s long hair back from his sweaty forehead and kisses his brow.

“Alright, I’ll be gone for only a moment,” he says, and he moves swiftly up the foyer steps towards the King’s chambers. It takes more than just a moment for him to locate one of his husband’s belt, but true to his word he is fast.

He drops to Sam’s side upon his return and lifts his right arm and wraps the belt swiftly around his forearm, just above his wrist. He tightens it so that the blood flow is completely cut off, and Sam’s arm is turning red and purple around the taut edges of the leather. Blinking back tears, he turns his face away, unable to watch as Castiel draws his sharpened dagger from his belt. Sam stirs awake, his whole body rigid and tense. Dean cups his brother’s sweaty face and whispers to him that everything will be alright.

“De…,” he murmurs, voice trembling. Dean shushes him and presses gentle kisses to his cheeks.

“Shush, Sammy. Don’t worry, everything is gonna be okay.”

“Don’t let them take my hand,” Sam says, hiccuping, and he looks like such a pup that Dean’s heart breaks. He glances back at Castiel and sees that he’s ready with his dagger, and Gabriel is moving Sam’s arm into the best position to get a clean cut. He shifts to block his brother’s view of the proceedings, and he whispers to him.

“It’s okay, Sammy. I won’t let them hurt you, alright? Now just be strong. Be strong for me, little brother.”

Sam whimpers and nods. Dean glances back at Castiel and jerks his chin; there’s the quiet sound of metal moving against a leather sheath and then the blade comes down, and Sam screams like he’s being murdered. His cry is so shrill and bloodcurdling that it could probably be heard all the way from the Lower Town, and sure enough the noise has every person in the hall turning their heads, wincing in sympathy for the boy who just lost his hand. Dean holds his brother down by the shoulders as Sam thrashes, tears pouring down his cheeks.

“You lied! Dean, you lied, you lied, you lied,” he sobs, body shivering, teeth chattering. Dean shushes his brother and cries right along with him, pillowing his face on Sam’s chest as the boy drags in heavy, labored breaths. He glances backwards and sees his brother’s arm hanging limp on the floor, blood oozing from the stump of it and all over the once-polished marble floors. He feels sick, so he looks away.

“Fetch me fire,” Castiel grunts, and Gabriel stands and rushes over to the fireplace on the opposite side of the room. With a piece of thread between his teeth Castiel begins to tie off the arteries, stemming the flow of blood. Sam quivers like a leaf underneath Dean’s arms, and he comforts his brother with soothing strokes and the occasional, choked out “I’m sorry, Sammy.”

Gabriel returns with a piece of heated metal, held aloft in his hands with wrought iron tongs, and Castiel moves to the side so he can press it to the site of the amputation. Sam’s body seizes and he
shrieks again, jerking his arm away from the heat, but Gabriel’s arm is steady and he does what he was meant to do. He drops the hot metal piece to the floor with a clatter, then bends over Sam to peer at his face. His eyes are filled with tears that blur his vision, and he whimpers. Gabriel cups his cheek and leans forward and presses a gentle kiss to his lips, and Sam can’t help but laugh despite the throbbing pain in his arm, a trace of a smile ghosting his lips. Gabriel chuckles and pulls away.

“You see, Samuel? Everything is going to be okay now.”

End Notes

Hey there! I know that this fic has been posted a couple of times... there were some major tech difficulties with the first posting and some other edits I wanted to add, so I decided to take it down and repost. I hope you guys don't mind and that you enjoyed the story.

PLEASE COMMENT, COMMENT, COMMENT! Please let me know what you think and share with your friends. I put a lot of work into this story, for you guys, and your feedback really means a lot to me.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!