Your Own Personal Trash Heap

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| Additional Tags: | Reader-Insert, Cruise Ships, travel fic, Summer Vacation, Anxious Reader, Surrogate family, Sailor Reader, Reader is an Ocean Nerd, reader is 17, Reader is an Honorary Winchester, Reader ships Destiel, Sam Winchester Ships Castiel/Dean Winchester, Sam is your mom, Not literally, But he may as well be, Actually they're all kinda like parent/big brother figures to you, Dean is Bad at Feelings, Dean is Not a Morning Person, Dean is In Over His Head, Flustered Dean Winchester, Dean is in denial, Deanial™, Bisexual Dean Winchester, Castiel is a Sweetheart, Castiel Loves Dean Winchester, Shy Castiel, Cuddly Castiel, Winged Castiel, Cuddling & Snuggling, Sharing a Room, Sharing a Bed, Cuddling Castiel/Dean Winchester, Grace Sharing, Fluff, Eventual Romance, Set in Roughly Season 8, Alternate Canon, Anxiety, Panic Attacks, Dysfunctional Family, Mentions of Dysfunctional Marriage, Reader's real family is a mess, Rated T for Language | Some Crude Humor | Brief Alcohol Use, Hickies |

Series: | Part 1 of The Garbage Pile Collection |

Your Own Personal Trash Heap

by Pippiuscattius

Summary

You've been in some truly bizarre situations since you were granted the ability to travel to the worlds of fictional stories.

But just how the hell did you, Sam, Dean, and Castiel end up aboard an Alaskan cruise ship trying to outrun a capitalist genie?

Notes
It’s not easy to explain why I wrote this. I was going through some rough times in my life, and I really didn’t have an outlet through which I could feel genuinely “okay,” whatever that meant. What I probably needed was therapy; what I got instead was a weeklong Alaskan cruise.

Throughout this cruise, inspiration came to me. Every little detail and situation I found myself in provided pieces of a plot involving familiar characters that brought me comfort. I found a story into which I could pour all my creative energy and time during and long after my time aboard that ship. It was never meant to be something this long, just my own way of trying to attain that feeling of being “okay” for a while.

What I ended up with was a 200+ page monstrosity. I affectionately called it “My own personal trash heap,” because that’s really what it was. I hope that through my time spent refining and editing this chunk of my life, perhaps it can be become your own personal trash heap, too.

WARNINGS: Mentions/descriptions of anxiety and panic attacks, dysfunctional family/home life, and marital conflict.
In which you make a mistake, Dean gets high, Cas gives Enochian lessons, and Sam is just trying to keep up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes
Somewhere in the depths of every person’s mind exists their own personal trash heap. Don’t even try to deny it; it’s only human nature to compile all those things that would make you happiest, even if they may be unattainable or frowned upon.

You’re no exception. The only difference is, you’re one of very few people who had the opportunity to make your trash heap a reality. As for how you did that…well, that’s an entire story in and of itself.

It all really started on a lonely winter night. In fact, it was the loneliest winter night you’d ever experienced. You were, for all intents and purposes, abandoned to the cold grip of the riverside and your own out-of-control emotions.

Well…okay, it wasn’t so much that you were abandoned. You’re just being melodramatic. It was more like you ran away from all your problems. But you felt abandoned in spirit, and that was more than enough to send you running from home; that, and the horrific shouting matches that had become all too commonly heard within the walls of your house.

Anyone who has had to deal with a dysfunctional family knows what it’s like. Being a child trapped in the middle of marital problems, playing no role in the conflict but still being subjected to its every whim, was a nightmare. For you, that nightmare lasted months.

That night was when you just couldn’t take it anymore. If you had to hear one more accusation, one more threat or feeble attempt at defense, you would probably die of fear. So you did what any remotely sane person would do and snuck out of the house to hike a mile in your pajamas.

Hey, you said remotely sane, not entirely sane.

By the time you’d reached the river’s edge, you were starting to realize that you really hadn’t thought your plan through. For one thing, it was early January and you couldn’t feel your limbs. For another, you’d been in such a hurry to escape that you hadn’t thought to bring your phone, and to make things even worse, you were almost positive that you were lost.

This section of riverside wasn’t particularly familiar to you. You’d grown up with water; lived near it, beside it, and even on it for a while. But that didn’t mean you could navigate any aqueous body, certainly not in the dead of night.

Being lost wasn’t even the foremost of your problems. You could still hear them, their harsh words and thoughtless shouts ringing in your skull. The sounds clanged in your head, and your heart clanged in your chest, and your veins clanged with spiked blood.

Exhaustion caught up to you and you collapsed in the grass. You would never, ever get used to anxiety, no matter how many months passed with it still stubbornly embedded in your nervous system.

You don’t even remember what exactly happened in the minutes following that. You must’ve walked, or crawled, or moved further somehow, because you ended up downriver with damp grass blades covering your jeans. All you know is that you snapped back to reality when you felt the shock of your fingers dipping into river’s surface, dragging and relishing in the cool currents.

You’d been dissociating again. Great. Fun times.

Even more lost than you’d been before, all you could really do was sit in front of the river and try to get ahold of yourself. You forced all your senses into focus, listened to the lapping of water at the
earthy shore, watched the subtle peaks and valleys of the river spanning for miles in either direction, smelled the crisp wet of the air. Your hand dipped back into the water, this time of your own accord, and you let the river take you over.

Then, you were okay. Grounded once more and not lost to throes of a malfunctioning fight or flight response, you could finally breathe easy.

Yeah, anxiety sucked. But what else was new?

Though your right state of mind had returned, all your troubles came back with it. It hit you then: you couldn’t. You just…couldn’t. Couldn’t go home, couldn’t run away, couldn’t find solace anywhere, because their voices and the pain would follow you wherever you went, and you’d just be dragged right back. You couldn’t think of a single place in this world where you could go to feel okay, and you mean really okay. Not the kind of “okay” you say you are after a panic attack to placate worried onlookers, but a real kind of okay that you could feel down to the marrow of your bones. The kind of okay that just was, with no terms or conditions.

You hadn’t felt that kind of okay for months since this whole mess started, and you mourned its loss every day.

The river was really the only comfort you had in that moment. You could stare into it, too dark to make out your own troubled reflection, and just accept it as it was. It didn’t ask anything of you, didn’t thrust circumstances upon you that you couldn’t handle. It just was. It was that kind of okay without even trying.

Water had carried you for years of your life. Years later, living on land, it was still carrying you.

“I…” your voice croaked out. “I wish…that…”

What? What did you wish? Did you wish that none of this had ever happened? Yes, but there was no undoing what was already done. Did you wish that this would be fixed? Of course, but you were powerless to make that wish come true, and who could say if it would be permanent or not? You just…wanted to get away.

You wanted to escape.

“I wish I could escape.”

“I believe I can help you with that.”

You screamed and nearly fell face first into the river when that voice cut through the quiet. You probably would have fallen if the voice’s owner didn’t reach out and grab you by the pajama sleeve, hoisting you to your feet.

Horrible waves of adrenaline took over your body again as you spun around to see who was with you. You were more than a little surprised to see a man, somewhere between twenty and thirty, in a blue pinstripe suit. A bushy, black beard covered his chin and his eyes were obscured behind polarized sunglasses.

A thought occurred to you then, remembering a quote from a certain famous fictional monster hunter: “I am wearing sunglasses at night. You know who does that? No-talent douchebags.”

You didn’t want to make assumptions about a stranger, but this guy did just appear out of nowhere, and he was wearing sunglasses at night.
“You said you have a wish, kid?” the mystery man asked, raising his bushy eyebrows.

Tired and still reeling from the night’s events, you stuttered out the very first thing that came to mind.

“I-I don’t want any drugs.”

You mentally facepalmed. Sure, this guy looked kind of like a drug pimp from TV, but you highly doubted any real-life drug pimps would be wandering around a southern riverfront at nearly midnight.

“I don’t deal in drugs,” he laughed to himself at the preposterous assumption.

Frozen on the spot, your mouth was running on autopilot. “Then…what do you deal?”

The man smirked. “I deal in wishes. Like yours.”

Swallowing, you forced yourself to gather my thoughts. “I…don’t think you can help me.”

“Don’t be so sure.”

By then you were really beginning to regret coming out here. Not only were you lost, but now you were also cornered by a strange man. Every instinct in your body was yelling at you to “run, run!”

But you were frozen. You’d already dealt with the flight side of fight or flight tonight, and now freeze was getting its turn.

The only thing you could voluntarily move was your mouth, so you did the only thing you could: kept talking.

“Who are you?”

Adopting a straighter posture, the man petrified you further under his stare. “Your genie,” he answered offhandedly.

Of course, you never would’ve had the mind to take him seriously, except that he chose that moment to remove his sunglasses in one smooth motion. His eyes were blue; not blue like a certain trench coat-clad angel’s, but unnaturally blue.

He still had pupils, corneas, all the right things in all the right places. But his irises…they were pure cobalt. They visibly glowed in the night, casting faint blue light over his tan features. All you could think was how unhuman they looked.

All of a sudden, you were much more willing to take him seriously. And it was a good thing you did, because that night ended up being the night that changed your life forever.

He really was a genie. Literally a genie. He explained it all to you, how his job was to traverse the worlds searching for souls worthy of a wish come true. Perhaps it should have worried you how it only took about two minutes of explanation on his part to convince you that yes, you were going to place faith in him and ask for a wish.

Then he pulled out the contract, a simple square of paper folded into the pocket of his overcoat. That was when you faltered. If there was one thing you’d learned from watching Supernatural, it was that you don’t make contractually-binding agreements with supernatural entities. You weren’t about to strike up an arrangement with a creature that could cost you your soul or worse.

Your genie just smiled, harmlessly baring his pristine white teeth. “You’ve been watching too much
of that Supernatural show. I’m no crossroads demon; trust me, I’ve personally paid several visits to that world, and I am nothing like the monsters there.”

That threw you for another massive loop. “That…you mean, that’s world’s real?”

“That it is. You can even visit it…once you fill out this paperwork, that is.”

You won’t lie: the thought of your favorite television show being a real place that you could visit made you want to snatch the paper from his hands and sign it without even reading it. If you could go there, or to any other world, that truly would be escaping. That would be your literal wish come true.

Still, you had your qualms, and who could blame you for that? The genie didn’t, and he explained with as much depth and patience as he could.

Where genies were the official licensed salespeople of the supernatural wish fulfillment business, crossroads demons were the underground black-market mobsters. While asking a genie for a wish was far safer and systemized, a baddy such as a crossroads demon wasn’t limited by the same rigid guidelines as genies and were far more accessible in their own world. For that reason, they tended to get a large share of the business despite the whole “claiming your soul for Hell ten years later” side of it. It was just a matter of economics, really, supply and demand at work in the free market; just with souls and magic rather than butter and artillery.

The genie encouraged you to read over the contract to see for yourself. Sure enough, there were no outstanding requirements, no examples of dubious phrasing, and it was all straightforward and easy to understand. It didn’t look fishy at all, printed neatly on clean paper and in tidy font. All you had to do was sign your name on the bottom line, and your wish would come true: you’d be able to escape from your own world into others.

There was just a single catch printed in bold.

“I can’t tell anyone?” you asked as you read over the paper.

“That’s right,” the genie nodded his head, moving beside you to read over the paper. “I can’t afford to let any liabilities arise from the wishes I grant, and yours…well, yours could have especially far-reaching consequences if you don’t keep it to yourself.” He stood up taller and straightened out his tie. “I pride myself in running a sound business, and the majority of the time, my clients have no trouble complying with the guidelines of their wishes.”

You pondered this. “So…you grant people’s wishes for a living?”

He seemed delighted to discuss his work. “It’s a business that spans between worlds, and a very successful one at that! The free market of wish fulfillment is rife with other genies and magical beings, but I don’t mean to brag when I say that my business has been the most successful. I have more satisfied clients than any other genie…alright, maybe I am bragging a bit. But it has brought me great wealth and success!”

What a night. You’d gone from panicking by the riverside to discussing the wishing business with a capitalist genie. Even looking back on it months later, it hardly feels real.

“Just ensure that you don’t tell anyone,” the genie stuck a finger out at you, “and I mean anyone, that you are capable of travelling between worlds. I’m taking a risk by even offering to grant this wish, but I believe you are a trustworthy client. Can’t exactly let it slip that there are other worlds in existence, that’s very hush-hush.”
That was fair, but your raging self-doubt complex couldn’t help but…well, doubt yourself. You were careful, but equally clumsy despite your best efforts.

“What if…I slip up?” you asked. “I mean, I can definitely keep this to myself if I have to! But-”

“If for any reason you break the terms of our contract…well, don’t worry too much. I’ll just have to clean up the damage myself.” He smiled at you. “I get the feeling you’re responsible. Just fess up that you made a mistake and I’ll meet with you again to work it out. Long as you do that, the only penalty would be to nullify your contract, but I like you so we can probably work something else out.” He pulled his sunglasses down to the tip of his nose and stared straight into your face with his otherworldly irises. “Because if you do screw up, trust me, I’ll know.” He tapped the side of his head. “I’ll feel any travelling-based magic, wherever it is. Perk of being an interdimensional genie.”

Winking, he pulled back abruptly and pulled a pen out of thin air. “So, we got a deal?”

Echoes of the voices at home rang in the back of your skull, and you took the offered pen and signed your name without another thought.

Grinning brilliantly, your genie took back the paper and pen. “Good job, kid. I promise, this is gonna turn your life around.” He did a dramatic bow and adjusted his sunglasses. “Hope I won’t be seein’ you any time soon. Use that wish well!”

“Wait!” you held out a hand. “How do I…you know, use it?”

“You’re a smart kid. You’ll figure it out.”

One more drop of his sunglasses and a wink later, and he was gone. All he left in his wake was a faint blue glow, although you may have imagined it.

Somehow, you managed to stumble back home that night. No one seemed to notice that you’d even been gone, and everything was still upon your return.

Phew. At least you’d returned to peace.

Flopping into bed, you were out in minutes, your mind a muddled mess of disbelief, memories, and a vague but uncertain hope. When you woke up the next morning, you were convinced you’d dreamt the whole thing up as just another hopeless, impossible utopian scenario that would save you from the nightmare at home.

The nightmare continued that very same day, as it did most days. You weren’t keen to go running away again, so at the first sound of conflict outside your bedroom door you reverted back to your only other coping mechanism: finding a distraction.

Netflix and earbuds were your only solace. You started up a random episode of Supernatural – Hunteri Heroici, yes that would do nicely – and turned up your laptop’s volume. You could already feel yourself relaxing, chuckling to yourself as Castiel announced his intention to become a hunter, when a shout cut through the buffer of your earbuds.

You turned the volume up another notch, but even that did nothing. All of your focus was on the screen, but that did nothing to make your heart or breathing slow down, and the shouts only seemed to be getting louder.

Just as Sam slipped in front of Castiel to defend his ownership of shotgun, the shouts reached maximum volume as they had so many times before. You shut your eyes and tried to listen only to the sounds of the show, but they were overpowered by the blood rushing in your ears and the
fighting going on outside.

God, please, not again.

You wanted, no, needed to escape. If only it really was as easy as signing a magical genie’s slip of paper. You could feel frustration bubbling under your rising panic, and mingled with that was a deep yearning. If you could just go to into the world pictured on your screen, if you really could escape to the world where the Winchesters resided, you could get away…

Your fingers reached out and touched the screen, your yearning surged, and suddenly everything was quiet. Your eyes fluttered open, and…

To your complete and utter bafflement, you weren’t sitting at your desk in your bedroom anymore. You were sitting on the ground, outside, at a gas station. Glancing around somewhat frantically, you saw a sign above a couple of gas pumps: Big Ryan’s Gas n’ Sip. Behind that was a car repair building.

You pulled your earbuds clean out of your ears. Your laptop was still sitting in front of you, on the ground now, but everything else about your surroundings was foreign. Except for Gas n’ Sip… wasn’t that the recurring gas station that appeared in Supernatural?

Hurriedly folding your laptop closed and rising to your feet, you took a few shaky steps towards the road. And that’s when you heard it: the distinct rumbling of a retreating 1967 Impala. You only caught a glimpse of the iconic car as it sped off towards its next case, but you could feel your heart leap in your chest.

Holy friggin’ crap. Your encounter with that genie hadn’t been a dream at all.

“Hey, uh, you alright?” someone called to you from behind, a mechanic by the looks of his oil-soaked clothing and proximity to the garage.

A smile burst onto your face before you could help it. “I’m great,” you beamed, and turned around to follow the roadside without another word.

That was only the first of many times you visited that world. It was literally as easy as pulling up an image of where you wanted to go, concentrating on wanting to go there, and then touching it. To get back home, you only needed to pull up a picture from real life on your laptop or phone, whichever you happened to have with you. You quickly learned that although you could use any official episode of Supernatural to travel to its world, you would always be put there in relation to how much time had passed since your first visit. That must have been a safeguard to prevent you from causing time paradoxes or shenanigans; good thinking on your genie’s part.

At first, you took your time to explore some of the world, but you could only hold back so long before you caught up to the boys. You would watch them from a distance when they were out on a typical case, and in all honesty, you felt like a huge stalker.

One of the things that shocked you the most, though, was the first time you saw Castiel. As if seeing him in-person in all his stoic, trenchcoated glory wasn’t enough, you could see two large, feathery black wings protruding from his back. You could’ve fainted right then and there from how overwhelming that was; were you one of the lucky few angel perceivers in existence, or was this some bonus side effect of your wish? Either way, you weren’t about to look a gift pair of wings in the… feathers?

Regardless, you still kept your distance. How on earth was a socially anxious person like you
supposed to just go up to your literal heroes and introduce yourself?

Turns out, you didn’t have to: they approached you. Keen as they are, they noticed that you kept showing up in the background of wherever they happened to go. After proving to them you weren’t a monster (which included a very unpleasant experience with a silver knife), you came up with the closest thing to the truth that you could tell them: that you were a bigtime admirer of them and their work, and that you wanted to help them however you could, ideally without putting your life in peril.

You got the sense that they weren’t particularly impressed at first, but when you showcased your knowledge of the supernatural and hunting in general, they started to take you more seriously, even more so when you admitted that you could see Castiel’s wings. The angel’s reaction to that particular nugget of info was adorable; he fidgeted and shifted his wings nervously against his back. As you got to know him better, he explained more about their mechanics, such as how he could turn them corporeal and incorporeal at will.

Time wore on, and you continued to pop in and out of the Winchesters’ lives whenever you could. They never let you join them on hunts, and that was A-Okay with you; it seemed best to leave the dirty work to the experts. Of course, you visited other worlds for fun too, but Supernatural was your primary destination. They got used to you showing up, a mysterious girl who always seemed to appear at the ideal time. But even though they didn’t know you, you certainly knew them, and they slowly but surely began to trust your presence and accept it as normal, if odd.

Though they always had questions, you deflected the ones you couldn’t answer as best as you could. You told them you had no family, that you lived on your own and studied supernatural stuff. You told them that you’d read Chuck’s books, published and unpublished, and found out about them through that. You told them what you could about your life, that you’d once upon a time lived aboard a sailboat on the ocean and that water was more your home than land was.

Months of this passed, and eventually they came to regard you as a friend, and a close one at that. You knew more about them than anyone in their own world could ever hope to, and you may have used that to your advantage to get closer to them. The day they invited you back to the bunker with them was one of the best days of your life. It was clear by then that you’d wormed your way into the Winchester family.

Oh, and did you mention Dean and Castiel? Because wow, those two need to be mentioned. For all the show’s amazing subtext and romantic overtones, none of it compared to watching them interact in the flesh. You’d swear they were already a couple with how they acted sometimes. In fact, the very first time you managed to get yourself alone with Dean, you straight up asked him if he and Castiel were together to see how he’d react.

“There’s nothing there,” he firmly told you. “We’re just friends.”

Which you didn’t buy for a second, but whatever.

The point is, all was well. You were finally starting to attain that kind of “okay” you’d thought was out of your reach. Sure, there was still conflict at home, but now you could escape it, and the good in your life was beginning to outweigh the bad. Your real family was a mess, but you were forging your own family off in another world, and you had endless possibilities literally at your fingertips. Things were finally looking up.

Which of course, as you’ve surely already guessed, meant that something went horribly wrong. And boy oh boy did things go spectacularly wrong.

Like you said, your family was still a mess, and that fact still grated away at your psyche anytime
you were reminded of it. Your standard protocol for dealing with it was simple: anytime a fight
started to break out, you’d just reach for your phone or laptop and switch to the Netflix tab you
always kept open. Then, you were one touch away from freedom, and you wouldn’t have to think
about it for an hour or two, give or take.

Figures you’d find a way to screw up such a simple, seemingly foolproof system.

The single saving grace about your parents’ fighting was that there was always a wall or a door
separating you from it. If nothing else, there was a blockade of hollow plaster and wood to give you
some protection, and better yet, that meant you were always free to escape without being noticed.
One night in the midst of summer, however, that all changed.

You had your laptop propped up on your legs while you watched some creepy YouTube video. You
don’t know why; even if you were drawn to morbid, unnatural stuff as a Supernatural fan, you knew
the video’s contents were going to keep you awake that night. What you didn’t know was that you’d
have far worse things to toss and turn about.

When you first heard the heated voices enter the house, you thought it was just a background sound
for the creepy countdown you were watching. Your blood went arctic cold when you took out an
earbud and could still hear them.

They barged into your room without warning. They’d been out at some party that night, and you
hadn’t been expecting them home for another hour at least.

The conflict started immediately, and you were frozen. Each one accused the other of being drunk,
and with the way they were speaking, you didn’t doubt they both were. You couldn’t move, couldn’t
say a word as you watched them tear each other apart with their sharp-edged words. You don’t even
remember what they said; all you know is that as soon as you heard your name thrown into the mix
of curses and spats, you doubled over and fell into the worst panic attack of your entire life.

Not that either of them noticed. At some point they must have wandered out of your room and
further into the house, their words still echoing through the hallways and your pounding skull. It was
bad enough witnessing them fight in front of you, but you’d gotten so used to escaping as soon as the
first hint of conflict reared its terrifying head that you’d lost any resistance you’d built up over the
months. You were utterly at the mercy of your own out-of-control terror.

Your instincts took over at some point. Your shaking hand reached out for your laptop, which had
fallen out of your lap when you crumpled, and pulled up your ever-present Netflix tab. It took
everything in you to lift your head up enough that you could see what you were touching.

The last thing you heard before your fingers made contact with the screen was a debate of who was
kicking who out of the house.

You ended up in the bunker with Sam, Dean, and Castiel sharing a night of takeout and research.
You don’t know what they thought when you spontaneously appeared in the middle of the library as
a curled-up, shaking and crying ball, but they leapt right into action.

Never it be said that the Winchesters can’t be a calming presence. Bless them, they really didn’t
know what was happening, but they tried their hardest to soothe you and got you to sit up against the
sturdy leg of a table.

Here’s the problem: filters don’t really exist when you panic. Everything kind of spews out at once.
Your memory of the moments that followed is exceedingly fuzzy, but what you spouted amounted to
something like “my parents are fighting and I can’t stop panicking so I came to your world and now I
feel like I’m going to die.”

Needless to say, they all had several questions for you by the time you were coherent enough to speak in anything other than run-on sentences. You’d been caught red-handed lying about having no family, and not to mention you’d implied that you weren’t from their world and that you had the ability to travel to it; all of that beside the fact that you’d just materialized out of thin air right in front of them, something you’d managed to avoid up to that point.

You tried to deflect their questions again, but even with the horrible state you were in, they pursued answers relentlessly. You outright refused to answer any of them, just saying that you literally couldn’t, but you knew the damage had been done. Their suspicions were officially, irreversibly raised.

One friggin’ condition in the whole contract, and you’d managed to skirt it. Yet your biggest mistake had yet to come.

The three of them had you cornered, and in your weakened state, they would pull answers out of you. They’d done it a hundred times before with deadly, Hell-powered demons, so what was one trembling human girl going to do against their interrogation tactics?

So you made a stupid, stupid split-second decision. Your laptop had fallen out of your reach, but you still had one other thing on hand. You grasped for your phone, which you luckily had in your pocket, and pulled up the picture of your house’s side yard that you’d set as your background. Before either of the Winchesters or Castiel could ask what you were doing, you touched it and were instantly back in your own world.

Which also meant you were right back where you started: at home. Thankfully, you weren’t inside the house that time; you appeared outside in the unkept side yard where no one would notice you. Part of your protocol was using that picture to reappear out of sight so that you could slip back inside the house unnoticed…but this time, there was no way you could bring yourself to go back in.

Still delirious in a haze of panic, you stumbled away from the house. Your entire thought process was little more than a muddled, driven sense of paranoia and illogical thoughts. Those illogical thoughts steered you towards the only other home you had, the last place you felt that you would be safe: your family’s sailboat, which sat unused at a marina on the river.

If the water had carried you up to this point, maybe it would help you stay afloat and gain some buoyancy when you felt like you were sinking to the bottom. Within that boat’s hull, you felt safety, and the water would keep you company where no one else could.

You weren’t even fully aware of your actions when you untied the boat and cranked up its engine. If there was anyone out at the marina that late, they didn’t notice as the sailboat puttered out of its slip and downriver. You tried to busy yourself through the night by motoring down the familiar waterway. Boating was second nature to you; you’d gotten your boating license the day you’d turned sixteen, and until now you’d never had the chance to put it to substantial use.

For a while, you could steer your boat through the dark, empty channel and let your unfocused brain bob and weave with the waves. Looking back, it’s a miracle that you didn’t accidentally plow into any buoys or run aground with how utterly out of it you were.

Eventually, sleep caught up to you. You had just enough boater’s instinct left in you to avoid passing out behind the wheel, and you dropped anchor in an alcove along the riverside. Below deck in your own cramped bed, your sleep was sporadic all night and plagued by fits of spontaneous fear. Worst of all were the few coherent thoughts your brain could muster up.
Sure, there was a chance that you’d broken the one condition in your contract by strongly implying that you could travel between worlds, but some small voice in your head told you it didn’t count. You hadn’t meant to, you weren’t even in control of your mouth at the time. Surely you couldn’t be held accountable for something that slipped out in the middle of an actual panic attack? And it wasn’t like you outright said, “hey guys, guess what? I can travel between worlds because a magic genie granted my wish! Isn’t that cool?!”

No matter your state of mind, it would have been better if you’d just called for your genie and explained it to him. As it was, you couldn’t think straight enough to remember how to eat bread the next morning, let alone figure out what you should and shouldn’t be doing about your slip-up.

Things only got worse that following morning when you emerged into the cockpit and immediately recognized the boat’s surroundings. Of all the alcoves on that entire stretch of river, you’d chosen the one that used to be your family’s favorite, the one you’d visit every weekend when you were younger. You could almost hear them conversing below deck, preparing Shirley Temples and a plate of cheese and crackers, or splashing in the water behind the boat.

And as those memories clashed with the ones of last night, the panic crept up again, trying to seep into every inch of your awareness. After what you’d felt last time, you knew you could not go through this alone. An idea finally came to you that actually had some genuine sense: your best bet was go back into Supernatural and seek solace from your surrogate family. You still doubted you could fully explain yourself to them, but if there was anyone who could help you get your head screwed back on right, it would be them.

Plus, once you’d calmed down enough, you could undo the damage you’d inflicted before it could escalate into any real consequences. You just needed to explain away what you’d said before as the mad ravings of an anxiety-ridden teenager and work off that. You’d fibbed your way through explaining aspects of your life to them before, so it shouldn’t have been that big of a deal. When you arrived inside the bunker, you braced yourself for another slew of questions you wouldn’t be able to answer. What you were met with instead was a hundred times worse.

Sam was literally tearing through the shelves of the bunker’s library, grabbing books at random, giving each of their covers a cursory glance, and then casting them off to the side. He didn’t even notice that you’d appeared behind him until you shakily called out his name.

“[Y/N]?” Sam choked out, his face tight as he looked at you in sheer disbelief. “Oh god- oh my god…”

“Wh-what’s going on?” you managed, feeling panic rising in your throat at the sight of Sam so distraught. Sam didn’t answer. His eyes darted towards the opposite end of the library, staring at the wide entrance to the war room. You followed his frantic gaze and flinched when you heard a pained grunt echo through the doorway.

Propelled by a surge of fear and instincts, your feet carried you into the war room. Nothing Sam could have said would have sufficiently prepared you for what you saw.

Cas was hurt. As in, really hurt. The angel was sprawled out on the floor, propped up against a wall and wheezing. Dean was kneeled beside him muttering uncertain assurances, desperately clutching at him and watching him with shock and fear. His vessel was completely unharmed, and to anyone else the source of his apparent pain wouldn’t be obvious.

Not to you. You knew exactly what was ailing him, and you felt a horrible lurch of bile in your
throat when you laid eyes upon it. His right wing had a jagged hole that went clean through feathers and muscle, bleeding light and grace.

Whatever had happened here, it could not have been good.

“Hey, hey [Y/N]!” Dean called your name when he noticed you. His unfocused eyes stared blankly into the space on either side of Castiel’s back. “Can you- can you see what’s-”

“Oh god,” you breathed out, voice brittle. “There’s-there’s a hole, he’s losing grace- oh jeez…”

Castiel grunted out a cough, his damaged wing trembling as he strained his neck to look up at you. “Too weak, need a spell…Enochian. Listen, you must…”

“Got it,” Sam chimed in, stomping in from the library with three books tucked under his arm. “I…hope,” he tacked on uncertainly, wincing when he saw Castiel’s condition.

One of the books was promptly shoved into your hands, and another was thrust upon Dean, forcing him to let go of Castiel. Sam opened the remaining tome, flipping and skimming pages with the efficiency of a desperate college student cramming the night before a final.

All you knew was that you were supposed to be looking for an Enochian spell, so you numbly opened your own book and started reading. It looked more like an angel physiology book than a spell book, but you kept reading, forcing yourself to focus on the words and diagrams on the page rather than the suffering angel on the ground beside you. You couldn’t imagine Dean was faring much better, turning several pages at a time and glancing at the angel beside him every few seconds.

Luckily, you didn’t have to look long. Sam found what he needed in his own book, crying out triumphantly and presenting the open pages to Castiel.

Leaning forward and reading over the book with unfocused eyes, Castiel managed, “That…should suffice. But…holy oil. We’ll need…”

“Say no more,” Sam interrupted, rising to his feet and sprinting out of the room.

Castiel coughed weakly, drawing your attention back to him. He really was in a pathetic state, looking as though he’d had much of the life drained out of him. Dean abandoned his book and returned to clinging to the angel in what you’re sure he thought was a totally platonic way; not that that would be his primary concern at that particular moment, but still.

“C’mon, buddy, look at me,” Dean coaxed, squeezing Castiel’s shoulder. “You’re gonna be alright, just hang in there, okay? You’re gonna be okay, buddy, you’re gonna be okay…”

He sounded like he was trying to convince himself of that just as much as he was trying to convince Castiel.

The effort it took Castiel to look up at Dean almost physically hurt you to watch. “Dean…must…hurry. Losing grace, can’t heal-” A cough rattled his frame and cut him off.

You tried not to shrink away when Castiel collected himself and turned to you. “You must do it,” he firmly stated. “Only you can…” Another cough cut his thought short.

“I’ve got it,” Sam called as he hastily reentered the room. In his hand was an old clay bottle of what you assumed to be holy oil.

You were left glancing between Sam and Castiel, still trying to figure out what Castiel meant, when
Sam unceremoniously passed the bottle into your hands. All you could do was stare down at it in confusion, a sense of dread mounting on your shoulders.

“Wh…why did you give this to-” you started, but were cut short by Sam.

“You’re gonna have to do the spell. Only someone who can perceive an angel’s wings can use this incantation.”

You turned to Castiel, and he weakly nodded in confirmation. “Only works…if focused on wings. Can’t be unless you can see them.”

Right about then you were saying a hearty hello to the unpleasant sensation of pressure to save a friend’s life. You wouldn’t recommend anyone put themselves in that situation if they can help it, because it brings stress like no other.

Still, you took a deep breath and put up a rudimentary wall to block your creeping dread and what you could manage of your anxiety. Castiel needed you to help him, and you absolutely refused to let him die.

“What…do I do?” you asked, voice nowhere near as steady as you’d hoped it would be.

“Put the oil on the wing first,” Sam instructed. “It’ll probably sting him a little, but he needs it for the spell to work.”

Staring at the horrible, luminescent hole in Castiel’s wing, you steeled yourself. Popping a cork from the bottle’s lid, you slid as close as you dared to Castiel’s side and tipped the container until a thick substance began pouring out over his feathers towards the wound. Castiel’s expression immediately scrunched up and he held back a groan of pain. Dean’s grasp on him tightened.

“Sorry!” you hissed out, keeping the flow of oil steady as you could. “I’m so sorry, I’m sorry…”

“Kinda like the angel version of whiskey in the wound, eh?” Dean half-heartedly joked. No one laughed, but you appreciated him trying to defuse the situation.

Nearly half the bottle was empty when Castiel held up a hand to stop you. “Enough,” he ground out.

Immediately, you withdrew the bottle and replaced the cork. The hole was thoroughly coated, the oily substance glistening and refracting the bleeding grace.

“Now here, read this,” Sam brought the book up to your face, finger pointing at a specific line of Enochian text. “Focus on his wing.”

Still thoroughly overwhelmed, you blinked hard several times as the words came into focus. They looked like Enochian alright, but even though translations were printed beneath the angelic letters, you weren’t even sure where to begin with pronouncing some of them.

“I…I don’t know if I can-”

“You have to,” Sam stopped you before you could doubt yourself further. “I’m sorry you have to be the one to do this, but you’re the only one here who can. Take it a word at a time, it’s not as tricky as it looks-”

As you skimmed over the sentences, one word in particular caught your eye. “What the heck- the word bagel is literally in here!”
“What?” Sam questioned, disbelieving. He leaned over to stare at the page. “Wait, it’s not spelled like bagel. It’s ‘bagle,’ but I don’t know what it—"


“Okay, bah-geh-leh, got it,” you hurriedly confirmed, going back to the words. “I…I think I can…” you swallowed, speed-reading the incantation one more time. “I’m not sure about the last word, but I’m gonna try it.”

Angling yourself to directly face Castiel’s afflicted wing, you held the book in your lap and tried to focus all your attention on getting the words right. “Ra gah io es, allar oi ne gassagen bi-en. D… dvlgar malprig ol oi bagel- I mean, bagle, nostoah zen zacare niis ol oe caosga.”

You really hoped you were pronouncing everything correctly, but Castiel hadn’t objected yet so you assumed you were doing alright. Eyes glancing between the wounded wing and the book, you continued, “Noaln mad olpirt fifalz oiad grosb geta niis ladnah noromi oi oiad noaln baglen oi nanaeel ol zildar…cr…crv…what the…”

“Creh-ves-can-sey,” Castiel supplied.

“Crvscanse!” you rushed to finish.

The effect was instantaneous, which was a blessing for your fried nerves. The flow of light out of Castiel’s wing halted, held in place by an invisible force and pulsing in the confines of the torn hole.

Castiel sighed in relief, turning to you gratefully. “Thank you. I…I can focus my grace enough now to…”

He didn’t finish, his eyes closing in concentration as the blue light circling his wound began to move with purpose, pulsing brighter and rhythmically. Slowly but surely, the flesh inside the wound began to knit itself back together, growing back in layers of stringy muscle. It was a mesmerizing, if somewhat nauseating, sight.

Sam and Dean watched anxiously. The latter broke the silence with a hushed, “You good?”

“Much better, thank you,” Castiel replied, sounding utterly exhausted but no longer in pain. “The damage has been mostly undone, and my feathers should grow back soon thanks to the boost that spell provided to my grace. My powers may be weakened for a while, but I will be okay.”

Everyone exhaled a simultaneous sigh of relief. You felt the reprieve so intensely that at first, you didn’t notice everyone’s eyes drifting and fixating on you.

You froze when you realized you were suddenly the center of attention. “Um…h-hey guys?” you tried, smiling what you’re sure was your most nervous smile.

Dean finally let go of Castiel, his expression hardening as he stared you down. “We need to have a talk.”

You audibly gulped.

You ended up seated across from the Winchesters in the bunker’s library. Castiel stood behind them, pacing and experimentally flexing his healed wing while he listened in.

That left you all by your lonesome, facing all those unanswerable questions you’d dreaded head-on.
Now that the crisis had been averted, it was time for answers.

“[Y/N]…” Sam started, but then stopped. He didn’t seem quite sure where to begin. “We…after what you said yesterday, and how you disappeared…there was, um…there was-”

Dean got to the point. “We met your genie friend.”

Your heart stopped for a full five seconds. Even when it started back up again, you couldn’t seem to breathe for a while.

Well, there went any and all plans you’d had to repair this clustercluck.

“Yeah…that,” Sam agreed. “He showed up out of nowhere- scared the living hell out of us -and started talking about a ‘broken contract’ and being on ‘clean-up detail.’ We didn’t know what he was talking about, until he mentioned you by name.”

“That sunglasses-wearing douchebag said he was gonna wipe our memories. Something about ‘protecting the sanctity of the multiverse,’ or some other nonsense. But I don’t care what sanctity he was protecting, no one swoops in and swipes our memories with no warning.”

With each word they said, a new wave of shock rolled across your consciousness. Horror dawned on you as you connected the events together.

“You…” you took a breath and tried again. “Please…tell me you didn’t try to fight him.”

“What the hell else were we supposed to do?” Dean defended. “We were not letting some asshole in a suit mess with our brains! That’s happened way too many times already…” Dean scowled and mouthed something that looked suspiciously like “Zachariah” to himself.

“Not that we really stood much of a chance,” Sam sighed out. “Whatever magic this guy was wielding, we were not prepared to counter it.”

“And if someone,” Dean looked pointedly at Castiel, “hadn’t put himself right in harm’s way, we might have just stood a chance at trapping him before he fled the coop.”

“As if you wouldn’t have done the same,” Castiel coolly countered. “His powers…they were unlike any I’ve ever seen. When I spread my wings to protect you both, I hadn’t expected him to be able to…” He trailed off, a vaguely haunted look crossing his face. “He was able to reach right between the very planes of existence to damage my wing directly. I believed no one outside of my kin to possess such an ability, but…”

Guilt hit you like a relentless hammer to the chest. You’d had no clue what could have caused Castiel such damage, but knowing it was your own actions that had indirectly caused him to suffer such harm made you want to curl up in a hole and never emerge.

“One thing is for certain,” Castiel concluded. “Whatever sort of being this so-called genie is, he is not of this world.”

Sam pinned you with a questioning stare. “We’re assuming that’s where you come in.”

And truly, you did feel utterly pinned down. As spacious as the bunker was, you felt claustrophobic under the trio’s stares. You could physically feel your stomach revolting as your nerves went into overdrive. This had all gone so wrong, all you’d wanted was to escape your rocky home life and meet and possibly befriend your heroes along the way, you never meant to hurt anyone, but your split-second decision had caused so much pain and there wasn’t enough air in the entire bunker to fill
your lungs and they were still *staring*-

“I’m sorry!” you wailed, unable to hold back. You managed to bury your face in your palms before the waterworks could get out of hand. “Oh my god, I’m so- I’m so- oh god why did I ever think this would-”

“Whoa, hey, hey,” Dean’s voice cut through the looping thoughts competing to escape your mouth. “Hey, kiddo, it’s okay, breathe.”

“N-no, I- I- I-”

“Shh,” Dean’s voice had turned unbelievably quiet. A chair gently scraped across the floor, followed by another. Footsteps advanced around to your side of the table.

Even when you felt a hand on your shoulder, you kept your face embedded in the cavern of your hands. The shame of being seen like this was only making it even worse, and you curled in on yourself further.

“It’s okay,” Dean’s voice soothed, his hand a steady, grounding presence on your shoulder. “I’ve been there, we’ve all been there. You’re alright. Deep breaths.”

Another much larger hand settled on your other shoulder. You knew it was Sam without looking, and you felt your panic relent ever so slightly at the silent comfort he offered.

“Cas,” you barely heard Dean whisper. “Get over here.”

A third pair of footsteps advanced to your side of the table. Even though you doubted Castiel would reach out to offer any physical comfort, just knowing he was present helped.

“You’re getting through it,” Sam softly encouraged. “It’ll be over before you know it.”

“If I may…” Castiel hesitantly began. “My grace may be able to neutralize your fight or flight response, if you think that would help-”

“P-please,” you immediately choked out. Although it was slowly subsiding, any way to hurry it along would be more than welcome.

Two fingers pressed to your forehead, followed by a stream of misty warmth encircling the inside of your skull. To say the least, it felt like a miracle, your body almost immediately untensing and your thoughts reorganizing into something resembling sensical. It only lasted several seconds, but that was all you needed. By the time the mist evaporated and Castiel retreated, you were able to pull your hands away from your puffy, tear-stained face.

You took a few moments to orient yourself with your surroundings, basking in the glow of near immediate freedom from the attack. As the events leading up to the breakdown fell into place in your mind, guilt returned tenfold to smack you in the chest.

“Cas, I…” A shudder wracked your body, but you forced your muscles to untense and stood up, the hands on either side of you slowly slipping off. “I’m sorry… I never would’ve thought that he would do something like…”

“Even without knowing the full details of the situation,” Castiel said calmly, “I seriously doubt that even half of the blame lies with you.”

You wished you could believe him. Instead, you let your instincts take over and turned around.
Striding towards the angel, you opened up your arms and gave him a brief hug. It was a little difficult, if only because he was kind of tall, but it felt appropriate. Castiel must have thought so as well, because he returned the hug as well as his limited social skills allowed him to.

The Winchesters watched with sympathetic eyes and uncertain but nonetheless reassuring smiles when you turned back around. You weren’t really sure what to say, but you mumbled out as genuine a “Thank you” as you could manage in your shaky state.

“You, uh…” you cleared your throat and rubbed some of the wetness off your face with your sleeve. “You probably still have a lot of questions.”

Sam nodded his head. “Well, yeah, but they can wait if you’re-”

“No, I’m…I’m okay now.”

Not the kind of okay you wanted to be deep down, but still better off than you’d been.

“In that case,” Dean eased, “go ahead and explain as much as you’re comfortable with right now.”

Taking a deep breath, you let the floodgates open. You told them about how crappy things had been with your family, how you’d gone out that night and made a wish without expecting anything to come of it. When you told them about how the genie appeared from thin air and offered to grant your wish via a contract, their guard was immediately raised.

“So you signed a contract with a supernatural being?” Dean questioned, squinting at you where you stood.

All you could do was nod your head and look away, regret peeking out amidst the overriding guilt still assaulting your chest cavity.

“You do realize that’s, like, rule number one of dealing with the supernatural? That you don’t make deals with them?”

“I know,” you sighed. “But I wasn’t thinking, and it seemed like it would be different, and…” You trailed off, your excuses sounding feebler than ever.

“It can’t be undone now.” Sam offered some reassurance from where he was amidst the bookshelves, replacing the spilled books and setting aside the angelic ones in a bag for safekeeping. “To be fair, it sounds like this genie really was a slippery guy if he convinced you to sign a binding contract.”

The more you looked back on it, the more you realized that yeah, your genie had been kind of slippery with how he’d gone about presenting himself. It had never occurred to you at the time, but the fact that he’d come to you in a moment of extreme weakness, presented himself with a context he knew you’d understand to put you more at ease…all of it did scream “slippery character.”

“That bastard is officially at the top of my list,” Dean growled. “For what he did to Cas, if nothing else.”

“What wish did he grant you, exactly?” Castiel asked.

“With everything going on at home, I…” You sighed. “I wanted to escape. So…he granted me the ability to escape into other worlds.”

“That’s twice you’ve broken your contract now.”
Your heart caught in your constricted esophagus as the familiar voice registered.

Nobody moved a muscle or said a word. You didn’t have the resolve to look behind you and see for yourself that he was here, and you prayed that you wouldn’t have to face him.

Of course, you had no such luck. At the least, Dean saved you the trouble of saying the first word.

“Well, if it isn’t the douche in pinstripe again,” he snarked.

The genie chuckled heartily. “Now, I’ve been called many things in my millennia of existence, but that’s a new one.”

“What are you doing here?” Sam questioned threateningly.

“Back to clean up my client’s mess,” the genie answered in a low voice. “I was surprised enough when she broke our agreement on a technicality the first time, but I thought she’d know better than to be a repeat offender of all things.”

“I-” your mouth opened before you could stop it as you ever so slowly turned to face him. “I’m sor-”

“Apologies won’t cut it, kid,” the genie feigned a sweet, sympathetic smile in your direction. “I actually believed you to be a promising client, but I am truly heartbroken with how much you’ve disappointed me.” He lowered his ever-present shades and tucked them into his collar, revealing menacing blue eyes. “I told you, I would find out if you screwed up. Now I’ve got to mop up your mess before it can get any bigger.”

Literally trembling under his hostile gaze, you took a few steps backwards. The Winchesters noticed and arranged themselves on either side of you, creating somewhat of a barrier between you and the genie.

Confidence bolstered by the presence of the brothers, you put on your best accusatory voice. “Why did you attack Cas?”

“Castiel?” He locked eyes with Castiel where he stood by the table, the angel staring back with nothing short of malice. “He got in the way, simple as that. I didn’t intend to come to this world for any reason other than wipe and rearrange your memories a little, but you three just had to make things difficult!”

“No one’s messin’ with our memories,” Dean stated. “Certainly not some wannabe guy in an ugly suit parading as a friendly version of a crossroads demon.”

The genie visibly twitched, and you knew Dean had struck a nerve in him.

Outright glaring at Dean, the genie spat, “Don’t you ever, ever compare me to those filthy excuses for wish granters!” He huffed a desperate, humorless laugh. “You don’t even realize how screwed to hell your world is with those soot clouds seeping up from the underbelly of your planet. I’d have already set up shop here a long time ago if it wasn’t for all the demons. They have an absolute monopoly on wish fulfillment here. Real shame, too, because they run just about the shadiest business practice I’ve ever laid eyes on.”

“Like you’re one to talk,” Sam countered. “You may not claim your clients’ souls for eternal damnation, but you sure as hell seem to trick and manipulate them, and for what? Profit?”

“That’s what business is!” His eyes turned wild and darted between each of you. “Manipulating the market, in this case the multiversal market, for profit! Those of us who know how to do that rise to
the top, and if we can keep our reputations clean, the rewards are unimaginable!”

“How exactly do you expect to keep your reputation clean when you’re going around barging in on people and attacking them?” Dean challenged. “That’s not business; that’s some grade A psychopathy right there.”

“I’m not some deranged psychopath!” he hollered indignantly. “I’m trying to run a business here!”

Sam shrugged, keeping his cool. “I dunno, sounds like you’re awfully defensive about it.”

Cobalt eyes brimming with rage swung around to face Sam. “You listen here, you speck of multiversal dust. I am not here to negotiate with meaningless creatures whose lives are but blips in the infinite space that is existence as we know it. I am not here to endure taunts from or argue with the equivalent of miniscule, inconsequential bacteria on the bottom of my shoe. I am here to do my fucking job.” He raised both of his hands, his palms glowing the same shade of blue as his enraged eyes. “And you’re gonna damn well let me, even if it means I have to kill you.”

Even as you were quaking internally, Sam and Dean stood their ground. Castiel strode to stand between them, raising his wings to guard them as the genie’s eyes and palms grew brighter and brighter.

You knew this would end in a fight that you couldn’t hope to win, even with an angel and the Winchesters’ resolve. So rather than stand by and watch your friends get torn to shreds by otherworldly genie magic, you reached into your pocket, pulled out your phone, and stepped forward to link an arm through one of each of Team Free Will’s.

Before the genie could even notice or comment on your interference, you touched your phone’s background picture and were transported away from the hopeless confrontation before it could even begin.

You were left in the same spot as usual when you appeared in your own world, except this time you had two very disoriented brothers and an angel with you. They were quick to realize that you’d intervened and taken them to your own world, but they settled down somewhat when you assured them it was basically the same as their world save for a lack of the supernatural.

Initially, your plan was to hop to another world via your phone and disorient the genie further, but when you pulled up a random episode of Doctor Who on your phone and pressed your finger on it… nothing happened. That was unprecedented in all the time you’d had this power, and you knew something was wrong. No doubt it was your genie’s doing; if he’d given you the power, he could take it away just as easily, especially if you were using it to defy him...

Since you were stuck, you guided Sam, Dean, and Castiel on foot away from your home and into town, trying your best to explain the situation to them. You’d been missing from home for about a day by then and did not want your family to find you no matter how much it pained you to leave home. They weren’t the type to immediately call for a search and rescue anyways, especially not with how often you snuck off to do your own thing. Not to mention, the genie could be on you in seconds, maybe sooner, so you ushered the hunter trio along as a plan formed in your head.

First things first: getting the heck of out of Dodge. Though you realized how immoral it was, you had Castiel use his invisibility to sneak into the local bank and take some of the physical cash from your family’s account; and by “some” you mean borderline but not totally obscene amounts, just enough to support three adults and a low-maintenance teenager for give or take a week. You honestly couldn’t muster up much in the way of a qualm about this at the time, fearing more for your lives if the genie materialized near you than getting caught by bank staff.
The Winchesters went along with it even if they only had a vague idea of what you were planning. You suppose they felt inclined to go along with whatever you said considering the troubles that had led them up to that point. Not that they went completely silently; they did insist on hearing what you were planning and where you were going, even though your racing, improvising thoughts rarely had solid answers. All you could afford to focus on was frantically trying to cook up a scheme that would put as much distance between you and the one place in your world that your genie would expect you to be.

It was when you hailed a taxi and directed the driver towards the Atlanta airport that the Winchesters began to exhibit real resistance, especially Dean. So, you told them what you were thinking as best as you could: you were going to look for the next available flight to somewhere as far away as possible, then hopefully find a method of getting even farther off the grid from there. It wasn’t much, but it was something. You were relying on having caught the genie by surprise with how abruptly you’d fled.

Sam settled down after that, but for whatever reason, Dean was still belligerent about being taken to the airport.

“Just let Cas teleport us somewhere!” he insisted.

“I’m pretty sure that would draw the attention of the genie,” you told him. “He seems pretty in-tune with magic stuff, and he said he can sense travelling-based magic. Besides, I didn’t rob a bank for nothing,” you added, thankful that there was a wall of glass between you and the taxi driver. You did not want to have to explain any of that conversation.

Dean was still agitated by the time you entered the airport. You looked over the screens of flights and were dismayed to see practically no international flights leaving in the near future. There was only one, a flight to Canada with one stop in Chicago along the way. You’d been hoping for one that would take you to a different continent, but it would have to do.

*Heck, everyone was already gonna move to Canada when Trump got elected anyways. And Canada’s nice, progressive, loves the gays, and everyone’s polite there, at least according to the stereotypes.*

With Sam, Dean, and Castiel peering over your shoulder, you announced, “Screw it, we’re going to Canada, guys.”

You bought tickets at the counter using some of your “acquired” money, the passport you carried in your purse, and fake passports the Winchesters had made for their trio some years ago. Sam was the only one among you with luggage; he still had the bag of angel books with him, but thankfully it was small enough that it wouldn’t cost extra to take onboard.

You tried to look as inconspicuous as possible as your group navigated through the bustling metropolis that was the Atlanta Airport. Dean had been surprisingly and suddenly quiet since you purchased the tickets, and you found out why shortly after he requested you stop so he could use a restroom.

“You know, Dean has a phobia of flying in airplanes,” Sam told you as he waited outside for his brother. “That’s why he was so upset earlier.”

Oh god, how had you possibly forgotten that? No wonder he’d been so uncooperative about this plan.

“It’s pretty bad,” Sam continued. “He and I almost died in a plane crash once and it’s only been
worse since then.”

“I remember watching—” you caught yourself. “Uh…reading the Supernatural book about that…well, I feel like a jerk now.”

Truly, you did. You had your own fair share of phobias and had been forcibly exposed to them multiple times in the past against your will, and to suddenly be the one causing someone else to experience that made you feel all sorts of guilt.

“I can attempt to offer him help if he’ll accept it,” Castiel piped up, joining the conversation. “My grace should be able to calm him considerably throughout our flights.”

“That might actually work,” Sam mused. “Just as long as it won’t alert that genie…”

“I don’t think it will; he only said he can sense travelling-based magic,” you pondered. “We should be safe as long as you don’t do something really big, regardless. That’s what he’d be looking for.”

With a nod from Castiel, it was decided, just in time for a fidgety Dean to emerge and nervously accompany you to your gate.

The four of you only had to wait fifteen minutes to board the first flight. It was a small plane with just fifty or so seats, two on one side and one on the other. Dean and Castiel got seated together with Sam across from them and you behind them. You watched through the crack between their seats to see what unfolded, and it was worth the investment.

You couldn’t hear them very well over the din of the engine directly behind you, but you could clearly see them. Castiel kept a hand on Dean’s shoulder throughout the entire bumpy flight, using his bright blue grace to keep him calm. It must have worked, because Dean stopped shaking and actually relaxed into his seat all the way until the plane landed in Chicago.

Your group had to wait a while to exit the plane since you were farther back than the rest of the passengers, so you stayed seated for a few minutes. Once the engines had died down, you could properly hear Dean talking. He was saying some incredibly loopy things, which you promptly realized must have been due to Castiel’s grace affecting his mind. The majority of these things were him profusely expressing his gratitude to Castiel in ridiculous degrees for helping him.

At some point, Sam jokingly suggested to him, “If you’re that grateful, you should give him a thank you kiss or something.”

Dean, being for all intents and purposes high, barely hesitated to plant a long, sloppy smooch on Castiel’s cheek. You don’t think he came down and realized what he’d done until after you were rushing through the Chicago airport to reach your gate in the eight minutes you had left to board, because at some point during your speed walking he noticeably slowed down and his eyes went comically wide. You spared him from his brother’s teasing by not alerting Sam to that development.

It was a miracle of spontaneous athletic skill that you reached your gate in time. The plane was much bigger this time, with over a hundred seats, three on each side. You got paired with Dean and Castiel while Sam was sitting in the aisle seat across from you. Dean insisted that you take the window seat, because he certainly didn’t want it, and you were more than happy to oblige. He ended up taking the aisle seat to be as far away from the window as humanly possible, hiding behind Castiel like a shield for the duration of the wait and taxi towards the runway.

Though hesitant after the “thank you kiss” incident, Dean did eventually weigh his options in favor of asking Castiel for his grace again, and the angel happily complied. You let them be for the first
part of the flight, glad that Dean had found a method of coping with his fear.

You felt quite at peace in the skies, getting farther and farther away from the threat of your genie-turned-attempted-murderer. This was still risky business, but you had a better shot by far now that you were relocating across the globe. If you could just take it one step further and go somewhere way off the map, like to an island or something. You doubted your genie would think to examine the ocean too closely. Yeah, that might be a good idea…your thoughts drifted as you watched states pass by below and the sky turn to darkness as the plane tried and failed to race the sun on the horizon.

At some point or another another snack trolley came by, which was enough to tear your rapt attention away from the view outside your window. That was when you witnessed one of the cutest sights you’d ever seen: Dean was essentially wrapped around Castiel, who in turn cuddled him closely. Dean appeared to be asleep, which was probably for the best seeing as he didn’t mix well with flying. You saw more than what anyone else could, however; Castiel’s wing cocooned Dean, encasing him in a blanket of grace. You couldn’t repress a smile at the sight, recalling that conversation you’d had with Dean the night he’d introduced you to Castiel and you’d purposefully mistaken them for a couple right off the bat.

“Ya know, Destiel?” you’d broached the topic. “You and Cas…together?”

“There’s nothing there,” he’d firmly told you. “We’re just friends.”

Yeah, ‘just friends.’ Sure Dean, whatever helps you sleep at night while lovingly cuddling your ‘just friend.’

You took a cookie from the snack trolley while Castiel declined to take anything, not requiring sustenance as he often reminded anyone who offered it. A flight attendant walked by shortly afterwards with immigration papers, which you handed to Sam as he was the only one awake who knew what to do with them.

Upon landing in Canada, you felt secure, at least for a while. Sam repeatedly poked at his brother’s arm across the aisle to wake him up, and even after Dean stirred and sat up, you weren’t convinced he was actually awake at all. If you’d thought he was loopy before, that was nothing compared to now. His longer exposure to Castiel’s grace had taken its toll, turning him into a carefree, word-slurring drunken man of the highest degree.

Sam, of course, saw opportunity and leapt at it like a hungry moose.

“How about another thank you kiss for him, eh Dean?” Sam wiggled his eyebrows for comedic effect, which elicited a snort unlike any other from you.

But Dean surprised both of you with his response. “What? Nahhhhh…I got somethin’ evvvvven better for Cassie Lassie ova here.” Dean pointed a single finger in front of Castiel’s face and inched it forwards until it made contact with the tip of his nose. “Boop,” he whispered like an excited puppy.

Something about that made you lose all coherency as you struggled to contain hysterical laughter behind your palm.

“Naaaaaaah I’m jus’ kiddin’, Cassie, ‘cause boy do I got a better deal for you,” Dean slurred out, paying no mind to your ensuing gelastic seizure. “Listen, listen, listen…ya listenin’ buddy?”

“I’m…listening,” a deer-in-the-headlights Castiel answered.

“Good. Now what Immuna do fer you, is…ackchly, anythin’ you want.” Dean paused and put a single finger to his chin to create the illusion that he was capable of competent thought in that
moment. “If it’s within reashon, I mean. Gottsa have ground rules, ehhhh buddy?”

“I…suppose so, yes.”

“Riiiiight. So yah, anythin’ ya want inside reashon. Fer…fer a whole week long.”

“A week?” Sam, who had been watching the exchange and grinning like a child in a candy store, voiced his surprise. “You sure about that? I’m not sure that Dean of the future is going to appreciate that responsibility.”

“Don’ be silly, Sammy,” Dean shushed his brother, pointing an accusatory finger towards his row. “If future Dean ups and decides to be a butt ‘bout this, you tell ‘im, and quota directly, he literally owes Cassie his friggin’ life, so man the hull up and make like Shia Laboof.”

A long-lost meme stirred somewhere in your brain. “And…just do it?” you hesitantly referenced.

“Yah see, she gets it!” Dean excitedly pointed at you. “Jus’ do it!”

At that point, the plane had emptied enough for you to make your way into the aisle and outside, Sam swooping in to hold up his brother as he freely stumbled about. You four were quite a sight making your way through the Vancouver airport, Sam practically carrying Dean, Castiel worriedly standing too close as he bobbed and weaved to avoid colliding with the unbalanced hunter, and you trailing behind pretending you didn’t know who any of these insane people were.

Customs was a nightmare; more so than usual, anyways. The weird looks you got from your fellow travelers were bad enough, but when you finally made your way to the border, real trouble started.

“Is…” the officer behind the counter ran a hand through her hair. “Is he drunk?”

It wasn’t even a question that she was referring to Dean, who was giddily laughing to himself about all the maple leaves he’d seen in the airport thus far.

Sam tried to make as serious a face as possible and replied, “No, just very tired from the flight over.”

The border officer squinted at Dean, sighed tiredly in a way that elicited genuine sympathy from you, and pointed you towards additional screening.

That set you back forty minutes as more security officers put Dean through a handful of sobriety tests. Of course, all of them came up negative because he wasn’t drunk, just higher than a kite on angel’s grace. Most of the forty minutes was devoted to them trying to procure a genuine explanation for how this clearly extremely drunk man was flawlessly passing all of their breathalyzer and drug tests. Eventually they had no choice but to let you through.

And that was the story of how you were nearly denied entry to Canada because your travelling companion was high off his ass on an angel’s grace. Believe it or not, this is far from the weirdest thing that ended up happening to you over the next two weeks.

It was 1 AM by the time you got out of the airport, which had one positive consequence of making it extremely easy to find an open taxi. You told the driver to take you to the most affordable hotel in town, which happened to be a quaint little Chinese-operated building overlooking English Bay. It was a downgrade compared to the crisp, pristine hotel rooms you were used to when travelling, but apparently to the Winchesters it was a considerable upgrade. Sure, everything wasn’t perfectly clean and the bed sheets were cheap, but it had a small kitchenette complete with fridge and stove, a small dining table, two twin beds, and a separate room with a double bed. Sam spent a few minutes enthusing over the flat screen TV in one corner of the room, sharing that they couldn’t always count
on getting a TV at all in their usual rooms, let alone a massive flat screen.

It was late enough that everyone sorely wanted sleep, aside from Castiel since he didn’t require it. Even Dean, who was still floating on cloud nine, seemed ready for bed.

“I’mmmmm gonna hit tha hay,” Dean announced. “Unless a certain dorky lil’ angel wants ta take me up on that offer? ’Member Cassie, anythin’.” Dean waggled his eyebrows in one of the most disturbing motions you’d ever seen his face make.

“I would never take advantage of your hospitality in your inebriated state,” Castiel firmly stated. “That being said…I would not object to your company and…” He hesitated, but finished, “…cuddles, for the night, if that’s alright.”

Dean looked vaguely disappointed. “Nothin’ else?”

“God, Dean, just keep whatever you do for the night PG, okay? There is a child out here!” you automatically replied. “But yeah, seriously guys, don’t. I don’t want to hear that.”

“Y’all are laaaaaaaaame,” Dean drawled out. “C’mon Cassie, if it’s cuddles ya want, it’s cuddles you’ll get.” Dean grabbed Castiel by the arm and guided him towards the separate bedroom, pausing in the doorway and craning his neck to face Sam. “Can we at leas’ up the rating to PG-13?”

“Dean!”

“Fine, ffffine, I’m goin’.” With that, Dean closed the door behind him and Castiel, leaving them to their hopefully PG activities.

Castiel’s grace was one hell of a drug.

Thoroughly drained, Sam flopped face first onto one of the twin beds.

You cleared your throat. “Uh, Sam, they’re not actually going to-”

“If they do I give you permission to throw my shoe at their door.”

Thankfully no footwear violence was necessary that night. Even after Sam was out on his bed, you were lying awake in your own browsing your phone, searching for nearby islands and potential passages to them. You wouldn’t feel safe until you were somewhere you knew was as out of the genie’s reach as possible, and though your current location was decent, it wasn’t the best. Somewhere in your internet travels you came across an advertisement for a boat trip, and from there you fell into a rabbit hole of cruise ship advertisements. On a whim you searched for cruise ships leaving from Vancouver, and amazingly, you found one.

The MS Noordam, a large cruise ship bound for Alaska, was scheduled to leave the very next afternoon from English Bay. There were just two rooms left for purchase, and knowing this would be your only opportunity to do so, you reserved them. It was a split-second decision, but those seemed to be serving you surprisingly well in your escape so far, so you decided to trust it.

After that was settled, you felt much better. A cruise ship was the perfect place to hide, even better than an island; a cruise ship was large, crowded, constantly on the move, and out in the middle of the ocean. There was no way your genie would find you there.
As you put away your phone and settled under the thin covers of your bed, you made a mental note to remind everyone that they should probably buy some supplies and extra clothes to take aboard the ship tomorrow. That is, assuming they would be okay with staying aboard a cruise ship for at least the seven days passage you’d bought them.

You didn’t know it then, but that was the beginning of a trip that would change your and Team Free Will’s lives forever.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it: the long and ridiculous beginning to a long and ridiculous story. I’ve never done a reader-insert fic before this, so if there are any issues format-wise or anything like that, don’t hesitate to let me know.

Thanks to everyone who takes the time to read this insanity. May you gather your strength, because there's much more ahead.

Translation for the Enochian in this chapter: "Spirit of the East, one of the four that liveth forever, bind up this holy angel unto my voice. Give life to his wing because it has sacrificed mobility for you on earth. May your light eliminate the bitter sting out of him for now so that he may use his own to fly more brightly."
In which you become a tourist, Dean is salty, Cas makes some requests, and Sam keeps the peace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~7/2/17~

You were woken up the next morning by the distinct sound of Dean Winchester yelping and falling out of bed. Said Winchester exited his bedroom just one minute later, easing the door open, slowly stepping out, and easing the door shut. He looked like he was in the middle of some semi-traumatic flashback with how he stared straight ahead, still dressed in his travelling clothes from yesterday since he hadn’t even bothered to change last night (not that any of you had).

Dean cleared his throat. “Coffee. I’m gonna…yeah, coffee.”

The hunter stumbled out of the room, you assumed towards the complimentary coffee machine downstairs. At least this was tired stumbling rather than drunken stumbling.

You took to getting yourself ready for the day that lay ahead, including your eventual cruising expedition. You couldn’t deny you were excited at being out on the ocean again, especially on such a large ship. You’d always wanted to take a cruise, and around then you realized that fact probably influenced your sleepy impulse purchase of boarding passes the night prior.

Oh well, too late to take them back now.

A while after you were dressed and clean, Sam came striding through the room’s door with two steaming Starbucks cups and a pastry bag. He certainly was bright and awake on this fine Canadian morning, which was more than you could say for his brother and admittedly yourself too.

“Hey, got you hot chocolate,” Sam off-handedly told you, placing a hot paper cup in your hands.

“You said that was like your version of coffee, right?”

“Thank you,” you yawned out, staring hungrily at the whipped cream-topped contents of the cup.

“You found a Starbucks?”

“Just down the road. I figured we could all use something to get us started this morning after… basically everything that took place last night.” Sam took out a muffin and passed it to you, retrieving a scone from the bag for himself.

“Speaking of last night…” you started between taking a mouthful of delectable whipped cream and chocolate syrup, “Did you run into Dean?”

Sam laughed through a bite of scone. “Yeah, he was downstairs trying to make the coffee machine work. He just took a cup from me instead and said he was taking a walk.”

“Do you think he remembers anything about last night?”

“I get the impression that he doesn’t.”

“You should have been here to see him when he woke up. I’m like 99% sure he fell out of bed.”

Sam hid a laugh behind his coffee. “Right. So anyways…what’s our next move? Do we have a
“game plan, or what?”

You sighed and finished off your muffin. “I do, but… I think everyone should be here to hear it, first.”

You both did wait until everyone else had gathered in the hotel room, a much more awake Dean finding his way back after a fifteen-minute walk along the bayside and a messy-haired Castiel emerging from his room after you knocked to check on him. Once everyone was in one place, you clapped your hands together and tried to repress your nerves.

“So…” you tried for a smile. “You guys have heard of impulse purchases at two A.M., right?”

Sam gave you what the hell did you do bitchface and your smile crumbled.

You took a deep breath. “I may have bought us tickets for a cruise to Alaska,” you breathed out.

“Did you say a cruise?” Dean asked incredulously.

You nodded sheepishly. “Yup. And… it leaves this afternoon.”

No one really said much of anything for a few tense moments, but eventually Sam said, “Well, that’s not too bad. I mean, it’ll probably keep us off the genie’s radar, right?”

“Right! Yeah! Exactly. I don’t think he’d know to look for us in the middle of the ocean. It’s as far off the grid as we can get.”

Dean shook himself. “We’re leaving… on a cruise,” he stated, as though confirming it out loud would make it more real.

“You can take our tickets at 4:00 today,” you said. “We may want to stock up on some supplies and extra clothes first, though. I don’t think any of us had time to pack for a cruise during that escape.”

Apparently everyone agreed with that, because five minutes later you were up and out of the hotel, strolling along the streets of outer Vancouver. You eventually reached a cheap resale shop with plenty of clothes and bags to store them in. While there, the Winchesters found an abundance of their beloved plaid and you found an abundance of your own preferred travel clothing. You even bought a couple of plaid shirts to give Winchester fashion a try. Castiel didn’t buy any clothes for himself since he didn’t need them, but he did add a bracelet with a metal feather pendant to your pile of accumulated clothing.

“I thought it might help me blend in more,” the angel explained before anyone could ask. “And… I like feathers,” he added, his own feathers ruffling slightly.

Aside from clothes, bags, and some basic toiletries, you didn’t really need to buy much. You assumed, rather optimistically, that the cruise would have whatever else everyone needed on board. By the time you’d left the store, each of you with a small duffel in hand, it was 10:00.

“We’ve got some time to kill,” you said as you looked at your phone’s screen. “Six hours, to be exact.”

“So what do we do until then?” Dean asked. “Lay low, stay safe?”

“… I was… actually thinking about taking advantage of being a tourist in Vancouver,” you admitted. “In a safe, laying low kind of way!” you amended.
Castiel picked up a handful of brochures for local attractions from a stand on the sidewalk. “These look safe,” he decided, passing a few of them around.

You opened up the one you’d been handed. “This looks good,” you muttered as you read over it. “Grouse Mountain…it’s got a sky lift, bears, some world-famous show about lumberjacks…”

“I think this one’s the safest,” Sam decided. “It’s an isolated nature park with lots of swinging bridges and trails; Capilano Park.”

“Leonardo Di Capri-what now?” Dean leaned over to look at Sam’s brochure.

“Capilano, not Caprio,” Sam clarified. “It’s just down the road from where we are. If we’re looking for off-the-grid while we’re here, this is it.”

One more taxi ride later and your ragtag congregation was standing face-to-face with one of the most impressive nature parks you’d ever seen. You’d been expecting a typical kind of deciduous forest when you heard Sam talking about this place, but what you got was a perfectly maintained, grade A Canadian rainforest. Ferns and trees hundreds of years old towered above the wooden boardwalks, and no matter how far you strayed, you could always hear the rumble of the rushing river that was the centerpiece of the whole park. Suspended a couple hundred feet above the river and bridging a four-hundred-foot gap was the largest swinging bridge you’d ever laid eyes on.
The second that bridge entered your peripheral vision, you knew you had to get on it. You may not be an adrenaline junkie by any definition of the word, but swinging bridges were your idea of a thrill ride.

Dean was disinclined to agree.

“That’s at least a two-hundred-foot drop,” he asserted, eyeing the bridge from a safe distance. “I’m not getting on that thing.”

“I don’t think you have a choice, Dean,” Sam observed as he looked over the brochure. “According to the map, it’s the only way into the isolated part of the park.”

Dean made a noise akin to a repressed whimper and turned helplessly to Castiel, who he’d been pointedly avoiding speaking to for the entire morning.

“I could teleport us across the gap,” Castiel suggested, his wings angling upwards in preparation.

“No!” you held out your hands. “No teleporting, my genie might find us and undo everything!”

Castiel’s wings lowered in time with Dean’s temporary glimmer of hope. “I could at least use my grace to ease your fear,” Castiel offered to Dean.

“Oh no,” Dean immediately responded. “I am not going through that again, no way.”

A particularly strong gust of wind swept through the valley, catching the bridge and making it sway and creak under the stress from the passing air. Dean gulped.

“…Okay, fine, use your grace,” he conceded, deciding the alternative of going without it was worse. “Just don’t let it go to my head, alright?”

The trek across the bridge was one heck of a wild ride, with the wooden floor and metal supports really putting the swing in swinging bridge. You loved every second of it, pausing a few times along the way to take in the scenic view of the impossibly tall trees on each side of the gorge and the water roaring past hundreds of feet below. Dean waited impatiently behind you, trying to stand as still as possible as though that would stop the movement of the bridge. At the very least he wasn’t freaking out to any real degree, Castiel holding onto his hand to keep him connected to his grace.

Upon reaching the other side, you set off down the main looping trail, which led you deeper and deeper into the massive rainforest. Every other tree was enormous, with rotund trunks big enough to build a walk-in closet inside.

For the first time in a long, long time, you felt truly relaxed. Something about the sensations of the forest calmed you, and you opened yourself up to everything around you. You could feel the thrum of the forest’s life in your palms and the subtle currents of breeze that ran over your skin, you could see the oddly-colored berries and mushrooms sprinkled between the leaves and trunks, and you could hear the birds and squirrels navigating the treetops. It was rare that you were somewhere you could let down all of the walls and safeguards you’d learned to so carefully keep in place, and you were more at peace than you had been all year in those minutes of strolling along.

Apparently Dean agreed with you, because you heard his contented, airy sigh a few feet behind you. Hoping to stoke conversation with him, you looked back and slowed your pace to let him catch up to you. What you saw surprised you; Dean was indeed behind you, walking side-by-side and still hand-in-hand with Castiel. A shy smile played on the angel’s face.

“That grace still working well?” you asked, pleased to see Dean getting over himself, at least a little
Unfortunately, it turned out that he hadn’t really gotten over himself. A few seconds after your words registered in his ears, Dean’s eyes lost their distant haze and he froze. He took one look at his hand, then one look at Castiel, and then withdrew his fingers from the angel’s.

“Dude,” Dean took a step back. “I thought I told you not to let it go to my head!”

“I tried my best, Dean,” Castiel looked almost hurt, tearing a crack in your heart. “I used as little grace as possible, but you repeatedly attempted to draw in more.”

“I did not!”

“You may not have been aware of it, but I am certain that you did. If not you, then your soul.”

Blushing and at a loss, Dean pulled his outer jacket a little tighter around himself and mumbled something as he sped ahead of Castiel. You watched him go, in a bit of a daze as you tried to work out what had just happened.

The rest of the hike was generally uneventful but peaceful, Dean and Sam taking up the front of your small procession and Castiel lagging behind you. Near the end, you reached a grand overlook of the gorge and the bridge. Below was a steady, steep drop-off into the deep valley.

Sam and Dean had their fill of the view and started back on the path, but just as you were beginning to follow them, you noticed a prominent lack of Castiel behind you. You found the angel still standing at the overlook’s furthest point, extended into the open air of the gorge. Castiel’s eyes were fixated on the opposite side of the valley, his wings wide open and spread out behind him.

“Cas?” you called to him, startling him and making his feathers fluff up slightly. “You thinking of flying?”

The angel sheepishly lowered his wings behind his back, trying to make them appear as small as possible. Sometimes you had to wonder if he ever forgot that you could see them.

“It is merely an instinctual pose,” he quietly explained.

You sent him a knowing smirk and continued on your way.

The trail didn’t last forever, which was a darn shame because that meant you had to leave your complete and utter sense of peace behind and that Dean would have to figure out how to make it across the swinging bridge again. He was adamant this time about not using Castiel’s grace, no matter how unpleasant it would be without it. What ensued was him practically hugging the metal cables along either side of the narrow bridge the entire time. You patiently waited for him each time he had to stop and close his eyes. It took you considerably longer to make it to the other side that time, but everyone did make it across in one piece, even if Dean was shaking so much that he looked like he might break into multiple pieces.

There were still four hours left to kill, so Sam asked for the brochure you’d had earlier and agreed the location it advertised would be another good place to hide out. Grouse Mountain was just a little farther down the road than Capilano park and getting there by taxi took only ten minutes at the most. It turned out that the sky lift mentioned in the pamphlet was the only way up and down the mountain that didn’t involve hours of strenuous uphill/downhill hiking. Everyone seemed okay with that, though Dean was a little disgruntled.

“What’s with the running theme of heights today?” he asked as he watched the lift ascend above the
mountain’s incline on its cable.

You used another portion of your money to buy tickets and you four boarded the lift. It was a packed compartment, with numerous other visitors already cramped into the pod-shaped vehicle. It wasn’t an easy or a comfortable fit, but you somehow made it work even with Sam’s gargantuan size. You pitied poor Castiel, who kept his wings plastered as closely to his back as he could. Even if his wings were incorporeal and didn’t take up any space on the physical plane, you imagined it wouldn’t be all that comfortable to have so many people going through them.

The ride up the mountain took just a few minutes, and once you were up there you were presented with a blast of cold air and the scenic grassy mountaintop. This place was considerably more crowded than the park you’d come from, but you seemed to blend in decently enough.

You happened upon the last part of the world-famous lumberjack show you’d seen in the brochure, which involved a man dressed up and masquerading as a clueless tourist climbing up a sixty-foot tree trunk and accidentally dropping his climbing gear once at the top. The routine was hilarious and you could tell it took a lot of skill considering the “tourist” performed everything from juggling to a headstand whilst perched atop the narrow trunk.

Castiel was deeply concerned for the man’s safety, fretting over how he was to save him from the imminent danger he was in without using his teleporting powers. Sam and Dean had to patiently explain to him that it was all fake, but even after that Castiel didn’t seem convinced until the man purposefully fell off the back of the tree and revealed that he’d been attached by a safety wire the whole time.

Aside from the show, there was a grizzly bear enclosure where a pair of brother bears played together in the water (“Why can’t you two ever get along as consistently as that?” you asked the Winchesters.) and a small aviary with birds of prey where you spent a good portion of your time.

One peregrine falcon raised its wings up high when Castiel passed, making a low chirping sound in the back of its throat. For whatever reason, this made Castiel faintly blush.

“What’s that bird’s deal?” Dean asked, staring down the falcon in question.

“She, um…” Castiel cleared his throat. “She has seen my wings and is alerting me that she considers me a suitable mate.”

That earned a hearty chortle from Dean, who then gave Castiel a friendly slap on the back. This made the falcon screech and stare daggers at Dean, who held up his hands and took a step back.

“Whoa, what’d I do?” he asked, warily eyeing the irate bird.

“I believe she is taking a defensive stance,” Castiel watched the falcon curiously. His blush returned with a vengeance as something occurred to him. “She is defending her territory. She’s…jealous of you.”

Now it was your turn to laugh. Dean simply glared back at the bird as though everything was its fault and hurried out of the aviary before his own blush could become more obvious.

“Did that really just happen?” Sam, who had been behind them, dared to ask.

“Absolutely,” you said between another laugh.

You’d seen most everything after that, taking your time leisurely walking between huddles of people on the sidewalk winding around the mountaintop. You walked beside Castiel, finding your eyes
darting towards his wings every once in a while.

Finally, you couldn’t keep quiet. “So Cas, I’ve been wondering since we went through the aviary: what kind of wings do you have?”

The wings in question twitched slightly as Castiel tilted his head at you.

“Like, are they based on a certain species of bird’s wings, or what?” you clarified.

“Ah,” Castiel nodded in understanding. “Well, bird wings were likely modelled after angel wings. Mine are not connected to any particular variety of bird that I know of, they’re…simply angel wings.” You may have imagined it, but you thought you saw his wings perform a shrugging motion.

“Neat!” you chirped.

“What do they look like?” Dean blurted out a bit too loudly, abruptly turning to face you and him. The intense expression on his face faded when he noticed your surprise at his outburst. He cleared his throat and nonchalantly clarified, “I’m just…kind of curious, since you can see ‘em and all.”

You sent a silent, questioning look to Castiel, who responded with an equally silent nod of permission. You figured he would be okay with you sharing his wings’ appearance with Dean, but you wanted to make sure.

“Well, they’re uh…pretty big,” you started out. “Solid black, but some parts look blue if the light hits them right. They look pretty soft, but strong at the same time. I think you’d like them.”

You could practically see the agreeing words “Yeah, I would,” trying to leave Dean’s mouth, but he swallowed them down, instead settling on a concise “Cool,” before turning back around.

Miraculously, the crowd did thin out after you continued on the path for a mile or so. Once you were away from the commercial area of the mountain, you went more off the beaten path. Concrete sidewalk had turned to dirt and gravel along a cliffside. Without any crowds to traverse, you had a wide-open view of distant mountains and valleys, some covered in mounds of vegetation and others topped with convex sheets of snow. It was easily the best view on the whole mountain; seemed a shame that so few people wandered far enough to see it. You were the only four people anywhere in sight.

“Wow…” Sam breathed out, and that really just about summed it up.

In total, you spent thirty uninterrupted minutes at that one perfect spot, Sam meandering and surveying the surroundings, Dean sitting down on a nearby flat rock, and Castiel standing by the edge and taking in the view. After a while you noticed that he once again had his wings spread just like at the overlook in Capilano Park. He’d told you before that he’d done that on instinct, but he really did look ready to fly; not only that, but he looked like he _wanted_ to fly.

If he wanted to fly, why shouldn’t he?

“Hey Cas,” you tried your best to sound gentle as you approached to avoid startling him again. “You thinking about flying again?”

“I…” Castiel trailed off, looking out between the layered peaks before him. “I am…seriously considering it. My feathers are healing quickly, and stretching my wings may help them.”

“Go ahead then!”
That apparently wasn’t what Castiel had been expecting you to say. “May I?”

“Of course! If it’ll help your feathers, you should. And if you wanna fly, I think you should be able to. It’s not like anyone else is around here to see it, and it shouldn’t count as magic, right? So my genie’s not gonna notice.”

Castiel considered it in that stoic way he had for a few moments. “Very well, if you’re certain.” He lifted his wings high but stopped suddenly and turned to you one last time. “You should know, I am ordinarily invisible to most humans when I take flight, but if you can see my wings, you may also see my true form.”

That caught you off guard. “Oh, uh…okay, that’s fine. As long as you’re okay with that.”

“I am. I trust you.” Castiel managed a small smile before he was all at once gone in a poof.

You blinked a few times until his split-second disappearance settled in your mind and turned back to admire the view. You ended up getting much more than you bargained for.

Swooping hither and thither between the mountains and gracefully dipping with the peaks and valleys in the vast terrain was…something you somehow knew to be Castiel himself. It wasn’t like anything you had ever seen, defying your every instinct and intuition merely on sight.

That was when Dean decided to walk up. “Hey, where’d Cas go?” he inquired, and you didn’t miss the hint of worry in his voice. “I thought he wasn’t supposed to teleport.”

“He didn’t,” you assured him, your head bobbing and twisting to keep up with Castiel’s otherworldly movements. “He’s…he’s flying.”

“Ah, angel’s got to stretch his wings, huh?” Dean noticed you tracking Castiel’s movements. “Wait…can you see him?”

“Yeah, I can…he’s in his true form out there.”

Dean was rapt with attention upon learning this information. He stared blankly out at the view, willing himself to see any indication that the angel was indeed out there. “W-what does he look like?” he stuttered out on impulse.

“I…don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?! You can see him!”

“No, I mean… I can’t…describe it.”

And really, you couldn’t. An angel’s true form isn’t meant to be perceived by the limited human mind, and apparently for those few who were able to anyways, it was an experience that defied the senses and every pre-conceived notion of perception you’d built up in your life. In his true form, Castiel wasn’t a thing; he was a…something. That makes no sense, but there’s no real logical way of putting it. He was beyond your feeble earthly comprehension, yet paradoxically you could see him in that moment as he really was.

More than anything you wished you could describe him, because his true appearance was something to behold. The best way you could think of to describe him went something like this: imagine if you will that the ukulele cover of the song “Over the Rainbow” was a massive, flying, living entity. That’s what Castiel looked like in his true form. It made zero sense, but it was the best you could do. Other “angel-perceivers” would understand what you mean; seeing an angel’s true form instilled a
feeling of synesthesia unlike any other.

Watching him dive and soar about through the valley, you were transfixed. It was without a single doubt one of the most amazing sights you’d ever been witness to in your life.

“Dude,” you said to Dean, eyes never leaving Castiel’s display. “Your boyfriend is beautiful.”

You didn’t even realize that you’d let the dreaded “BF” word slip past in your state of wonderment, but Dean simply sighed and stepped back to wait until Castiel landed in his perceivable form again.

Shortly after Castiel landed and reappeared, you backtracked to the commercial section of the mountain and stopped at a café for lunch (which had killer fish tacos). By then you’d used up another three hours of time, giving you just enough remaining time to get to the Vancouver docks and board your cruise ship.

The ride down the mountain on the sky lift was considerably more enjoyable than the ride up, partially because the midday rush of tourists had died down and partially because you were able to actually look out the windows at the prickly trees passing beneath you. You called on another taxi upon reaching the bottom, and the driver quietly drove you four back into the hub of activity that was central Vancouver and towards the docks.

If you’d known how similar the process of boarding a cruise ship was to boarding an airplane, you would’ve come more prepared. As it was, you improvised.

The tickets you’d reserved were digital, so you had to pull them up on your phone and pay up in cash upon arriving. The man at the ticket counter must have either been very unobservant or very indifferent, because he thankfully didn’t question why or how a seventeen-year-old was buying cruise ship tickets. You wish you could say that you had the same luck with security.

“ID, ma’am?” the security officer asked right off the bat when your group reached her counter.

You had your passport at the ready, as did the Winchesters and Castiel. As the officer looked over your passport, alarm shone in her eyes.

“You’re a minor,” she realized, staring you down. Suspicion overtook her features as she scrutinized the remaining passports. “Can you tell me why it is you’re travelling with these three men?”

Panic took root somewhere in your chest, but you prayed it didn’t show. “Um, yeah, these are…” your mind was racing for something believable. You glanced back at Sam, Dean, and Castiel, silently asking them for help when they couldn’t easily provide any.

Going with your gut instincts, you blurted out, “These are my dads!”

The security officer raised an eyebrow and you could practically feel the sweat trickling down your neck. There had to be a way to take that ridiculous, on-the-spot lie and mold it into something passable.

“These two are my dads,” you gestured to Dean and Castiel, silently promising them an apology once this was over with. “And this is my uncle,” you pointed to Sam. “We’re just going on vacation together.”

“Your last name doesn’t line up with any of theirs, Ms. [L/N],” the security officer observed, giving your passport another once-over.

“That’s because…they adopted me recently.” You flinched when you realized the potential holes
that additional lie could come with. “A few months ago now, I think…right?” You sheepishly turned to Dean for backup, and though he was keeping a neutral face for the sake of your poorly-conceived cover, you could see him seething under the surface.

“Yeah, a few months now,” Dean grated out. “Didn’t have time to update the passport, but we figured it’d be okay.”

None of that seemed to smooth over the officer’s qualms, but after a few more moments of scrutiny she gave a defeated sigh. “Alright, fine then. Head on through security. You’ll get your room keys on the way to the dock.”

Thank goodness you had been directed to the one security officer in the entire building who’d had a long enough day to let something like that slide.

After all of your suspiciously measly amount of carry-on was searched and you went through the typical metal detectors, you hurried down a mostly empty corridor towards the dock. Dean was on you the moment both of you were out of sight.

“Really?” he shout-whispered. “‘These are my dads?’ You couldn’t come up with anything better?!”

“I’m sorry, I was panicking!” you defended. “Besides, it worked.”

“You could have just told her you were our sister!”

“But our names are different! And-and I wasn’t thinking straight! I thought maybe she’d think you were too old to be my brother.”

Before Dean could voice his offense at that last statement, Sam stepped in. “It’s okay, it worked; however ridiculous of a cover it was, it worked. Can we board now before she changes her mind and calls us back?”

Dean heaved a tired sigh that you had to resist the urge to label an “old man sigh,” because boy did it sound like one. “Fine, let’s go.” He pointed an accusatory finger at you before he set off. “But I swear, we are giving you improvisation lessons after that stunt you just pulled.”

The ship itself was mind-boggling. When it came into view through one of the corridor’s windows, you had to stop and stare. Ten stories high, wider than a whale, and packed to the brim with layers upon layers of rooms. You’d seen cruise ships from a distance before, but up close you could hardly fathom the size.

You barely paid attention when a man handed you a keycard as you went past, mindlessly shoving the card in your pocket and never taking your eyes off the impossibly giant vessel tied to the dock. Following the others’ lead, you ascended a ramp onto the ship itself and followed the directions of a crew member inside. It didn’t look like the interior of any boat you’d ever been on, decked out with fancy carpets, golden trim, paintings and treasures mounted on the walls, and enough headspace that you could break the known rule among sailor’s children that you never jump inside a boat unless you wish to suffer brain damage.

Your eyes must have had stars in them as you wandered about, every new room and corridor in the ship rekindling your amazement anew. All your life, you’d associated living at sea with the necessities of cramped quarters, limited supplies, and the bare minimum, but this ship broke every single one of those notions with its abundance of accessories, decorations, and general decadence.

For the first time in your long life of sailing and living on the sea, you were going to cruise in absolute luxury, and you couldn’t be more ecstatic about it.
The center of the boat was a hub of activity, other newly-boarded passengers “oohing” and “ahhing” at the sights as they moved about. You took one look around the flawlessly furnished, classy space, and stretched your arms confidently behind your head, taking the lead of your group.

“Alright boys, time to live it up!” you announced.

The Winchesters both gave you a sidelong glance while Castiel did his patented head tilt.

“Sorry,” you lowered your voice, feeling your face turn red. “I’ve just always wanted to say that.”

Your embarrassment was quickly forgotten when you caught sight of the centerpiece of the ship: a spiral staircase of glass and gold descending into a longue of crystal tables and walls of golden, diamond pattern mirrors. Attached to the ceiling was a long, dangling bauble of golden orbs and a glowing glass light shaped like rings around a tiny planet. The light shone with vibrant purples and blues, illuminating the space with color.

“This is so fancy…” you breathed out in amazement as you leaned over the railing of the second deck to stare at the bejeweled decoration.

Castiel frowned at the hallway to his left. Intricate stone telamon statues lined both sides of the otherwise ornate gold and red passageway. It looked more like it belonged in a palace than a boat.

“It is rather unnecessarily extravagant for a simple voyage to sea,” Castiel observed.

“That’s why people go on cruises, Cas,” Dean patted Castiel on the shoulder. “To be overly extravagant.”

“People go on cruises to travel and be out at sea, too!” you added, getting a bit defensive.

“Yeah,” Dean scoffed. “Sure. Let’s see if this place has any grub.”

Dean pushed a button for an elevator on the wall to his right, watching the intricate golden elevator doors like a hawk until one opened.

“Give him time,” Sam assured you as he walked past. “He’s just not used to being somewhere so… well, overly extravagant. His salty attitude will quit eventually.”
Dean muttered something about an unlikelihood and shuffled into the glass elevator.

Dean’s salty attitude quit the exact second he learned that the complimentary buffet offered endless apple pie at the dessert counter.

“Ya know,” Dean paused in the middle of obscenely devouring the two slices of pie he’d somehow fit onto his tiny dessert plate, “maybe I could learn to enjoy this cruising life.”

Sam sent you a look over his bowl of salad that said, “See, told you.”

After you finished a small but satisfying dinner, you trekked up to the uppermost exposed deck to watch as the boat departed the dock and steered out into the bay. It felt great to be out on the water again, hearing the rumble of engines and feeling the sway of water underfoot. The only difference from what you were used to was the sheer number of other people around and the fact that you were essentially in a giant mobile building rather than a humble little sailing vessel.

With the stressful night yesterday, none of you had adjusted to Canadian time in the slightest, so by the time the ship was under the Lionsgate Bridge, you were all ready for bed. Only then did it occur to you that there was one last dilemma for the day. You hated to delay getting to sleep, but it had to be addressed.

“Uh, about our rooms, guys…” you tried to broach the subject carefully. “I only booked two of them for us.”

“Only two?” Dean was slightly incredulous. “Why would you book only two, there’s four of us!”

“It was all they had left!” you insisted. “I reserved them last minute, I couldn’t really be picky.”

“It’s fine, we can make it work,” Sam, ever the harmonizer for the day, stepped in again. “What kind of rooms do we have?”

“That's just it...I know that one room has two single beds. I'm pretty sure the other just has a double. All I’m gonna say is that I probably need to stay in the first one and take one of the singles. Other than that, you guys can work out whatever you wanna do among yourselves.”

You left them to it, casually browsing my phone to see if you could pick up any cell reception (which of course you didn’t since you were practically out at sea). The discussion had hardly begun when you happened to look up and see Castiel tapping at Dean’s shoulder while he and Sam ruminated.

“Dean?” Castiel hesitantly asked.

“Yeah, Cas?” Dean swiveled to face the angel.

“I just…I was wondering.” You saw Castiel’s wings flattened against his back, a sure sign of nervousness. “Since you promised me ‘anything within reason’ yesterday…”

“I did what now?”

“That’s right!” Sam piped up. “On the plane yesterday, just after we landed, you promised Castiel anything within reason for a whole week.”

“I don’t remember that!” Dean exclaimed.

“You wouldn’t, you were under the influence of my grace,” Castiel informed him.
Dean wiped a hand over his face. “Of friggin’ course- look, whatever promises last night’s Dean made, I’m rendering them null and void!”

“Not that I support drunk Dean in most of his endeavors,” Sam could barely hide his grin, “but he did want me to tell you, and I quote, that you ‘literally owe Cas your friggin’ life, so man the hell up and make like Shia Labeouf.’ That’s the grammatically correct version of it, anyway.”

“Sam, you know very well that drunk Dean makes promises that sober Dean cannot keep.”

“I know, but drunk Dean didn’t make this promise; grace-influenced Dean did. There’s technically a difference.”

Dean clearly wanted to counter that with another argument but stopped himself halfway through opening his mouth. Groaning to himself and looking up at the sky as though to ask God, “why me?”, he relented. “Okay, what the hell. We’re basically on a vacation at this point and I just want to get to sleep already. What do you want from me, Cas?”

Castiel’s wings pressed further into his back. “Well, I was just…going to ask if it would be alright for you and me to share the second room.”

Objection was written all over Dean’s face, but he forced his eyes shut, took a steadying breath, and nodded his head. “Yeah, okay, if that’s what you want, fine. I’m about to pass out over here.”

With the room assignments settled, you made sure everyone had the appropriate key cards and took one last look at the shorelines on either side of the boat.

“C’mon Cas, let’s get going,” Dean grabbed his friend’s hand and began towing him along. “I’m exhausted.”

You watched the pair proceed ahead of you and Sam for a few moments. “Does he know they’re…?” you asked when it became apparent Dean wasn’t going to let go of Castiel.

“I don’t think he does,” Sam said with a snort. “Let them be.”

You were content to let them be as you made it inside and took an elevator towards deck six, which was where your quarters were located. You and Sam had room 6007, while Dean and Castiel had the one right next to it, room 6005. Only when Dean reached for his key card in his pocket did he realize that he had been holding an overly-pleased Castiel’s hand the entire time and nervously retract his own hand.

Sam used his own keycard to unlock your room. The space inside was more akin to the confined dimensions you usually associated with boats, but it was still larger than any bedroom you’d ever stayed in while at sea. Two single beds sat against opposite ends of the back wall and through a short hallway was a bathroom and closet. You unpacked what little you had in your bag, hanging up your clothes in the closet and storing your toiletries in the bathroom. You changed into a comfy pair of hand-me-down pajamas you’d bought that morning and practically fell into the cushiony surface of the farthest bed.

A few minutes later, Sam flopped down on his own bed, uttering a tired “‘Night” before turning off the lights and cloaking the room in darkness.

The ocean is like home to you; no matter what vessel you may be on, be it sailboat, dinghy, fishing boat, or gigantic cruise ship, so long as you are on the open water, you are truly home. Insomnia was an issue you’d had before, but on the water, no such thing existed. The subtle rocking of the boat from the waves, the comforting distant hum of the engine, and the occasional creaks in the ship’s
frame all lulled you to sleep better than any lullaby could.

That being said, no amount of your ideal sleeping conditions could make you sleep through the conversation you heard next door.

“You want me to do what, Cas?!” you heard Dean exclaim in disbelief.

“C…cuddle with me,” Castiel’s unsteady voice replied. “Like you did last night.”

“Last night I was-was, drunk on your grace, or whatever.” You could literally hear the blush in Dean’s flustered voice. “You don’t even need to sleep, you’re an angel!”

“Yes, but I quite enjoyed our time together. This would be the last request I make of you today, Dean, I promise.”

Silence. Then, an exhausted sigh of defeat. “Oh my go- screw it, I was serious about passing out earlier. C’mere, Cas, maybe you’ll help me sleep better anyways.”

You caught traces of something like the sound of rustling sheets, which settled after a minute or so.

“Just,” Dean’s voice was slightly farther away, “don’t breathe a word of this to Sam or little miss Destiel over there.”

“What’s a Destiel, Dean?”

“…Shut up, Cas.”

The pair was silent after that, leaving you struggling to hold back an eruption of laughter. Eventually you calmed yourself down, thanks largely to the boat’s natural lullaby, and fell asleep in less than a minute.

Chapter End Notes

I dunno why Dean is so salty in this chapter. He's probably just struggling to deal with the fact that he got up close and personal with Castiel the night prior, and we all know Dean's typical default reaction when it comes to dealing with feelings he doesn't want to: he gets mad.

Poor guy. At least he's got a luxury cruise to look forward to.

Image source for Capilano Bridge: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/f0/12/90/f012906e7da8f90a0e32cce2b384eff4.jpg

You slept in until 9:00 the next morning, basking in dreams of swimming with Orcas and captaining the Noordam yourself through treacherous fjords of icebergs and narrow deep water. Sam was missing from the room, but you figured he woke up earlier and left to do something else aboard the ship. He showed up shortly after you’d gotten up and dressed.

“Good morning,” he greeted you. “They’re serving breakfast on the Lido Deck if you’re interested.”

You were very interested to see what breakfast options were available on such a luxurious ship. You usually weren’t that big of a breakfast enthusiast, but considering how well-stocked and extensive the buffet was for dinner, you couldn’t wait to enjoy a rare chance at a luxury breakfast at sea.

As it turned out, in the mornings, the buffet was permeated by the pure, unadulterated scent of breakfast, its bars full of breads, cereals, assorted meats, pastries, fruits, and juices. You honed in on the waffle station, where a chef prepared waffles live and decorated them with whatever you requested of the innumerable toppings offered. It was, in short, a morning miracle.

Sam watched with concern as you dug into what was easily one of the best breakfasts you’d ever had: two fluffy, flower-shaped waffles drenched in strawberries, chocolate sauce, sprinkles, whipped cream, and powdered sugar.

“That isn’t breakfast,” Sam said with alarm. “That is dessert.”

“I’m an adult if you round up,” you reminded him. “I can have dessert for breakfast if I want.” You took another overly large bite. “Besides, you’re my ‘uncle,’ not my ‘dad.’ Er, either of my dads.”

“Are you at least planning to get something from the fruit baskets?”

You simply skewered one of the strawberries on your fork and held it out for him to see as evidence that you did in fact have fruit in your meal already. Though still visibly ruffled by your plate of early morning sugary goodness, Sam settled back in his seat and continued to eat his cup of yogurt.

You saw neither hide nor tail of Castiel or Dean for the duration of breakfast, something that didn’t really surprise you as much as it probably should have. It was too easy to imagine they were still enjoying each other’s company in their room.

“So…” you said after finishing off your first waffle. “Did you by any chance hear Dean and Castiel last night?”

Sam went rigid. “N-no. What did they-”

“Nothing bad, don’t worry! They just…” You took another bite of waffle and thought for a moment about how best to phrase it. “Somehow Castiel convinced Dean to stay true to his promise and reward him with ‘cuddles’ like the night before.”

Sam just about spit out his mouthful of orange juice. “Cas did…what?”
“I swear, I heard every word.”

“And Dean wasn’t high on grace or drunk?”

“I’m almost certain he wasn’t; just tired, desperate, and still in denial.”

Sam had to shake himself. “Jeez, how Cas managed to convince Dean of all people to do that is beyond me. I’ll have to congratulate him at some point, because that is an achievement.”

After breakfast was finished, Sam said that he was planning on taking a walk around the perimeter of the ship to get more familiar with its layout, so you bid him farewell and set out on a journey of your own. You wanted to find the aft and bow of the ship all on your own. The Lido Deck was your starting point, packed with clusters of all varieties of tourists and cruisers. You carefully made your way around them, taking in the sights as you headed straight for the back of the ship.

Outside the buffet area, there was a pool and small covered dining space, and beyond that was the open deck at the aft of the ship. You were on the ninth level, so you were pretty high up off the water, which only made the view all the more spectacular. You were mesmerized by the trail of churning whitewater and bubbles the ship left in its wake, an oceanic trail of breadcrumbs left by the massive vessel. You really were properly out to sea now, deep blue water on all sides as far as the eye could see. You breathed in the cold ocean breeze and were once again overcome with the feeling of being home, where you belonged and could be at peace.

After a few minutes of standing at the aft, you took a staircase up to the topmost deck and were immediately assaulted with the full ferocity of the ocean’s whipping gales. It was cold but bracing, the harsh embrace of the ocean as you’d come to know and love it.

Well, except for the disheveled state it left your hair in, you most certainly did not love that.

Aside from giving you a bad hair day, it was a not so subtle reminder of the power held in the domain you now inhabited, a cue for you to feel respect and humble yourself accordingly. You plowed past the constant gusts and past the ship’s massive smokestacks and rotating radars until you finally reached the bow, which was enclosed in a wall of slanted glass windows to provide some relief from the unrelenting wind. That much didn’t surprise you about the bow; what did surprise you was that Castiel was standing out in the middle of it. Dean was watching from a recliner under the safety of the windows’ shelter.

The angel’s wings were spread wide and high, rustling and thrumming with the wind. He seemed occupied, so you maneuvered around him towards Dean.

“What’s going on?” you asked Dean as you sat beside him in the recliner.

“Cas’s latest request,” Dean said, some hint of bitterness underlying his voice at having to keep up his drunken self’s promise. “He was apparently so cooped up in our room last night, his wings needed a good stretching. He said this would be the best place to do it.”

“Well, the rooms are pretty small,” you admitted. “But at least they’re bigger than the room I had to live in on my boat.”

Dean’s eyebrows raised in a challenge. “No way, that ocean excursion of yours couldn’t have been that cramped.”

You raised a challenging eyebrow in response. “Oh trust me, it was. I bet your room is at least twice the size of my sailboat’s bedroom. Actually, no, I bet your room’s bed is bigger than my entire bedroom was.”
“What are you betting?”

“Nothing…yet. Unless you have something worthy of betting? Because all I own of value currently is my phone, and I’m sorry, but I’m not putting that on the line.”

“Let’s say winner gets to ask the loser up to three questions, and the loser has to answer them truthfully no matter what, like a one-sided truth-or-dare.”

“I like how you play, Winchester. Add three dares to that to make it a complete game and I’m in.”

“Alright, you’re on.”

How on earth Dean always managed to bring out your competitive side, you’ll never know. You truly were confident in your bet, but it was still a gamble; after all, you couldn’t quite recall the exact dimensions of your boat’s bedroom.

Dean and you decided to leave Castiel and head back to deck six; you just couldn’t delay finding out the results of the bet, you were both too eager. You decided that the only fair way to determine a winner was to look up the dimensions of your sailboat’s make and model online and compare them to the dimensions of the double bed.

By the time you made it to Dean’s room, the cleaning staff had already tidied up inside. Dean commented on how nice it was to finally have someone maintain his living quarters for him, since that seldom happened in any motel he stayed at and he had to keep the bunker clean for himself.

You couldn’t help but notice that he was also visibly relieved upon discovering that the bed had been made up, and you couldn’t help but wonder if that had anything to do with him and Castiel, but you kept your mouth shut.

“Aaccording to Wikipedia,” you read from your phone, “a double bed’s exact dimensions are 54 inches by 75 inches. Now then, let’s see about my sailboat…”

The internet was agonizingly slow. You must have spent five minutes sitting and waiting for the search results to pop up, and when they finally did, both you and Dean literally leapt up out of your seats.

“Okay, you can see here that according to Google,” you scrolled down your phone’s screen, “the dimensions for the bow sleeping quarters- that’s where I stayed -of an S2 35 Center Cockpit sailboat are…35 inches by 70 inches. That’s less than the bed! I win!”

“What?! No way, lemme see that…” Dean snatched your phone away to scrutinize it, pulling up an image of the bedroom in question. “You lived in that?”

“The boat’s only thirty-five feet long, Dean. I was only six years old when we lived on the ocean, of course I got the smallest room.”

“…Dammit. I did not think this bet through.”

“Clearly. Now you have to answer my questions and complete my dares. For now though, I think I’ll stick to asking my first question.”

Dean sighed. “Alright kiddo, whaddaya wanna know?”

Possibilities raced through your mind. This was a God-given gift bestowed upon you, and you could not afford to waste it. Remembering something that had been bugging you since yesterday, you
asked, “Okay, how about this: why were you so incredibly curious about Castiel’s wings and true form yesterday?”

Clearly, Dean had not been expecting that. A faint trace of color stained his cheeks, though you couldn’t quite decipher if it was blush or a trick of the dim lighting in his room. “Well, uh, ya see… the thing about that is…” Dean took a moment to collect himself. “Cas and I have known each other a long time, right? And I’ve seen the shadows of his wings a few times here and there, and he tried to speak to me in his true form a couple of times, which went just swell by the way…and…”

You waved a hand for him to continue, on the edge of your seat at the potential Pandora’s Box you’d just managed to open.

“I just really want to see what he actually looks like, okay?” Dean admitted. “Or at the very least, what his wings look like. Your description the other day gave me a pretty good idea, but that ended up making me want to see them even more, and…” More color flooded Dean’s face, and this time you were sure it was from a blush. “It’s just not really fair. I’m closer to the guy than practically anyone else, we have that ‘profound bond’ thing or whatever he calls it, but I’m not one of the special people who gets to see him as he really is. I won’t lie, I was a bit ticked off when you first showed up and ended up being able to see his wings. Like, ‘here’s this random person who just materialized in our world, and hey would you look at that, she can see your best friend’s wings just like you’ve always wanted to, and…’”

Dean trailed off for a few moments as he processed what he’d just said. “I mean, I haven’t always wanted to see them, I just…”

“You do have to answer completely truthfully, Dean,” you reminded him.

Dean cursed faintly under his breath. “Right, okay. I have wanted to see them for a long time. It just feels unfair, and I guess I’ve been reminded of that a lot lately. You can see Cas’s wings, heck even a random bird could see Cas’s wings yesterday, but even though me and him have lots of history, I still can’t.”

You pressed your hands together and held them up to your chin. “So, what you’re saying is…you’re jealous.”

Dean looked ready to retaliate against that but decided against it at the last second and feebly nodded instead, avoiding all risk of eye contact.

Jeez. Talk about opening the floodgates.

“I think that’s understandable,” you tried to sound comforting. “If you ever want to know what his wings are doing, you can ask and I’ll tell you. I don’t think Cas would mind.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Dean scratched the back of his head and turned away, signaling an end to the conversation. “Don’t go blabbing to ‘Uncle Sam’ about any of this or whatever, I know you two are gossip buddies.”

“You have my word,” you swore, and you really meant it. “And actually, that brings me to my first dare.”

“Already? You’re gonna use up all your prizes before the day is out at this rate. What’ll it be?”

You mustered your best version of a devious smirk. “I dare you…to keep up my crappy cover for us from the security station yesterday.”
Dean stared you down. “Oh you have got to be kidding me. That won’t even work, everyone has to play a role for that one, not just me!”

“Sam’s already your brother, he doesn’t have to do much of anything. I’m sure Cas would make a fine pretend father with a little coaching from you, and I’m in on the dare, so I’ll just put on my best ‘sweet innocent daughter’ guise whenever necessary.”

“You’re seriously giving off more of an ‘obnoxious kid sister’ vibe right now.”

You sneered. “I’ll work on it.”

The rest of the day was as laid-back as could be. The ship was at sea for the entirety of the day, so you were basically free to wander about and do as you pleased. Dean left shortly after the bet to grab a late breakfast and you decided to hang out in the quiet longue area in the center of the ship, watching that golden, purple, and blue bauble glow on the ceiling above. You really needed the time alone with your thoughts; you hadn’t had a chance to do any proper introverting for too long.

Eventually hunger forced you out of your hiding spot and you took a slice of some of the most well-seasoned cheese pizza you’d ever had from the buffet. You ran into Sam and Castiel sitting at a table beside a window and happily joined them, listening to them discuss what all they’d found on the ship so far and speculating on what they had yet to discover.

You suggested that you all do some exploring as a group to see what there was to find, and that was how you spent the next three hours of the day. You discovered a karaoke bar, a dance floor tucked away in a secret corner of the third floor, several hot tubs, an art gallery, a massive auditorium that served to remind you of just how gargantuan this ship really was, and even a fully operating casino with slot machines and poker tables. Sam (somewhat) jokingly said that he had to keep Dean away from that last one at all costs.

Your tired feet carried you back to your room for an hour-long break, which you and Sam spent watching a buddy cop comedy on your room’s TV. The film was about as ridiculous as one would expect, but you enjoyed laughing at it the whole way through. You filled in Sam on the dare you’d proposed to Dean, and though a bit dubious at first, he ended up being happy to conspire with you and keep the “cover” going.

Just as you were starting to get restless and considered getting out again, an excited Dean knocked on your door.

“Dude,” he told Sam from the doorway. “They have lobster at the buffet tonight. We have to try some.”

And try some they did, all four of you taking the stairs to the ninth floor and accepting plates of fresh, steaming lobster tails from the surf n’ turf bar. Apparently, the Winchesters had never even had the opportunity to try proper lobster before, which made your heart pang with pity. Lobster was a luxury everyone should at least be given the opportunity to indulge in at some point in their lives, and you were happy to see that wrong undone on that night. Even Castiel ended up with a plate on Dean’s insistence, although the angel attempted to eat the tail whole, shell and all, before Sam and Dean stopped him and showed him how it was done.

“Well,” you said as you pushed your empty plate across the table, “I’m going for dessert.”

“Check what kinds of pie they have out tonight and report back,” Dean requested, still working on his second lobster tail. You gave him a thumbs-up and headed towards the dessert bar, taking a slice of chocolate cake for yourself and taking inventory on caramel, blueberry, and key lime pie. Dean
ended up going for a slice of each by the time he was ready for dessert.

The ship’s journey had taken you closer inland by the evening, and by the time you were done with dinner, it had maneuvered into a canal lined with deciduous trees, wisps of fog, and mountainous terrain. You admired the view from your table’s nearest window briefly before announcing that you were tired and ready to head back to the rooms.

Everyone else agreed with you on that, and you took the long way downstairs to extend the time you had to take in the view of the Alaskan shoreline. Many of the people we passed were dressed up in fancy clothes and accessories, and after the first ten or so, you started to get suspicious.

“There isn’t like a dress code or anything in effect here, right?” Dean asked.

“I believe it is a gala night,” Castiel concluded. “I read about it in one of the pamphlets in our room. Customarily, passengers dress in formal wear and mingle on the second deck for the evening.”

“Well, we don’t have much in the way of formal wear,” Sam sounded almost disappointed. “We can skip it, I’m ready for bed anyways.”

“We could always pick up something fancy on-shore tomorrow,” you realized. “The ship is docking at a port for the morning, and we certainly have the money left for it.”

“Maybe,” Dean yawned. “I’m not sure I wanna socialize with a buncha high-brow rich people anyways. We’ll worry about it whenever the next gala night is.”

Your group parted into two upon reaching the rooms, Dean and Castiel entering their room and you and Sam entering yours. You got ready for bed at your own pace after Sam had passed out, and as you shuffled towards your bed, overhead another ongoing conversation through the wall.

“…there’s this dumb bet thing,” Dean was saying. “And basically…we gotta keep up the act [Y/N] came up with at security yesterday.”

“I can attempt to,” Castiel didn’t sound terribly confident. “But I don’t know much of anything about being a father.”

“Just…follow my lead and you’ll do fine, no worries.”

“Thank you, Dean.” There was a long pause, and at this point you had your ear pressed against the wall. “If I may make another request of you, since the week is still active…”

“I’m all ears, Cas.”

“Would another night of cuddling be acceptable?”

There was an even longer pause this time, and you found yourself inching forward as you willed away the gaping void of unbearable silence and tension that had descended.

Dean cleared his throat. “I, uh…o-okay.”

The familiar sound of rustling sheets arose, followed by settling and the click of a light switch.

Castiel let out a contented hum. “Good night, Dean.”

“Y-yeah, g’night…Cas…” Dean trailed off, muffled by blankets.

You weren’t sure if you would be able to successfully fall asleep with how your head was spinning
from the unadulterated cuteness that had just transpired, but with the steady rock and rumble of the boat as your foundation, you drifted off in just one tranquil minute.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter this time. Trust me, there will plenty longer ones to make up for it in the future.
In which you snoop, Dean conspires, Cas learns US history, and Sam is unfairly fit

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

~7/4/17~

Your sleeping schedule was still a little off kilter, especially after you officially crossed into a different time zone and the ship’s clock was set back an hour. You woke up at the ripe hour of 6:30 in the morning, earlier even than Sam, which was unprecedented.

The first thing you noticed upon getting out of bed was that the swaying of the boat had all but stopped and the engines weren’t making their sweet, mechanical music. The Noordam must have docked sometime in the early morning hours. Left with nothing much else to do, you decided to rummage through your pitifully small amount of carry-on in search of entertainment, but what you ended up finding proved to be much better.

You’d nearly forgotten that Sam had packed up the handful of obscure angel books when Castiel’s wing had been injured three days ago. It was just an accident or poor timing that they’d been brought along, but at least it meant you had some resources from Supernatural on your side if you should need them. Curiosity urged you to take one and read it for yourself; you were sure Sam wouldn’t mind, since he was always open to teaching you about the nature of the supernatural.

The book you ended up grabbing was an older one labelled “Angel Spells: Untested and Unproven.” The title drew you in because of your fascination with both magic and all things regarding angels, and a combination of the two excited you more than either could alone. What you very quickly learned upon reading the preface and first few “spells” was that magic tied to angels was for the most part, as the title implied, untested and unproven. Because angels were such powerful, uncontrollable beings who were until recently so distant from humanity, creating and practicing spells based on them was next to impossible.

Most of the spells in the book were incomplete, missing ingredients or recorded effects, and sometimes were even without any listed procedures at all. You skipped ahead to a section of completed spells, which of course offered the most promise. Among the useable spells in this section were ones that you already knew about, such as the angel banishing sigil and angel summoning ritual. But nestled between the pages on “flight nullification spell” and “angel blade disarming spell” was one you had never hoped to even exist: “the angelic perception spell.”

This spell’s description said that whoever it was tied to would essentially be able to see a single angel’s true form, including their wings when contained in a vessel, even if they weren’t born with the ability to perceive angels. You could have leapt out of your seat with excitement when you discovered this, even more so when you found that the ingredients and instructions were all complete. The one major drawback of this spell was that it was yet another untested and unproven one, meaning either no one had managed to prove it worked or been able to cast it at all. So, it was entirely possible that a) it either didn’t work, or b) had unforeseeable side effects.

That certainly wasn’t going to stop you from informing Dean of the spell’s existence. He at least deserved to know that such a spell was a genuine thing.

You were so eager to get the news out that you changed and got ready in minutes, quietly leaving your room with the book in hand and knocking on the next door over. Only when you heard a
startled waking snore from inside did you remember what time it was and have the decency to step back and leave your neighbors be.

Or at least, you would have left them be if you didn’t hear Dean frantically mumbling something and rushing to get out of bed.

“Cas, go, go!” Dean whispered hoarsely, followed by the sound of another person leaving the bed and walking across the room. You heard a door open, more footsteps, and then a door closing. Dean cleared his throat and you heard him briefly adjusting something before the door swung open, nearly hitting you in the face.

“What?” a very irritated and very sleepy PJ-clad Dean demanded, carefully keeping the door open as little as possible.

You were frozen in place. “I…I’m really sorry, I didn’t even think about what time it was…”

Dean sighed and momentarily covered his face. “What could have possibly been so important that it made you forget it was…” Dean pretended to look at an invisible watch on his wrist, “ass o’clock in the morning?”

“Seven thirty, actually…but yeah, there is something.” You lifted up the book to show him. “I found a spell in here I think you’d like to see.”

Dean quirked an eyebrow, tiredness momentarily forgotten. “Angel spells?” He took the book from you and flipped to the page of interest you had bookmarked with a pamphlet from your room. As he read over the spell’s intended effects, his eyes went wide. “Where did you find this?”

“In Sam’s bag. He still has the books from when Cas got hurt.”

Looking over the spell one more time, he stepped back into his room, forgetting to hold the door in place. “Can I hold on to this for a while?” he asked.

“Sure, I’ve already read most of it.”

“Cool, cool, thanks…” Dean seemed to have fallen into a sort of daze that went beyond just early morning tiredness as he read over the spell once more. He blinked hard and turned back to you where you still stood outside in the hallway. “Are we still going to shore today like you said?”

“That’s what I’m hoping for. You should probably get ready; the boat leaves the dock at 2:30 so we have limited time.” You peeked a little further into the room. “Oh, and you should also probably let Cas out of the closet.”

Dean started, opening and closing his mouth like a braindead fish for a few moments as he glanced back and forth between you and the closet.

“I saw his wings sticking out,” you explained before he could ask. “That book said it isn’t healthy to keep angels cooped up for too long.” On that note, you turned and left for your own room, fully intending to wake Sam and get moving towards the shore.

Sam thankfully woke up easily and was ready to leave in minutes. You made sure to grab your thick jacket off the hook in your closet, knowing that Alaska was more than likely going to be frigid. You and Sam waited for Dean and Castiel outside their room and the pair emerged shortly thereafter, Dean carrying a small bag at his side.

Your small group disembarked the ship from deck two in a line of other passengers. Most everyone
around you was sufficiently bundled in coats, hats, gloves and the like. Only then did you realize that nobody else in your group had cold weather clothing; you only had your jacket with you at all because you were perpetually cold and happened to be wearing it the same day you fled. Castiel was unaffected by outside temperatures, but as for the Winchesters...well, you just hoped that their innumerable layers of clothing would be enough to get them through the day's ventures.

The steep gangplank led you down to a dock bustling with tourists. The air was incredibly chilly, seaside breezes blowing right past and whipping at your exposed face. You found a small covered building at the dock’s edge with a map of the surrounding area. It turned out you were on an island rather than the Alaskan mainland, specifically one called Ketchikan, the self-proclaimed “world capital of salmon.” As a seafood enthusiast, your interest was definitely piqued.

The island itself was relatively small with a population of just 8,050. A few attractions were highlighted on the map that stood out to you as sufficiently isolated for your purposes, one of them being a “totem city” (whatever that meant) and another being a short trail through the local temperate rainforest. The only other one accessible to you was a tour of the fishing docks, and Dean refuted any plans of checking that out by stating that the smell of dead fish from there would probably knock you all unconscious.

A small shuttle service van drove you to the “totem city” since it was just a few minutes outside of the docks. It turned out that it had earned its name for the fact that it was a sizable plot of historic land littered with restored totem poles carved by the native Alaskans. The poles were indeed beautiful, and you had to appreciate the hard work that must have been put into making them so smooth and symmetrical.

Much to your complete and utter joy, a friendly Alaskan cat with brown tabby fur, a fluffy tail, and unusually short legs emerged from a bush on the property once you neared the far end of it. The cat walked right up to Castiel, who was closest, and rubbed its side all over the bottom of his trench coat. Castiel watched the cat with curiosity, eventually reaching out to stroke its back and grinning when it arched up into his hand.

“She’s very social,” the angel observed as his newfound feline friend continued marking him and accepting his attention.

“We should name her!” you cheered, leaning down to pet the cat for yourself.

“Like what?” Sam wondered. “Maybe a native Alaskan name…”

“I don’t think we know any of those,” Dean said, watching the cat from a safe distance to keep his allergies in check. “What about something easier? Like ‘Totem Pole’ or something else relevant.”

“We can just call her Totem,” you decided, grinning from ear to ear as the feline in question laid down and stretched herself out on the gravel. “Yeah, I like that. Totem!”

Another ten minutes was spent showering Totem with as much affection as your small band of travelers could offer, excluding Dean since he was playing it safe to avoid provoking his allergies. After a few more minutes of admiring the handiwork of the various totems and carvings littered about, you left for the gift shop to warm up for a while. Though the Winchesters had fared decently enough against the prickly hand of Alaskan chill, they did need a break from it.

Being the smart moose that he is, Sam decided to purchase a proper jacket in the gift ship. You insisted that he buy one with a red moose printed on the back, and though it took some convincing, he eventually conceded and took it to the sales counter.
With that purchase influenced, you wandered off to find Dean at the other end of the store digging through a small box of assorted charms and small jewelry. He seemed intensely focused, hurriedly picking up and setting aside item after item and never seeming to locate what he was after.

“Whatcha doin’?” you asked, leaning over his shoulder to watch him work.

“Just looking to see if they have something…” Dean barely even acknowledged you, dead set on his task of sorting through the tiny trinkets.

Knowing you wouldn’t get much of anywhere with him, you left him be and joined Castiel by a wall of ornaments and hanging decorations nearby. As he and you were in the middle of painstakingly ranking each dangling bauble from most to least practical, you heard Dean shout a triumphant “Ah-ha!”

You excused yourself and left Castiel to ponder the remaining ornaments. By the time you caught up to Dean, he was talking with a young man behind the sales counter.

“…just want to make sure, this doesn’t actually open anything, right?” Dean was asking, holding up what appeared to be a small but intricate brass key.

The man glanced at the key. “No, man, it’s just a trinket,” he assured. “It shouldn’t open anything at all.”

“Are you sure?” Dean pressed, holding out the key further. “I have to be sure it doesn’t have a matching lock anywhere that you know of.”

“They made it as a charm independently of any lock as far as I know. You gonna buy it or not?”

“Yeah, I’ll take it.” Dean fished a couple of dollars out of his pocket and completed the purchase, gingerly placing his new decorative key in the bag he’d had with him all day.

Your suspicions were officially raised. Dean was definitely up to something.

After you left the gift shop, your group took the shuttle towards the rainforest trail on the far end of the island. It was a considerably longer drive, and the roads were quite bumpy and in desperate need of repaving in some places, but the views of deciduous mountains rolling in clouds around you made it easier to overlook the unsteady ride.

The trailhead was at the very end of the island’s main road, literally marked by a yellow diamond-shaped road sign that read “END” in bold black letters. Sam adorned his new jacket, and as soon as Dean noticed it, he visibly twitched a bit.

“Why didn’t I think of buying something like that…?” he muttered, frowning down at his own barely-adequate layers of clothing.

Barely-adequate turned into completely inadequate somewhere around half a mile down the trail. Dean huffed to himself and held his arms together over his chest in a bid to keep his outer leather jacket closed, which wasn’t really working out for him. You did feel sorry for him, but it was difficult to focus on Dean’s weather woes with the amazing sights. Moss and a rich variety of trees dominated the landscape, a cascading, gently sloping waterfall running alongside the trail the whole way.

A small pocket of rain closed in on your location, sprinkling you with water drops for a few minutes. You and Sam both had hoods on your coats, so the rain didn’t bother either of you, and Castiel could care less, but as for Dean…well, the poor guy just couldn’t catch a break.
By the time the brief shower had passed, Dean was borderline soaked, not drenched to the point of dripping water everywhere, but wet enough that his clothes weighed him down and surely chilled him to the bone.

Castiel clearly took notice of Dean’s shivering, because you saw him up his pace to keep up with the hunter and begin to raise his wing towards him. The angel hesitated, pulling back for a moment, then made a few false starts towards the freezing cold Winchester. Eventually Castiel steeled himself and went all the way, wrapping and hovering his corporeal wing as far around Dean as he could to shield the hunter from some of the cold. Dean certainly didn’t notice since Castiel’s wings were invisible to him, but his relief was immediate. He slumped forward ever so slightly and loosened his death grip on his jacket, letting out a comforted breath.

You were desperate to say something, but you refrained; you had a feeling doing so would embarrass Castiel and take away Dean’s one source of protection from the frigid air, so you let the pair walk on without so much as a word.

In total, you walked two miles out and back on the trail, Sam always in the lead like the athletic maniac that he is. Highlights of the trip included spotting a pair of banana slugs hiding under a patch of skunk cabbage and stumbling upon a geocache under some loose wood.

The shuttle took you as far back into town as it could, which turned out to not be very far because a Fourth of July parade had just started. You’d almost completely forgotten about ‘Murica Day as you liked to call it, and that brought up another frantic thought into your mind: if today was July 4th, that meant that your birthday was tomorrow.

Starting tomorrow, you wouldn’t have to say you were an adult if you rounded up. You would be, legally speaking, actually an adult.

Wowza. That sure was a thing that would be happening.

“My birthday’s tomorrow,” you blurted out as the van turned to avoid a traffic jam.

Your travelling companions all turned to look at you where you sat alone in the back row. No one said anything for a few long moments.

“Wait, seriously?” Dean was the first one to snap out of it, shaking his head.

“Yeah, seriously,” you confirmed. “I just remembered. I wasn’t even thinking about it, what with us being on the run and all…I’m turning eighteen.”

“That’s…a pretty big deal,” Sam said slowly. “You’ll be an adult. Do you…wanna do anything special?”

You thought about it for a moment. So far, this entire trip had been something “special,” and you were more than happy to spend at least some of your birthday aboard a boat.

“I know that we’re stopping at another port sometime tomorrow,” you recalled, gears turning in your brain. “So…could we maybe…try some Alaskan salmon there? I’ve always wanted to; it’s my favorite kind of fish, and to have some from one of its most famous sources would be fantastic.”

Dean grinned. “You got it, kiddo.” His face twisted. “Wait, am I gonna be allowed to call you that anymore?”

“Honestly I’d prefer if you continued.”
“Good, got it.” He looked out his window at the seaside shops passing by. “Speaking of local food, is anyone else hungry for some lunch?”

You certainly were, and apparently Sam was as well. He asked the shuttle driver to drop you off on one of the street corners and you proceeded through town, taking in all the patriotic decorations and overwhelming color scheme of red, white, and blue. You swear you saw a bald eagle perched atop one of the taller buildings on that street, and that paired with the quaint but passionate parade a few yards away and the innumerable American flags hanging from the streetlights made it one of the most ‘Murican things you’d seen.

Your best option for a quick lunch was a local diner nestled between a jewelry shop and a small market. The inside of the building was designed with a 50s/60s diner in mind, with tiled checkerboard floors and cushiony red booths for seating. You ordered a simple grilled cheese but splurged a bit on a banana milkshake, which appeared at our table in tall semi-frozen glass topped with whipped cream, sprinkles, and a maraschino cherry. You were worried Sam was going to start up the whole “having dessert for a main meal” thing again, but he just sent you a single disapproving glance and offered no comment.

As Dean looked over the menu, his eyes narrowed. “Hey,” he asked, eyes still glued to the paper in his hands, “they get all of their seafood fresh from the water around here, right?”

“I…think so, yeah,” Sam answered, suspicion creasing his brow. “Why?”

“Just wondering. It might influence what I end up ordering.”

Sam let his suspicion go at that, but you didn’t release yours quite so easily. Something had definitely been up with Dean since he’d bought that key at totem city, and you knew better than to ignore consistent suspicious behavior in a Winchester.

You ate your meal as quickly as you could manage, since there was only a half hour left to re-board the ship before it left. After paying the check at the front counter, Dean stopped the rest of you on your way out the door.

“You all can go ahead,” he said. “I just need to make a bathroom stop before we leave. I’ll catch up with you on the ship.”

Just as he was about to turn and leave, you hurriedly choked out, “M-me too! We’ll see you on the boat later, guys.”

Dean raised an eyebrow at you but continued towards the back of diner where the restrooms were located. You weren’t about to leave him alone with how he was acting; you were determined to get to the bottom of his behavior; that, and you really did need a bathroom break.

By the time you were done and back out in the restaurant, you caught sight of Dean having a discussion with one of the cooks in a quiet corner of the building. The cook looked rather confused and a little concerned, but hesitantly nodded his head as Dean talked to him. You watched from afar as the cook took off for the kitchen, leaving Dean waiting for a minute or so before returning with a small plastic bag. Dean thanked the cook, took the bag and carefully placed it inside his own larger bag, disgust coloring his face as he tried to keep whatever it was he had in his hand as far away from his face as possible.

You chose that particular moment to stalk up behind him and tap him on the shoulder.

Dean yelped and spun around, relaxing but still bristling when he saw it was you. “Jeez, usually Cas
is the one who shows up out of nowhere and scares the living daylights outta me,” he said to himself. “You ready to go?”

“I think so,” you answered. “What about you?”

“Yeah, let’s get out of here,” he hastily said and took to speed walking out the door. You had to take big steps to keep up with him and his bow legs, and he was clearly trying to keep some degree of distance between you as he walked down the street and back towards the docks. Whatever it was he was hiding, he did not want to risk discussing it with you.

Dean didn’t have a choice but to slow down when he made it to the gangplank, as it was backed up with other passengers waiting in line to go through the ship’s makeshift security station before boarding again. You looked around at the other people, and they seemed mostly distracted with talking amongst themselves or taking in the sights of Ketchikan. This might be your only chance to confront Dean about what he’d been doing while it was just the two of you.

You cleared your throat and opened your mouth, but before you could get out a single word, Dean interrupted you. “Hey, could I ask you a favor?”

Your mouth snapped shut. You blinked a few times to regain your senses and replied, “Uh, sure. What is it?”

“Okay, this is gonna sound really weird, but…” Dean lowered his voice. “I need you to…” Embarrassment nearly overtook Dean’s face in a sweep of red, but he collected himself and pressed on. “I need you to ask Cas if you can have one of his feathers.”

You blinked. “You what me to what now?”

“Ask Cas if you can have a feather from one of his wings,” Dean quietly repeated. “You can see them, and he trusts you with them, so he’ll probably be willing to pass one on to you.”

As odd as the request was, you knew Dean was right. But this feather-acquiring business turned a fishy situation into a borderline deceitful one. Why the heck would Dean need one of Castiel’s feathers?

Unless…

“You’re…you’re trying to cast the spell,” you realized. “The angelic perception spell from the book.”

Dean’s expression made it immediately obvious that you’d caught him red-handed. He didn’t really have much to say, didn’t even try to deny it. His face hardened and he refused to meet your eyes.

“You do know that no one’s ever tried it before, right?” you reminded him. “We don’t even know if it will work, or what else it might do.”

“I know that,” Dean sighed out. “But…I have to try, you know? This might be my one shot at getting to see…” Dean swallowed. “Look, I know it’s risky, but if something goes wrong, I can always call on Cas and he’ll fix it. He’s an angel, he can undo most anything related to spells from what I’ve seen.”

“Even untested angelic spells?”

“Especially angelic spells, I’d think. If you could just get one feather from him, that’s all I’d need. I won’t bug you about it anymore after that.”
“Well…” you considered your options. You really did want Dean to be able to see Castiel now that you knew how badly he wished for it, even if it was risky business.

“Okay, I will,” you decided. “But only if you let me help with the spell. It’ll be safer that way.” You crossed your arms. “I’m assuming you’re trying to keep this from Sam?”

“Safe assumption to make. Don’t let him know a thing about this, and that obviously goes for Cas too.”

You let out a melodramatic sigh. “You Winchesters and your secrets. You’ll at least let them know about it if the spell works, right?”

“That’s the plan.”

You shrugged. “That’s better than nothing. C’mon, let’s get through security.”

Security was brief and orderly, steering you back onboard the ship. You ran into a newly-placed sign stating that the front-most section of the bow was open to visitors on the fourth deck, so you decided to check it out. You got there just in time to feel the boat’s engines hum to life and begin propelling away from Ketchikan and back out into the great big blue. The view was impressive, unhindered by any glass walls like on the tenth deck and vast from the v shape of the bow.

You greatly enjoyed the return of the ocean’s breeze to your hair and face and the smell of the water and mist. You felt properly like a sailor again, even taking the time to admire the anchor that was tied down to the center of the bow. It had to have been twice your height, easily the largest anchor you’d ever seen on a boat in your life.

Dean was getting restless, his gaze sweeping back and forth over the expanse of water and mountains encompassing it. “Okay, I was just thinking,” he started, “we should probably take a look at what I have for the spell so far before Sam or Cas show up.”

“You’re probably right,” you conceded, lamenting the thought of leaving the watery view behind.

“I’ll show you what I have so far.” Dean held up that bag he’d been carrying for the duration of our day. “But uh, not here, definitely not here. I don’t think the other passengers are gonna wanna see this.”

You nodded your head warily and accompanied Dean back to his room, anxious to see just what it what he had in that enigmatic bag of his. Upon ensuring that his door was safely and securely closed, he set the bag down on the small round table in his room and unzipped it.

“Okay, so here I’ve got the book,” Dean began to take a short inventory, lifting the angelic spell book from the bottom of the bag, “then I have this key from the totem city. And the last thing I have is…” An expression of disgust settled on his face as he peered into the bag at the last item. “Well, here, you can just…see it.”

You leaned over to closely look into the bag and immediately regretted not thinking ahead to keep your distance. “Oh my-” You put a hand to my chest to collect yourself. “Is that…an eyeball?”

“Certified salmon eyeball, yup,” Dean confirmed grimly. “That’s what I got back at the diner. I figured since they used fresh fish, they would have all the spare parts leftover, so…”

“That is vile.” You’d seen your share of dead fish in your life, as was inevitable for someone who
lived on the ocean for any extended amount of time, and though you’d long since adjusted to the sight of full fish corpses, a single separated eyeball still made your stomach churn. “Are you gonna keep that in your fridge?

“That’s what I’m planning on, assuming Cas doesn’t go poking around in there.”

“O-okay, that sounds good. But…I’m not touching that.”

“I didn’t think you’d want to. I’ll do it, I’m the one who picked it up earlier.” Dean took a deep breath and grabbed the top of the plastic bag in which the eyeball rested, averting his eyes as best as he could while he maneuvered around his tight room to the minifridge beside his closet. You heard the fridge door open, then something being shoved onto one of its racks, and then the door loudly closing.

“Done,” Dean said, and the sheer relief in his tone was evident.

A single chuckle escaped you as the ridiculousness of the situation hit you. “What do you even need a salmon eye for, anyway? I don’t remember the spell calling for that.”

“You might wanna take another look at the spell, actually.”

You picked up the book from where it rested on the table and flipped to the bookmarked page. The spell wasn’t entirely direct; some of the ingredients were written as somewhat cryptic clues. Apparently, that was the standard when it came to angelic spells, or at least the style that this book was written in.

You read aloud, “Necessary ingredients include: a drizzling of holy oil, the stone of October, and an eye that sees but not through air…oh, so that’s why you got a salmon eye.”

“Told ya.”

You continued. “After these items are gathered, the blood of the one who wishes to see an angel must be added along with a freely-given feather of the angel to be seen. A paradox key without a match must be used to stir it together and the spell will be complete.”

You reached for the key where it sat plainly on the table. It was a small skeleton key, and upon getting a closer look at it, I had to admit it was quite pretty. The top handle was curvy and vine-like, while the bottom of the key was flat and shaped out of stacked cubes. “That’s why you wanted to make sure the key didn’t go to anything.” You turned your attention back to the book. “I’m pretty sure Sam packed that bottle of holy oil along with the books when Cas was hit. I can bring you that…and I’m assuming the ‘stone of October’ is like a birthstone, right?”

“Right, that’s what I thought too,” Dean joined you in reading the book.

“I don’t know what October’s birthstone is,” you wracked your brain as you tried to remember to no avail. “All I know is my birth month’s, ruby.”

Dean barked a laugh. “That must make jewelry shopping a drain on your wallet.”

“Actually, I’ve never had the money to buy a ruby, as much as I’ve wanted one.”

“Huh…that’s probably for the best, then. I’m pretty sure October’s birthstone is opal, but we can look it up to make sure.”

“How the heck are we gonna get an opal though?”
“I saw a jewelry store on the first deck, we can check there. If not there, then we’ll figure something out at one of the ports.”

“This is really coming together nicely,” you said with just a bit too much enthusiasm. “This is exciting! I’ve never cast a spell before. No wonder you go behind Sam’s back all the time and vice versa; supernatural conspiring is fun!”

Dean frowned a bit but did eventually chuckle. “What do we say we try to find Sam and Cas before they find us?”

“Like a massive game of hide-and-seek, only impossible because this ship is ginormous.”

Dean grinned as he packed up his accumulated spell supplies and shoved them under his side of the bed. “That’s one way of looking at it, sure. But we never back down from a challenge, do we?”

“No, sir!”

“Atta girl. Let’s get to searching.”

The search turned to not be so impossible. All you had to do was follow a trail to the Lido Deck buffet and thoroughly scan it to find Sam standing in line at the grill and Castiel seated in a booth by a starboard window. The buffet was fully decked-out for Independence Day, full of American cuisine like hot dogs, steak, hamburgers, and other carnivorous delights.

Most of dinner was spent trying to explain Independence Day to Castiel, including a brief summarization of old American history and the customs of fireworks and barbecues that accompanied the holiday. The US history lesson was quickly forgotten upon Dean catching sight of someone walking by with a whippy slice of lemon merengue pie on their plate. Dean wordlessly left the table after that and returned thirty seconds later with two slices of the same pie from the dessert bar.

“You sure you’re gonna be able to eat all of that?” Sam asked, watching his brother with genuine concern. “You’ve already basically had a Fourth of July feast already.”

“Sammy, today is a day to celebrate freedom,” Dean chastised, “and you’re trying to restrict a man by how much pie he can have? That’s not in the spirit of the holiday at all.” On that note, Dean shoved a much-too-large bite of pie right in his pie hole.

You ended up with a slice of lemon merengue for dessert as well, and in all honesty, you could really see why Dean took two slices. The stuff was heavenly, the perfect end to a holiday meal that you felt you’d all earned.

“So, I know there aren’t going to be any fireworks,” you said once you were sufficiently stuffed, “but we can at least enjoy the view from the tenth deck for the evening.”

“I dunno,” Dean doubted. “It’s gonna be awful cold up there, and I’ve had my fair share of frigid weather today.” He shivered to prove his point.

“You never know, we might see some Alaskan wildlife,” you tempted, but Dean still didn’t budge.

“I am sensing some rather large mammalian life forms in the waters ahead of the ship,” Castiel said.

Well, that settled it. You had to see that. But still, Dean was determined not to get left out in the cold again, so you pulled out a secret weapon you hoped you’d never have to use. You put on your best kicked puppy expression and stared Dean down. He caved in record time. You would have to
remember to thank Sam later for teaching you the puppy dog eyes trick.

It was a battle to walk against the wind up towards the front of the tenth deck, the Alaskan climate determined to do all in its power to keep you from reaching your destination. You had to admit, Dean was one hundred percent right about it being cold. Not that he was commenting on it anymore since Castiel had once again encased him in the shelter of one of his wings. Again, though you were tempted beyond all normal realms of temptation to say something, you kept your thoughts to yourself.

Those slanted glass windows at the bow had never looked so inviting before, promising relative warmth and protection from the ferocity of the windstorm dancing across the top of the ship. You each settled on an armchair except for Castiel, who mentioned something about “stretching” and trekked to the exposed center of the bow like the brave soldier he was. Just as he had yesterday morning, he extended his wings over his head and let the wind pull them out to their fullest possible height.

You watched Castiel for a minute or so until Dean casually leaned over and whispered, “What are they doing?”

You gave him a look to let him know that you had no idea what he was talking about.

Dean rolled his eyes. “His wings, what are they doing?”

You mouthed an “oh” and squinted at the wings themselves as Castiel slowly lifted and lowered them in and out of the wind currents. “He’s…well, he’s stretching them. Up and down right now.”

“You’re sure?”

Dean graced you with an equally more intense eyeroll. “Are any parts of them blue? You said they shine blue if the light hits them right.”

You turned to check for him and, oh wow, yep, that was definitely a lot of hecking blue right there. The sun wasn’t anywhere close to setting yet, since you were far enough north that the days were much longer than the nights, but the bright burning beacon in the sky was angled just right so that it shone perfectly over the uppermost edges of Castiel’s wings, bringing out that deep blue color all along their tops. As if that wasn’t enough, blue wasn’t even the only streak of color in his raven black feathers; orange and even a smaller shade of pink were reflecting off of them in waves from the sunlight. It was the kind of image that one would want to capture in a photograph and hold onto forever, except that a photo would never be able to hold the entirety of the actual moment’s splendor.

Dean tapped your shoulder and you snapped out of your thoughts. You hadn’t even realized that you’d been staring. He was still impatiently awaiting an answer. How were you supposed to describe all of that to him?

“Um, wow, okay,” you cleared your throat. “He’s got the blue for sure, yeah, but…his wings are reflecting the sunlight. They’re kind orange and pink now too. It’s…really, really freakin’ pretty.”

Something withered in Dean’s expression and he turned to look at Castiel, willing himself to see what you saw but knowing that he wouldn’t no matter how hard he tried. He exhaled for a long few moments, then turned to you again. “We have got to cast that spell,” he firmly stated, and after what you’d just seen, you couldn’t help but wholeheartedly agree with him.

“Guys, come look!” Sam interrupted your moment, calling from the port side of the glass wall.
“There are dolphins in the water!”

You leapt up and practically ran over to where Sam was, Dean right behind you. Sure enough, there was a pod of dolphins just out of the ship’s reach, dipping above and below the wake it carved in the water’s surface. Castiel joined you shortly after that, watching the dolphins playfully skimming the surface as they swam past.

Your group stood by the window for another few minutes, waiting around to see if there was anything else worth sticking around for. You were lucky enough to spot the next creature, none other than a lone Orca breaching the surface for air. You excitedly shouted out and pointed at it to get your friends’ attention, and you all stood rapt with attention as the whale spouted a cloud of mist as it breathed and gracefully descended back underwater.

Having gotten your fill of marine life viewing, you decided to head back to your rooms for the night and prepare for tomorrow. Thankfully, the wind was helpful on your journey back down in contrast to your journey up, pushing you along rather than holding you back.

As you stood silently in the elevator together, you happened to look down and noticed that the rug under your feet was labelled with the single word, “Tuesday.” Yesterday, the elevator had a rug labelled “Monday,” and so on and so forth. You smiled deviously and nudged Sam with your elbow.

“Hey Sam,” you said, raising an eyebrow. “It’s Tuesday.”

Sam adorned a classic bitchface. “Don’t.”

You abruptly halted the joke, but that didn’t stop you from snickering to yourself behind a cupped palm for the rest of the ride down.

The walk to your rooms felt like it took forever this time, probably because you were navigating from the ship’s stern to the opposite end of the stateroom hallway near the bow. Your feet had gotten used to walking the long distances on this ship, but somewhere along the line, Dean began noticeably lagging behind. He was subtly grabbing at his stomach and having to pause every once in a while, then dash to catch up with us. Sam took notice.

“Dean, you okay?” he asked. “Did you eat too much?”

“I’m fine,” Dean insisted a bit too grumpily. “And I ate plenty, thank you very much.”

Not fully believing him, Sam continued on warily but without further comment. You bid Dean and Castiel good night and settled into your own room, Sam organizing his closet for a few minutes and then officially going to bed. You took your time getting ready, even taking a shower with the complimentary shampoo provided in the bathroom, before burying yourself in blankets and the sensations of the boat around you.

You were just about to drift off when you heard a pained groan through the wall.

“Dean?” Castiel’s concerned voice cut through. “Are you alright? You appear to be in pain.”

“I’m…f-fine, Cas, I just…” Dean let out another low noise of discomfort. “I ate too much,” he admitted.

“You lied to your brother, then.”

“Yeah, because he’d never let me hear the end of it if he found out he was right!”
Castiel hummed in agreement. “You are most likely correct. Do you suppose cuddling would help ease your discomfort?”

Dean was silent for a few moments. “I-I dunno, do you?”

“I think it would, Dean. I was going to request that of you again tonight anyways, but I believe it will be especially beneficial to you in this case.”

“I…” Dean let out another groan. “Okay fine, c’mere.”

There went that now familiar sound of rustling sheets, followed by the also familiar settling afterwards. Neither of them said anything for a good two minutes at the most, and just when you thought you’d heard all you were going to for the night, Castiel broke the silence.

“Are you feeling better yet, Dean?”

A drowsy Dean mumbled back something that sounded like a “Yeah…”

“I’m glad,” I could literally hear the affectionate smile in Castiel’s voice.

“M’too,” Dean managed, followed immediately by a snore.

That was enough eavesdropping for one night. You settled down in your own bed and let yourself be engulfed by the comfort of being at sea. One final thought crossed your drifting mind as you lay in bed: this was the last night you were ever going to spend as a child. The next time you woke up, you’d be an adult; in legal terms, anyways. You didn’t plan on growing up anytime soon.

Would it feel different to wake up as an adult than a kid? You supposed you would find out the next morning.

*Goodbye, age seventeen. I’ll remember you fondly for the most part.*

…Well, except for basically everything that’s happened at home, but we don’t talk about that. But as for meeting the Winchesters? Yeah...yeah, that's as fond as it gets.

Chapter End Notes

We’re finally getting into some of the (incredibly Destiel-driven) plot, folks! Took me long enough to get there. :P

Photo of the book, key, and eyeball belongs to me.

(Fun fact: I found the eyeball used in that picture in a geocache while I was in Alaska writing this, hence where the inspiration for the mention of a geocache in the forest and the salmon's eye came from. Apparently some people in Alaska eat salmon's eyeballs as a snack growing up...yeah, you're welcome for that mental image/taste. ;w;)

(But as for meeting the Winchesters? Yeah...yeah, that's as fond as it gets.)
~7/5/17~

It turned out that waking up as an eighteen-year-old wasn’t any different from waking up as a seventeen-year-old; unless you woke up to see presents at your bedside every time you woke up after turning eighteen, which you wouldn’t object to. Two neatly wrapped, box-shaped packages were sitting on the edge of your bed with an envelope taped to the top that read “OPEN” in blue ink. You smiled perhaps the biggest smile you’d worn all week and promptly got out from under the covers, fully intending to thank the gift-givers in person, only to find that there was a distinct absence of any other people in the room.

Sam’s bed was empty and still unmade, and after a minute of pressing your ear to the other wall, you heard no sign of your neighbors, either. You shrugged and decided to go on ahead and follow the envelope’s instructions. You carefully tore it open and produced a piece of small paper from the notepad provided in our room. You read over the words written on it, recognizing Sam’s handwriting.

Hey, happy birthday! Dean and I got you some stuff earlier this morning from what we could find in the shops onboard. Cas…well, he wanted me to let you know that he intended to give you a special fish of some kind from the water since you love the ocean so much, but we had to put a stop to that because pets are strictly not allowed onboard according to the manual in our room. He’s still working on getting you something, but for now you can enjoy what we do have for you.

Come find us at the buffet on the Lido Deck after you’ve opened your presents. We’ll be at table number eighteen.

-Sam

You got a good laugh at imagining Castiel trying to use his angel powers to fish off the side of the boat. Aside from that, you were eager to see what the Winchesters had managed to get for you.

Starting with the larger, flatter package, which was labelled as being from Sam, you carefully ripped through the sea green wrapping paper. What it revealed took your breath away: a writing journal with a gorgeous design on the front cover. A mermaid with flowing red hair and a trailing green fin floated in the middle of an oceanic scene complete with a seahorse, a cluster of red groupie, and a well-placed treasure chest within her line of sight. A golden dreamcatcher was tangled in her mess of a red mane, and other shiny golden accents decorated the hardcover book.

Now that was one heck of a writing journal.

That wasn’t even all in that single package. Inside the journal was a bookmark that had an anchor in the middle surrounded by the words, “refuse to sink.” Both of these items highly pleased your ocean obsession.

Smiling in a way that did not at all feel very adult-like, you moved on to the second package from
Dean, which was smaller and more shaped like a square. Beyond the outer layer of wrapping paper was a shiny, silvery box with the logo for “Zale’s” on the front.

_Huh. That’s an odd box for Dean to keep a present in. Didn’t think he was much of a jewelry man._

You opened the box’s lid, and…

Jesus Christ on a banana peel.

You audibly inhaled. “Dean…” you whispered to yourself. “How much of our money did you _spend_ on this?”

Dangling in the middle of the box was easily the most expensive necklace you’d ever been this close to. A large, oval cut red gem you recognized as a ruby was in the center surrounded by shimmering white crystals. The whole thing was attached to a thin golden chain that you found yourself simultaneously hoping was and wasn’t real gold, with more white crystals trailing up the loop that held it in place.

_Way to freakin’ _spoil _you, wowzers._

Still in shock, you wordlessly clasped the necklace around your neck and admired how it looked. Dean must’ve taken your comment about your birthstone last night seriously.

Fully awake at that point, you set about your morning routine and got dressed and ready in minutes. You felt quite chipper on your morning walk through the ship, deciding to take the stairs rather than the elevator to get out some of your energy. The Lido Deck buffet was swirling with the usual scents of breakfast when you arrived, and you started your search for your companions among the numerous tables scattered about the edges of the room. You found all three of them seated in a circular booth on the port side with a little sign that read, “18.” Beside them was a window that didn’t show much other than how foggy it was that morning.

“Hey, there’s the birthday girl,” Dean called for you the second you were in his line of sight. “C’mon over, we saved you a seat at the adults’ table.”

Laughing at that comment, you made your way over to the booth and scooted in beside Castiel, trying to think of what to say. “I got your presents,” you settled on. “Thank you so much, both of you.” You nodded at Cas. “And the fish was a nice thought, Cas. I would have loved to have it if that was possible.”

Castiel managed a shy smile at that. “You’re welcome. I’ll get something else for you before the day is over.”

You turned to Sam. “That journal is already my new favorite writing journal, and I haven’t even had the chance to write anything in it yet. And the bookmarks…” You shook your head. “You know me too well.”

Sam huffed a laugh. “I figured you’d like them. Especially that one with the anchor, since you have that…’shipping’ obsession.”

You gave him a subtle smirk in response that left both Castiel and Dean quite confused.

“I see you got my gift, too,” Dean said, pointing at the necklace.

“Oh yeah!” You glanced down at the necklace and back up at him. “I love it, really. It’s probably now the fanciest accessory I own. Is…is it really a ruby?”
“That it is, at least according to what the saleswoman told me. Those gems around the edge are clear sapphires, and the ones on the loop are diamonds.”

You could literally feel your eyes bulging. “D-diamonds?”

“You heard me right. Three of ‘em, right there on the gold loop.”

You didn’t dare ask if he meant that the loop was literally gold at that point, because you were already still shaken from the fact that you had freakin’ diamonds around your neck.

“How…how much did you…” You swallowed. “How much did this cost?”

Dean waved a dismissive hand. “We’ve still got plenty of money left, don’t worry. It’s your eighteenth birthday, you should be able to live it up! Wear something fancy to show how mature you are.”

Still reeling a bit, you numbly nodded. “I…wow, thank you, really.”

“Don’t mention it. If I’d been able to get something that fancy on my or Sammy’s eighteenth birthday,” Dean snorted, “well, I wouldn’t have gotten a necklace, but you get the idea. While we’re here we may as well splurge a bit where we can.”

“I think I’m gonna get some breakfast,” you decided, scooting out of the booth. “Anyone else gonna get anything?”

“We ate already,” Sam said. “We, uh, got up pretty early to buy your presents, so we were too hungry to wait until you got here…”

Only then did you notice the accumulated cluster of coffee cups in the center of the table. Your appreciation for the morning’s events grew exponentially when it hit you just how early everyone must have gotten out of bed for you.

You excused yourself and went to look for the perfect birthday breakfast, finding it at a counter where fresh crepes were being prepared. You requested one from the chef at work as well as a scoop of syrup-drenched strawberries on top. Once the plate was in your hands, you went nuts with the other ingredients, piling every sweet in sight over your flat meal. You went all out with whipped cream, chocolate powder, powdered sugar, chocolate sprinkles, chocolate syrup, the works.

By the time you’d finished preparing your breakfast masterpiece, it looked more like an ice cream sundae than a decorated crepe, and that was the indication that it was just right. You snatched a carton of milk from the drink bar and navigated back to your table, proudly setting down your plate for all to see.

Expecting Sam to say something to the effect of, “that isn’t healthy enough to be counted as breakfast,” you sent him a preemptive look daring him to criticize your meal. But, to your surprise, he smiled and didn’t even look the least bit disapproving.

“It’s your birthday,” he explained without prompting. “Like Dean said, you should be able to live it up.”

On that unexpectedly accepting note, you dug in and thoroughly enjoyed what was one of the tastiest breakfasts you’d ever had the opportunity to consume.

When your plate was empty aside from a pool of collected chocolate and strawberry syrup, Sam cleared his throat and pulled out a sheet of paper. “So, I was looking over the ship’s itinerary for the
day, and it looks like we’re docking in Juneau.” He passed the schedule over the table towards you.
“We aren’t leaving the dock until ten P.M., so we’ve got basically the whole day to do whatever. I thought you might like to take a look at what there is to do in Juneau so we could decide on a plan.”

When you realized he was talking to you, you glanced around the table. “Me?”

“It is your day of birth,” Castiel chimed in.

“Birthday, Cas,” Dean corrected him. “Just call it a birthday.”

The list of activities on-shore was extensive, but one in particular caught your eye: a whale-watching tour. You’d been lucky enough to see an Orca yesterday, but this tour promised Humpbacks. You had read about Humpback Whales numerous times in your oceanic studies, but you had always dreamed of being able to see one in real life.

“What about this whale watching tour?” you asked, pointing to it on the list. “I’ve always wanted to see a Humpback, and it would still give us plenty of time to explore the rest of Juneau.”

“You wanna go looking for whales?” Dean asked, taking the list. “Well, if it’s what the birthday girl wants, it’s what the birthday girl gets. See anything else?”

“There’s a glacier nearby we could visit,” you pointed to the corresponding location on a map of the city. “I’d resigned myself to never getting to see one before they all melted, but this could be my one chance.”

“Gotta agree with you there,” Sam approved. “And I’m sure we can find someplace around here with that fresh salmon you wanted, too.”

“Right, the salmon!” You’d nearly forgotten about that. “Great, now I’m already hungry again. That should be impossible.”

The ship made land a few minutes later, slowly pulling in alongside a dock with massive bumpers and ropes for tying up larger boats. You watched most of the process through the window, also taking in the sights of Juneau. The buildings were what you’d expect of a fishing community, composed of waterfront, faded structures that had a certain charm to them not found anywhere else. A cable car station was among them, wires carrying bright red cars up and down the mountainous backdrop obscured by thick fog.

It took a while to get the gangplanks in place so passengers could disembark, so you decided to hang out in your rooms while the ship properly docked. While you were admiring your new journal, the wall phone in the room unexpectedly rang, practically scaring the pants off you. Sam walked across the room to pick it up. You only heard one end of the conversation that followed.

“Hello?” Sam asked as he put the receiver to his ear. “Uh, yes…we’re having dinner on the ship…I think she would love that, yeah. 7:45 sounds good. Okay, thank you.”

Sam hung up. “That was the front desk. They must’ve kept track of your birthday in the information you gave them, because they’re going to bring you some cake at dinner tonight in the dining room. They’ve made us a complimentary reservation and everything.”

“…Wait really?” you could hardly believe that. “They do that on cruise ships?”

“Apparently.”

“Oh, this day just keeps getting better and better.”
“That’s the idea,” Sam laughed, going back to reading his book while awaiting the announcement that you were allowed to leave.

When the announcement was made, you regrouped and took an elevator down to the bottommost deck, mercifully just missing the influx of other passengers leaving and clogging up the path to land. You walked along the dock for a minute or so before coming to an abrupt halt when you saw someone up ahead in what looked an awful lot like a moose costume.

That person was indeed wearing a moose costume, acting in-character as a friendly, anthropomorphic creature greeting passengers as they walked past and taking photos with the occasional few. A scheme was forming in your mind by that point, and Sam immediately took notice.

“Oh no,” he tried to shut it down. “I know what you’re thinking, and it’s not happening.”

“Saaaaaaaam,” you asked in a sing-song voice, “would you be in a picture with me and that moose over there?”

“I’d…rather not. Costumed people kind of freak me out.”

“They freak me out too, but this is a special occasion. You can’t deny a request on my birthday.” You put on the puppy dog eyes, using Sam’s own ultimate weapon against him.

His resistance to your tactic was impressive, but eventually he gave up. “Alright, fine, just one picture.”

You handed a smirking Dean your phone with its camera primed and ready, posing beside the moose while your own moose ambled his way over. Dean gave a countdown and then snapped the photo. You smiled and gave the costumed moose a friendly wave while Sam scurried away.

The picture was nothing short of a masterpiece of a memory, as Dean and you concurred. You pointed at Sam and the moose. “Aww, they’re like twins,” you joked. From somewhere ahead of us, Sam rolled his eyes, but you didn’t miss the beginnings of a smile he tried so desperately to hide.

Juneau itself was a beautiful town, with the mountains as a backdrop to its charming shoreline style. The smell of fish was everywhere by the docks, which you had learned to enjoy in your years at sea, but the stench made both Sam and Dean crinkle their faces in mild disgust. You were happy to see no less than five husky dogs of varying sizes and ages being walked down the street in your time there, each one taking in the sights through wide, blue eyes.

Shops lined the streets, some touristy and pricy, others local and humble. You wandered (somewhat accidentally) into a local bookstore, finding yourself drawn in by the multitude of cruising and oceanic books on one of the shelves. You ended up spotting a book on Alaskan wildlife and flora, and being fascinated with nature, you sat and read it for a few minutes.

“You should buy it,” Sam suggested when he caught up to you. “Birthday present for yourself.”

You took one look at the book, thought “what the heck, I really am enjoying it,” and took it to the cashier. You couldn’t deny that you were highly satisfied with the purchase.

Shortly after leaving the bookstore, you reached a visitor center for tourists, where you intended to purchase tickets for the whale watching and glacier visit. The last available whale tickets were for three o’clock that afternoon, so you took them as well as passes for the glacier park. You still had a couple of hours left to spend in town before 3:00 rolled around, so you glanced through a stand of brochures inside the visitor’s center to get an idea of what your options were.
“There’s a mountain we could visit,” you suggested. “Mount Roberts. We’d have to take a tram to get there, but it’s a short ride. The whole thing is owned by native Alaskans too, so that’d be neat.”

“If it’s where you wanna go, we’ll go,” Dean firmly stated, and so it was decided.

That “tram” as it turned out wasn’t anything like any of you had been expecting; it was the red cable car system you’d seen through the window earlier. Dean didn’t seem entirely happy about having to once again face heights, but impressively he managed to keep his concerns to himself and stayed quiet the entire ride up the mountainside.

Mount Roberts was a high point in Juneau, overlooking everything from the entirety of the city below to the neighboring mountains and stretch of water that passed it. You could see the Noordam from the skybridge at the entrance to the mountain, and you spent a few minutes trying to find every detail that you could from the vantage point.

Easily the most stunning view of all arrived on a thermal just as you were about to leave: a wild bald eagle soaring in loops right in front of the skybridge. You’d never been so close to a wild eagle before, and even if you weren’t particularly known for patriotism, you did feel rather American in that moment.

You pulled out the book Sam had convinced you to buy earlier- “The Great Alaska Nature Factbook” -and turned to the page on bald eagles.

“Apparently,” you read from the book held close to your face, “Alaska has more bald eagles than any other state in the US; about fifty thousand in total.”

“That many?” Sam asked incredulously, moving to stand behind your shoulder and read alongside you.

“That does sound like an exaggeration,” Castiel agreed, stepping into place behind your other shoulder. “But it would explain why we have seen an abundance of them since arriving here.”

Somewhere outside the window, the eagle chirped loudly and continued its swooping. Dean sighed overdramatically and refused to acknowledge any of you. “I’m surrounded by nerds,” he lamented to himself.

Besides its excellent viewing spots and patriotic avian wildlife, Mount Roberts also had an abundance of beautiful walking trails with more excellent viewing spots and patriotic avian wildlife. You saw more bald eagles on that single trip on the mountain than you’d ever seen in your whole life. The forest trails were picturesque in every sense, with the distant warbling of native birds and the soft touch of sunlight constant no matter how far you walked. The entire environment there put you in a similar state of serenity to what you’d felt back in Capilano Park. There was even a local string band performing some of their songs inside the main building on the mountain, which Castiel in particular enjoyed listening to.

The “tram” ride down the mountain was breezy and quick, depositing you back on the ground in Juneau within minutes. There was just enough time to left to grab lunch somewhere in town before you had to meet for the whale tour, and you found a suitable place right by the docks called “Twisted Fishes.”

The interior of the restaurant was reminiscent of a giant version of a well-cleaned fishing cabin, with everything made from wood and colorful fish of all sizes mounted and hanging on the walls. Being a
seafood restaurant, it was pretty obvious that it would have the Alaskan salmon you craved. You ended up ordering salmon tacos, something this restaurant was apparently well-known for, and excitedly awaited a meal that you hoped would live up to your expectations.

Your waiter was charming, energetic, and more than just a little talkative. He was a youngish man with a curly, golden beard and dark, thick-framed glasses. Even with the restaurant as busy as it was, he took the time to diligently chit-chat with every table he waited.

“Amazing weather for a day out,” your waiter commented as he refilled our glasses of water. “It’s rare to have a day this sunny around here.”

That hadn’t even occurred to you, but he was absolutely right. Everything in Juneau was bright and bathed in sunlight, the complete opposite of the thick cloud of pervading fog you’d had to cruise through to get there. You hadn’t even been aware of the stark lack of cold air that morning that you’d come to expect in Alaska, subconsciously accepting all of the sun’s warmth and soaking up heat in your jacket. No wonder Dean hadn’t complained about the cold in all the time you’d been out in town…

“I love it,” you replied, remembering that you could participate in the idle conversation. “Perfect birthday weather.”

The waiter brightened. “Oh! Happy birthday, then!”

“Thank you.” You smiled and leaned a little closer to the window, enjoying the feeling of the magnified sunlight through its glass pane.

Some minutes later, your faithful waiter returned with your plates. You could barely wait to take a bite of what proved to be the best fish taco you’d ever had. All the hype about Alaskan salmon still didn’t prepare you for just how amazing it was. The fish was textured, fresh, and more salmon-y than any salmon you’d ever had before.

Sam and Dean ended up sharing a whole smoked salmon pizza fresh from the oven, which though enticing to you, was too large for your salmon-stuffed stomach to handle. You left them to it, and according to both of them, it was delectable. Dean even convinced an uncertain Castiel to try a slice of it, which you suspected may have been in part because the pizza would have been too large for the Winchesters to finish on their own.

Your waiter came to check on you partway through the meal, all bright smiles and chipper tone. After ensuring that your meals were all you’d hoped for and that everyone what they needed, he said to you, “I’ve been meaning to compliment you on that lovely necklace of yours. My girlfriend’s been asking for a ruby like that for a long time now, and I’m really starting to see the allure.”

You turned pink when you considered how flashy the necklace might seem. “O-oh, yeah. It was a birthday gift from just this morning, actually.”

“Whoever gave you that is out to spoil you, that’s for sure.”

You chuckled. “Yeah, that’d be him,” you sent Dean a good-natured accusatory look.

The waiter chuckled along with me, addressing Dean. “Dude, you’d better be someone important in her life if you gave her that, because otherwise I’m out of excuses to not buy one for my girlfriend.”

Opportunity and an until-then forgotten dare collided in an instant in your mind, and you leapt at the occasion.
“He’s my dad,” you blurted out.

An odd, frayed silence descended upon the table, each of your travelling companions giving you undecipherable, questioning looks. You had to do something to remind them of the dare you’d assigned Dean; you knew all of them were made aware of it at some point.

You pointed across the table at Castiel. “And he’s my other dad.” Castiel began to tilt his head at you, but partway through the familiar maneuver he stopped, remembrance making him shift and cancel the motion.

“He’s still working on getting me a present,” you added, hoping everyone else would go along with it.

“That’s…right,” Castiel hesitantly kept the dare going. “I wanted to give her a fish, but regulations prohibit pets onboard our cruising vessel.”

“No kidding,” the waiter replied, suddenly very curious. He turned to Sam. “What about you? Are you like the kooky uncle in this little family?”

“I dunno about…kooky,” Sam was caught off guard, apparently still trying to process the fact that your fake cover was now a real cover.

“Moosey uncle, more like,” you corrected. “I have a picture on my phone from earlier of-”

“No, don’t bring that out,” Sam hastily told you.

Thankfully for Sam, the waiter wasn’t focused on your treasure of a photograph so much as he was Dean at that point. “You, sir, are clearly an excellent father to be able to give your daughter something so meaningful for her birthday.”

Dean swallowed. “Well, ya know, it’s her eighteenth, so I figured…”

“Eighteen? That’s a big deal. A family cruise seems like just about the perfect way to celebrate that.” He briefly pointed between Dean and Castiel. “Whatever you two have been doing to raise this girl, you’ve been doing something right. There aren’t many kids who get to celebrate with something so extravagant. I’m sure she’s extremely grateful.”

You worked up what truly felt like a genuine smile. “Oh, you have no idea.”

After the waiter deposited the check on your table and left, Dean let out a long-suffering sigh. “Why did I ever take that bet?”

“Because,” you said before taking a final mouthful of the best dang salmon you’d ever had, “you never back down from a challenge.” You picked up the check and stood up, intending to pay it at the front desk. Before pushing your chair in, you added, “By the way, I always knew you and Castiel would make great dads.”

Dean grumbled something about “only letting her get away with it because it’s her birthday” as you walked off.

Your whale watching tour met outside the tram station. Apparently, many other people had the same idea as you, because a sizable crowd of people was clustered there. The tour director herded everyone onto a large white school bus, which then drove you out of central Juneau and into the more rural, natural area surrounding it. It parked at a marina humming with activity, fishing boats pulling in and out with netloads of salmon and other miscellaneous fish.
From the second you stepped onto the dock and took in the scents, sights, and sounds of the marina, you were in your element. The familiar bobbing motions of the boats, the metal clinking of ropes on masts, and the smell of receded, rocky tides all carried you back to a simpler time of living on the sea. Nostalgia overtook your mind as your sentimentality and familiar mode of seafaring instincts kicked into gear.

The tour boat you were assigned to was a large, covered speedboat with numerous glass windows, a platform on the back, and an upper level accessible via a steep, built-in ladder. The four of you slipped into a booth with a table and two cushioned seats facing each other. You perched in a window seat with Castiel at your side and the Winchesters across from you.

The boat moved slowly at first while still in the confines of the marina, but upon passing the “no wake” zone, it picked up speed tremendously. Spray and spouts of water practically erupted from the sides of the boat as it carved a path through the water, creating a dazzling display of dew and refracted rainbows. You were thrilled to be aboard a fast-moving watercraft again, enjoying the feeling of freedom and the exciting drops and rolls impending waves inflicted upon the humble craft.

Throughout your journey into the nearby canal, the boat’s captain, an older man with a cartoonishly long, scraggly white beard, spoke to his passengers over the boat’s scratchy intercom system about the various islands and spats of land he passed, as well as some basic details about the Humpback Whales you were promised to see. Most of what he’d said about the giants of the sea were things you already knew, so you sort of tuned him out and took your time enjoying the ride as only a sailing kid knew how.

Complimentary drinks were a perk offered to the boat’s passengers, and you gladly accepted a steaming Styrofoam cup of hot chocolate from the attendant onboard. You’d barely had time to begin blowing on your beverage to cool it before Castiel noticeably sat at attention beside you, straightening his back out.

“The purpose of this venture is to locate and view whales, correct?” Castiel inquired. When everyone in the booth nodded their heads, Castiel turned to look out one of the starboard windows. “There are exactly ten of them by the shoreline on that side.”

As if answering Castiel’s words on cue, several blackish humps crested the surface of the water to your right, each one gracefully slipping back under the water in one long, curved motion. The other passengers noticed in seconds, excitedly chattering and scrambling to adjust their cameras and get outside.

Your own group hurried out to the back platform, weaving among the crowd to get as close to the edge of the boat as possible. Another whale surfaced, spouting a cloud of mist with a loud but calming whoosh of sound as it gently descended back under the water.

You were rooted to the spot with giddy delight as you watched one of the world’s largest mammals put on a natural display. A few more whales surfaced again, following the pattern set by their predecessors. One of the whales was noticeably smaller than the others, its spout not reaching as high and releasing a weaker sound than its kin.

“I believe one of these whales is a youngling,” Castiel observed. “Its mother is the largest of its pod.”

So not only were you seeing an entire pod of Humpbacks, which was a rarity in and of itself, but you were also seeing a baby Humpback and its mother. Could this possibly get any better?

It turned out that it most certainly could, as the whales were in a playful mood that afternoon. The largest whale, which you knew to be the mother thanks to Castiel, took to floating on its side and
lifting its massive right fin clean out of the water, waving it back and forth and slapping it against the water’s surface every few times. It must have spent an entire minute waving at the boat, and it really looked like it was giving you a symbol of friendly greeting.

Sam and Dean climbed the ladder to the top platform to get a better vantage point, and you and Castiel decided to follow them. The view was extensive up there, if a bit more congested with people, but it proved to be well worth it for what came next.

Castiel put a hand to the side of his head and gained an intent expression as though he were listening to something. “The whales are saying that they’re going to begin feeding shortly,” he told you.

You couldn’t help but stare at him. “You…understand whale?”

“I can understand every language.”

Before you could take any amount of time to process this information and its absurd implications, someone on the port side of the boat gasped in amazement. You spun around to see what happened, and your mouth fell open. Nearly every single one of the whales had breached the surface with their mouths, their baleen showing clear as day as they swallowed up mouthfuls of water and what appeared to be tiny, flailing fish. A semicircle-shaped ring of disturbance on the water’s surface surrounded the scene, encompassing the whales as they swept back under the water.

Something clicked in your mind as your experience from years of studying ocean life retrieved a nugget of information you’d collected long ago. “Bubble netting!” you shouted. “They were catching fish using bubble netting! One whale exhales large bubbles around a school of fish and traps them in one place so the other whales can eat them. Bubble netting!”

A few other passengers gave you glances, but for once in your social anxiety-ruled life, you did not care. You’d just seen a live demonstration of bubble netting courtesy of an entire pod of Humpback Whales. You may as well have died and gone to young marine biologist heaven at that point.

The whale activity slowed a bit after that, the pod diving down deep and showing of their tails in the air as they plunged. You leaned against the starboard railing of the platform, dazed and still buzzing from excitement at what you’d just witnessed. You looked out over the water for any signs of more surfacing whales, but what you ended up finding was even better: just off the side of the boat was another semi-circle shaped ring of what looked like walls of bubbles hitting the water’s surface.

“Look, look, look!” you called to your friends, energetically pointing at the ring near the boat as they hurried to where you stood. “That’s a bubble net! Look, the whales should come up any second now, look!”

And sure enough, they did come up, splashing into the unusually warm Alaskan air with their hard-caught prize in their huge mouths. You drank in every second of the event, transcribing it to your permanent memory for future reference.

The whales put on one last bubble netting show just as you were leaving, adding up to a total of three entire bubble netting hunts in the span of thirty minutes. You were practically vibrating with excitement by the time everyone was ushered back inside the sheltered part of the boat, so high on what you’d just witnessed that you didn’t even care that your hot chocolate was now lukewarm chocolate and drank it all anyways.

After you’d docked and bid farewell to the whale watching boat, you returned to the bus, which graciously volunteered to take you to your next destination: the Mendinhall Glacier. You and the others were dropped off at the park’s entrance, and even from that far away the glacier was clearly
visible in the distance. It was a mass of white and blue, a block of ice and snow squished together by mountains on either side like a gigantic ice cream sandwich. On the right side of the glacier, a prolific waterfall poured whitewater into the lake at the bottom, which was dotted with smaller, carved ice floes.

In short, it was a sight that you were grateful to see before it disappeared sometime in the near future.

Left with an hour until the next bus back to town would arrive, you settled on taking a short walk down a scenic boardwalk route in the park once you’d had your fill of the view. No matter how far you strayed within the park’s boundaries, the glacier was a constant, its icy walls always in your peripheral vision or looming over your shoulders wherever you looked. Even when it was hidden behind a thicket of deciduous trees and foliage, you could literally feel its chill carried on the wind. You were thankful that you’d chosen to wear your jacket that day even with the warmer weather.

Dean, on the other hand, was still without so much as a proper overcoat.

“I think I’m literally getting colder just looking at the glacier,” Dean complained, wrapping his arms tightly around his torso. “I am just about ready to turn into a human popsicle back here.”

“We really need to get you a jacket,” was all Sam responded with, already adjusted to his brother’s griping about the cold.

It only took Castiel a couple of minutes to work up his nerve to approach Dean and repeat what he’d done back in the Ketchikan rainforest: warm Dean with his wing. This time, the angel threw a bit more caution to the wind and used both wings, one eventually joining the other in loosely blanketing the hunter. Dean was still completely oblivious to this, and though you had to fight to keep your mouth clamped shut, you successfully held back all of the comments that wanted to spring forth.

After a few minutes, Dean had visibly stopped shivering and had actually picked up his pace considerably, enough that he’d caught up to where Sam took the lead. Sam was noticeably surprised at this development.

“Whatever happened to being a ‘human popsicle?’” Sam asked his brother.

“I dunno, I think I’m getting used to it,” Dean didn’t sound sure, but he did seem grateful to be free from the glacier’s grasp. “Something’s helping me adjust to the Alaskan climate. Must be my macho attitude and stark perseverance even in the face of hypothermia.”

Sam didn’t look convinced. “Mm-hmm, sure thing, Dean.”

The boardwalk was quiet after that, your short hike ending just about in time for the bus to arrive and shuttle you back into downtown Juneau. You took a window seat near the front, Castiel deciding to seat himself beside you. Worry tugged at his features, and he glanced in your general direction every few seconds before abruptly redirecting his gaze elsewhere.

“Hey Cas,” you greeted the angel. “How are you doin’?”

“I, um…” Castiel sighed. “I wanted to…apologize. I still do not have a suitable gift for your day of birth celebration as is customary. I considered getting you a whale since you seemed so taken with them on the tour earlier, but I realized it would be highly immoral to remove such a majestic creature from its pod, and the logistics of such a gift would be next to impossible to craft, and…”

“Cas, it’s fine, really. You don’t even have to get me anything, I’m fine with what I have. It’s the thought that counts, anyways.”
“N-no, I…deeply wish to give you something. You have been a good friend to me and I feel that I owe you something of worth.” Castiel stared straight ahead. “I just don’t know what. If you have any suggestions, they would be appreciated.”

“You really don’t have…” You trailed off as a thought occurred to you. There was something of worth that Castiel could give to you, something he didn’t even have to buy or work to find in the first place. “Well, if you really want to give me something, there is something I’d actually like from you, if it’s alright.”

Castiel perked up. “What is it?”

“It…might seem a little odd, but…I was wondering if I could maybe have a couple of your feathers?”

The angel blinked slowly at you, his wings shifting around behind him. “My feathers?” he asked for clarification.

“You don’t have to, it’s just…I used to collect feathers when I was younger, and I’ve always liked them, so an angel feather would be-”

You cut yourself off when Castiel extended one of his wings in front of him and gently reached out, carefully plucking two smaller feathers from its lower half. He flinched slightly upon removing them, but swiftly recovered, the detached feathers briefly glowing with a light blue energy before fading into a purely corporeal state. He wordlessly held them out to you, a smile gracing his face.

“Happy day of birth, [Y/N],” he said as he gingerly placed the feathers in your own hand.

Unsure of what to say, you settled for a simple, “Thanks, Cas,” and took to holding the feathers close to your chest to keep them safe.

After arriving back in Juneau and departing the bus, you went through the brief security process of re-boarding the Noordam, dropped off some of your stuff at your rooms, and took an elevator to the dining room where you apparently had reservations made especially for your birthday. The dining room was in the aft of the ship, an insanely fancy restaurant with flowing glass statues covering the ceiling and fiber optic threads lighting the room in ever-changing rainbow colors.

It had to be one of the fanciest places you’d ever eaten, fancy enough that your server pulled out all your chairs and personally unfolded and placed napkins in your laps. The menus were loaded with the names for dishes you’d never even heard of before, and you certainly weren’t alone in that.

“What the hell is chard?” Dean asked as he glared at his own menu.

“It’s a stringy, leafy vegetable,” Sam answered without missing a beat. “Very healthy for you.”

“Ech. I’ll pass.”

You ended up deciding to go a little wild with an appetizer of chilled raspberry soup, which was your first exposure to a bright pink variety of soup. It was delicious and went surprisingly well with the assortment of breads that had been left on the table. Even though you’d had a good taste of it for lunch earlier, you ordered a plate of grilled salmon for your entrée. It turned out to be well worth it, the flavoring and grilling done to a perfection you’d never quite tasted in a fish fillet before. Whoever hired the chefs for the Noordam deserved a raise, and that was to say nothing of the praises the chefs themselves deserved.

A cake was brought out to your table as was promised on the phone that morning, along with a
towering cup of vanilla bean ice cream (which you oh-so-graciously shared with your tablemates) and a brief musical number from the servers wishing you a happy birthday in Dutch. You hadn’t been that stuffed full of food since the first time you visited an all-you-can-eat Japanese steakhouse back home.

You managed to drag yourselves back to your rooms after finishing off the dessert, sufficiently drained after a busy and highly rewarding day. Dean and Castiel wished you a final happy birthday before calling it a night (“I told you, Cas, it’s birthday, not ‘day of birth’ or whatever you say.”) and Sam wished you the same before he all but collapsed onto his own bed.

After carefully removing your valuable necklace and storing it among your other valued gifts and possessions in the closet, you hurriedly brushed your teeth and got dressed, racing to your bed to hear what conversation would unfold on the other side of the wall tonight. You managed to catch Dean and Castiel near the start of a conversation.

“Jeez, eighteen years old…” Dean thought aloud to himself. “Do you remember when you were eighteen, Cas?”

“Not particularly. That was millennia ago, Dean.”

“…Right. Okay, well, I am just about ready to pass out, so if you could scooch and give me some room…”

“Actually, I was going to ask about another request.”

Dean exhaled loudly. “Lemme take a wild guess: you want my company for the night, again.”

“As long as that’s within reason, but if you would prefer not to…” You had to imagine Castiel was pulling the puppy dog eyes trick, and based on Dean’s reaction, you probably weren’t too far off from what really happened.

The hunter let out yawning sigh. “No, man, you can…we can, if you want to…sure…”

Cue rustling sheets, then settling, then silence.

Then, Castiel breaking that silence with a hushed, “I truly appreciate you letting me stay this close to you, Dean.”

“Don’t make it weird, Cas. Just be quiet and let me sleep.”

And that was the end of that particular night’s cuddling shenanigans. These two, you swear to Castiel’s father…

You settled in for the night, feeling fulfilled after a day packed with achieved dreams, delicious food, and wonderful time spent with wonderful friends. If this was what being eighteen was like, maybe being an adult wouldn’t be too bad after all.

You let the boat rock you to sleep after an unforgettable birthday.

Chapter End Notes

For the purposes of this fic and its time frame, your birthday is on July 5th. If your
birthday isn't *actually* on July 5th, as is most likely the case, think of this like a free second birthday you can share with TFW.

Both pictures used in this chapter belong to me.

(Hip hip hooray I finally have a practical use for one of the scenic photos I took on this vacation TwT)
With the leniency of your schedule since boarding the Noordam, you weren’t adjusted to being woken up by somebody else, so it was more than a little shocking to be pulled back into the realm of the waking world by a hand shaking your shoulder. You heard a yelp, which must have been from you because whoever was wobbling you to wakefulness jumped back and hurriedly muttered a sincere, “sorry!”

Of course it turned out that your rude awakener was none other Mr. Early Morning Riser himself, Sam Winchester. He was fully ready for the day ahead, with his usual day clothes of plaid and jackets in place and his luxurious mane of moose hair styled to perfection. He really did look like he regretted waking you so early, unintentionally putting on his famous puppy dog eyes and making you feel ten times worse about your gut reaction.

After combing a finger through your unruly squirrel’s nest of a morning hairdo, you calmed yourself and greeted him with a succinct, “What’s up?”

Sam nervously scratched the back of his head. “Uh, s-sorry about waking you up, I just thought I should tell you…we’ve docked at the next town.”

That couldn’t be all. He wouldn’t wake you just to tell you that.

“Well, I was looking at what there is to do on land here, and there’s a scenic hike and float that caught my eye…” Sam snatched a brochure from your room’s table and handed it to you. “It goes through the Tonga National Rainforest and over a glacier-fed river in a loop.”

You sleepily read over what you could of the pamphlet. “Looks nice…” you managed to mutter out, and you really meant it. The few pictures in the brochure showed what looked like bonafide forest land untouched by the hand of humanity and a sturdy inflatable raft carrying smiling hikers down what you could tell was a frigid river.

“I thought you might like it,” Sam huffed out in relief. “It’s something I’d be interested in, but I wanted to know if you would like to join me.”

“Sure, I think that’d be a good excursion for today.”

“Okay, but you should know…this isn’t going to be easy flat hiking like the walks we’ve been taking so far. This trail has ups and downs and rough terrain; the whole deal. It’s only two miles long, but it’ll still be more intense than what else we’ve done.”

You pshawed and drowsily waved a hand. “I’ve done far tougher hikes, trust me. Long as there’s no spiders, I can handle it. And besides, I could use the exercise. It’s been a while since I did a proper hike.”

Sam nodded. “If you say so. There is, uh, one other thing though…”

You waited for him to elaborate, but he hesitated. Eventually, he slowly removed the brochure from
your fingers and flipped it around, re-depositing it in your grasp. The backside that now faced you had the times for each guided hike and float listed on the back.

“The only time we can make with the ship’s schedule is eight A.M.,” Sam forced out. “It’s seven thirty right now. That’s…why I woke you up.”

Well, that explained why you still felt so sluggish. All the same, you’d pretty much made up your mind about committing to this, and though the time wasn’t ideal, you still planned to enjoy the excursion.

“That’s fine,” you assured Sam, slipping out of bed. “I’ll go ahead and get ready.”

A momentary dumbfounded expression befell Sam’s face. “Wait seriously? Just like that?”

“Yeah,” you said as you gathered supplies from your closet. “I’ve had to wake up way earlier than that for less. I may not be much of an early morning person, but I can handle it when necessary.”

“Oh.” Sam hummed to himself. “Alright then, I guess that’s that. I think I’m just used to Dean’s habit of sleeping in so late,” he figured with a snicker.

“Is Dean gonna come with us?” you asked as you stepped into the bathroom to start washing your face.

“I…don’t know. I haven’t asked.”

“Are you going to?”

“I know from firsthand experience that waking a sleeping Dean is the same as waking a grumpy, sleeping lion. I’m not eager to experience that another time.”

“I understand. He won’t get upset if we leave without at least telling him first, right?”

Sam was silent for a few moments. “…Well, now you’ve got me paranoid that he will be.” Taking a breath to steel himself, Sam opened the door to the hallway. “I’ll be back in a few.”

“Good luck,” you called after him, knowing that he’d really need it.

It was in the middle of brushing your teeth that you heard the first sign of life stirring in Dean and Castiel’s room. Hastily shuffling bedsheets and rushing footsteps echoed to where you stood in your bathroom. You heard Dean’s muffled voice quietly barking out an order, followed by the closet door opening and closing.

You peeked out of the bathroom doorway at the wall behind your bed, and sure enough, you saw the very tips of Castiel’s feathers sticking through the wall of your room in their incorporeal form. The temptation to reach out and poke them was strong, but you were forced back into the bathroom by the foamy toothpaste dripping down your chin.

“Sam?” Dean’s irritated voice cut through the walls. “You know better than to wake me up this early.”

Sam replied with something else at length, but it was more difficult to hear because of his position outside and considerably quieter voice. Whatever it was, Dean was not a fan of it.

“You woke me up to tell me that?” Dean demanded. Sam briefly responded, sounding apologetic, but Dean cut him off. “No, you know what, I’m going with you anyways. I’m already all antsy and
awake now, may as well do something.”

By then you’d spit out your used toothpaste and positioned yourself by the right corner of your room so you could hear more clearly.

“…right,” Sam was saying. “Is Cas coming too?”

Out of the corner of your eye, you saw the black feathers protruding into your room stiffen.

“Yeah, yeah, he’ll probably wanna come along,” Dean supposed. “Little guy isn’t gonna wanna be left all alone on the ship, I bet.”

*Dean, you would not be calling him “little” anything if you’d seen his true form,* you thought to yourself.

“Where is he?” Sam asked.

The feathers stiffened again, this time more violently. Dean didn’t seem to have an immediate response.

“He’s uh…in the bathroom,” he eventually settled on.

“Angels don’t need bathrooms.”

You could imagine the barely-there hints of panic lining Dean’s expression that you’d learned to recognize. “He’s just…checking out the soaps. Actually, I should probably check on him to make sure he isn’t trying to eat them or anything.” Dean’s voice moved farther into his room. “Cas, those may smell good, but they do not taste good, buddy!” The door to his room closed on its own after that.

A few seconds passed before you heard the closet door opening, a nearby Dean muttering something about “a close call.” Then you saw Castiel’s wingtips retreat back into the wall as though they’d never been there at all.

You met Sam out in the hallway after you finished getting ready, the two of you proceeding down the lengthy corridor to wait for Dean and Castiel by the elevators.

“I assume they’re both going with us?” you asked.

“Sounds like it,” Sam sighed out. “By the way, it it’s of any interest to you, which I know it is, based on what I saw in their room, I’m pretty sure those two lovebirds were sharing a bed last night.”

“Oh trust me, I’m aware. They’ve been snuggling every single night since we arrived on the ship.”

“Every night?” Sam hardly looked like he believed you. “Yeah, sure, and Dean doesn’t like pie.”

“It’s true! I’ve heard their conversations every time I go to bed, and they all end in cuddles.”

Before Sam could voice further disbelief, Dean and Castiel emerged from the hallway, bringing your discussion to an abrupt end. You piled into the elevator and waited in line to take the gangplank outside. Even before you stepped out of the ship, you could tell that it was another beautiful day, sunshine still ever-present and pleasant breezes keeping the oppressive cloud cover at bay.

Your stop for the day was the old Alaskan settlement of Skagway, a small mining town of just a thousand people nestled in the space between two of the innumerable peaks that surrounded it. It was quaint but stylized. Most of its buildings were colorfully repainted living fossils from its gold rush
days. Wonders of the natural Alaskan landscape abounded in its surrounding area, from plentiful, untouched temperate rainforests to brisk, silty rivers fed by glaciers in the ice-capped mountains.

The first two things you saw upon exiting the ship were an active railway by the docks and the bumpy cliffs on the coastline covered with decades worth of painted graffiti and advertisements for all manner of things. You followed the railway on foot for a brief time until you had left the docks and made it into the edge of town. Sam steered you towards a stand selling tickets and asked the man behind the counter for the eight o’clock tour. He bought the tickets and you only had to wait a few minutes for a van to pick you all up and shuttle you across the mountains towards the rainforest for your tour.

There were only two other groups of tourists along with you, one couple from the lower forty-eight and a family with two (thankfully quiet) sons. But the only stranger you really concerned yourself with for the duration of your hike was your tour guide, who you swear sounded exactly like Chris Pratt with an added southern drawl to his voice. He was open, chatty, and honest to a fault, being frank with everyone about recent bear attacks that had taken place elsewhere in the state to frighten the younger kids. That being said, he was an excellent guide, leading your small collection of visitors through tangles of roots and alongside steep, mossy cliff faces.

After two miles of what did end up proving to be some fairly intensive hiking, you reached a bank by the river with a sturdy blue raft tied to the shore waiting for passengers. You had to change into tall rubber boots and lifejackets that had been left in a drybag for you. As soon as Castiel was passed a lifejacket, he attempted to explain that he didn’t require one since he was exempt from the danger of drowning or hypothermia, but Dean handled the situation before too many heads could be turned and got Castiel to slip it on and buckle it up anyways.

The four of you were assigned to sit on the front of the boat, yourself on the far-right corner right beside the swirling, turbulent water. The entire float down the river lasted around forty minutes, and with the reminiscent sounds of water rushing past the hull and the numerous downed trees around you, you were able to relax for the entirety of it.

Curious as ever, Castiel took to dipping the very tip of one of his wings into the rushing, brownish water on his side, jerking it back the second the icy river hit beyond his feathers.

“I can confirm that the water is indeed extremely cold,” he informed the rest of you, though you were the only one who seemed to fully understand how he’d reached that conclusion.

After coming ashore on a bank in one of the final bends of the glacial river, your tour guide who sounded just a bit too much like one of your favorite actors to ignore bid your group farewell and you piled into the shuttle van. You were dropped off practically in the center of Skagway, where clusters of other cruisers from the Noordam were milling about.

Now that you were properly in the town for the first time, you got a real sense of just how distinct it was. It really did look like an old mining town, with elevated wooden sidewalks and old western style buildings lining the streets. Virtually no traffic lights or any traffic regulation at all really existed as far as you could see. The old timey style of the infrastructure clashed with the touristy contents of many of the shops and the constant roar of engines from the occasional car that cautiously drove through town. It was a town partially frozen in time, segments of it having since been forced to thaw by the tourism industry.

One of the most striking buildings in the entire town was an old saloon that had been converted into a snack shop. Signs in the window promised ice cream among its wares, and evidently you were not the only one excited by that prospect.
“Anyone else thinking what I’m thinking?” Dean asked us as he caught sight of the ads in the window.

“I know I am,” you piped up, already pulling a wad of money out from your travel bag.

“Who’s gonna order?” Sam asked as he looked over the menu of flavors on a stand outside the shop. “I can take care of it if no one else-”

“Wait, wait!” you stopped him, an idea coming together in the “devious schemes” section of your brain. You’d been thinking for a while that you still had two dares left you could inflict on Dean, and you might just have found the perfect opportunity to use one. “Dean should order.”

Dean looked at you in surprise. “Uh, okay, that’s fine…why me, specifically?”

“Because,” you smirked, “I have another dare for you.”

As that registered in Dean’s mind, he grimaced and shut his eyes. “Okay, what’ll it be?”

“I dare you…to go and order us ice cream in that shop, but…for the entire time that you’re inside, you have to pretend to be an old-timey gold miner from out of town, being as over-the-top as you possibly can and never breaking character until you’ve brought us our ice cream.”

Dean’s face softened. “That’s…not too bad, I guess…what flavors do you all want?”

“Surprise us.” You winked, handed him the wad of cash, and sent him on his way.

The poor hunter wasn’t really sure what to do with himself at first when he entered the store, glancing about nervously at the other customers and employees. He had to wait in a short line at the ice cream freezer, and you, Sam, and Castiel took the extra time to position yourselves outside a window to see what unfolded.

“Hiya,” the lady behind the ice cream counter greeted Dean. “What’ll it be?”

Dean cleared his throat, and then spoke in literally the most ridiculous version of an old western cowboy voice he could muster. “Well now, little lady, I’m thinkin’ I’ll have four cones fer me an’ my prospectin’ buddies, one vanilla, one choc-o-late, one cookie dough, and one…” a barely-there smirk briefly flickered on his face, “Moose Tracks.”

The lady raised an eyebrow but didn’t comment on Dean’s over-the-top voice and pronunciation. You and Sam exchanged highly amused looks, both of you visibly fighting to contain your laughter.

“So, uh…where ya from?” the lady asked while she started the tedious process of scooping and packing each cone with the specified flavors. “You certainly don’t sound like you’re from anywhere around here.”

“I certainly ain’t.” You snorted a little at hearing that accented word leave Dean’s mouth. “I’m from way out west where…the…cowboys live.”

“O…kay…” the lady paused in her scooping as regret settled onto her face at trying to make polite conversation with such a bizarre stranger. “What brings you to Skagway? You on vacation?”

“I’m no tourist, far from it. Naw, I’m out here searchin’ fer…” Dean made a show of looking from side to side and leaned forward with one hand around his mouth, “…gold.”

The woman slowly nodded to give the impression that she understood despite how obvious it was that she did not. “That’s…unusual.”
“You wouldn’t happen to know the bes’ places to go minin’ fer gold ‘round here, wouldja?”

“I’m afraid I don’t.” The woman was now hurrying through her task, scooping up the final cone and scurrying to the register. “That’ll be nine dollars and twenty-five cents.”

Dean dramatically slammed his handful of cash down on the counter, fixing the woman with an obsessive stare. “You got any gold fer me, eh little lady?”

Distant shock twisted the lady’s features, which then slowly shifted to something akin to disdainful understanding. “Wow. If this is some bizarre tactic of flirting with me, it is definitely not working.”

A sputtered, half-contained eruption of laughter tore past your lips.

Dean almost broke character, his normal voice returning. “Wh- I-I wasn’t—” he caught himself and cleared his throat, breaking out his miner voice again. “I mean, it ain’t you I’m interested in. It's the gold I’m after.”

The lady passed the cones of frozen sweetness to Dean and she crossed her arms. “Mm-hmm. You’re gonna have to find your gold elsewhere, I’m afraid.”

Lingering for a few moments as he tried to think of anything else he could respond with to salvage the situation, Dean eventually bit his lips closed and hurried outside with the ice cream balanced carefully in his hands. You and Sam broke into fits of laughter as he glared at you both.

“Yeah, yeah, here’s your ice cream,” Dean grumbled as he distributed the cones.

Sam stared at the cone extended before him. “What’s this?”

Now Dean was the one who looked ready to laugh. “A surprise, as ordered: Moose Tracks for a moose.”

Sam narrowed his eyes in disapproval but took the ice cream anyways, turning the cone around as he warily examined its contents. You gladly took a cone of chocolate while Dean handed Castiel one of vanilla, keeping the cookie dough ice cream for himself.

Castiel regarded his cone with suspicion. “Dean, I do not require—”

“Sustenance, I know,” Dean finished for him. “Give it a try anyways. Getting to eat ice cream is like a basic human right. Er, angel right, in this case. So eat up.”

You strolled down the sidewalk of wooden boards, each enjoying your ice cream and the unique atmosphere of the refurbished mining settlement. Your walk eventually carried you back towards the docks and the Noordam, and after a day with lots of rigorous hiking and walking, you think everyone was ready to rest their feet inside a luxury cruise ship. Upon getting through the ruckus of security and the bottleneck of other passengers returning to and leaving the ship, you all took a minute to catch your breath outside the main stairwell.

“Okay, I don’t know about you guys, but I am beat,” Dean announced. “I’m going back to my room to get some rest, because if I don’t at least get in a single nap in before the day is over, my sleep schedule will never recover.” He gave Sam a pointed look during his last statement, which his brother purposefully ignored.

“I need some rest too, I think,” Sam agreed. “I’ll be sitting on the balcony of deck three if anyone needs me.”
With their plans announced, the Winchesters parted the group, bound for their individual relaxation spots. You and Castiel were left standing in front of the carpeted staircase.

“What about you, Cas?” you turned to address the angel. “Got any plans?”

“I think…I’m going to stretch my wings again. I will be located on deck ten if my presence is required.” He turned and began ascending the stairs towards the highest level of the boat, faintly flexing his wings to prepare them. That left you alone and free to wander and do whatever you wanted. But what to do, and where to go?

With endless possibilities at your fingertips, you opted to instead go back to your own room and take some introvert time for yourself. After a short session of much-needed introspection, you decided to go through your room’s closet in search of more quiet entertainment.

You happened upon your stack of presents from yesterday, smiling at the fresh, positive memories they brought up. As your eyes caught on the two feathers Castiel had given you on the bus ride back to Juneau, it dawned on you that you’d completely forgotten to tell Dean you’d managed to acquire what he’d asked of you.

You gingerly took the smaller of the two feathers, as well the bottle of the holy oil from Sam’s bag, and resolved to bring them to Dean next door. Immediately after knocking on the door to Dean’s room, tired, barely audible grumbling emanated from within, the door swinging open and bringing you face-to-face with a very disgruntled and very sleepy hunter.

“What does it take for a guy to get some decent sleep around here?” he griped, but his attitude lessened when he noticed what you were carrying. “You got a feather. Good job, bring it on in!”

You stepped into the room and presented Dean with the wavering, downy feather and clay container of holy oil. Dean took both but squinted hard at the feather.

“That’s one of Cas’s feathers?” he asked in disbelief as he examined the bundle of dark fluff. “I was kind expecting something…I dunno, mightier, more fitting of a warrior of heaven. You made his wings sound so impressive.”

“Trust me, they are!” you rushed to explain. “I just had to take what I could get from him. This is a baby feather compared to the rest of them. He plucked it from underneath his larger feathers, which I promise are super impressive.”

Dean quirked an eyebrow but added the trembly feather alongside the holy oil to the table, dragging the rest of the spell’s ingredients out from under the bed and arranging them alongside the ones you’d just brought. And yeah, okay, you did bring Dean the lesser of the two feathers on purpose, because wanting one for yourself hadn’t been entirely a ruse and it seemed a shame to waste the higher quality one on a spell that would effectively ruin it.

“So, what’s left?” you asked, taking the angelic spell book from the bag and turning to the correct page. “I know we’ve got the key, the feather, the holy oil, and the eyeball… all that’s left is your blood, which we can get when we’re ready to cast the spell, and the opal.”

“Got it covered,” Dean said with pride, pulling out a shiny, round gemstone with layers of blue and white from one of the bag’s side compartments.

You gaped at the stone. “Where did you…?”

“That necklace I gave you wasn’t the only thing I bought at the jewelry store,” Dean said, a glint in his eye as he put the opal down with the rest of the ingredients. “When Sam and I went out shopping
for your presents, I figured it would be the perfect excuse to stop by our local jewelry store onboard and see what I could find.” His face twisted at the memory. “You would not believe the money some people apparently have to spend. There were things in there worth ten times what your necklace is.” Dean shook his head. “Anyways, I charmed my way through the process of buying your present so well that the saleswoman was willing to make me a deal on a gemstone minus the flashy chains and decorations.”

You smiled at Dean with admiration. “You are one heck of capable socializer, Dean. Coming from someone who is essentially a socially awkward potato, that is one of the highest compliments I can give.”

“I’m flattered,” Dean said playfully, switching to business mode in seconds. “Alright, so we’ve got everything we need minus a bit of my juice. Should we…”

“Go ahead and cast it?” you guessed.

Neither of you had an immediate answer. This all was coming to a head so fast. Somehow it seemed to be happening too soon, too easily. There was still the matter of whether or not this spell would even cause its intended effects, but as you played the risks over in your head, intangible data crossed paths to tell you that it would be fine. When you had an intuition of that kind, you always trusted it, and it served you without fail in most every instance.

“I think we should do it,” you decided, putting your hands on your hips for emphasis.

“You think so?” Dean asked, not sounding too sure. “Don’t get me wrong, I… really want to cast it, but like you said, it’s risky.”

“Trust me on this one. My intuition’s telling me it’ll be fine.”

“…How could you possibly-”

“Don’t question my intuition. Please, everyone else does and it gets really tiring after the first hundred times. I just… know. I don’t know how I know, but I know.”

Dean held up his hands disarmingly. “Alright, miss intuitive, we’ll cast it on your word alone. No pressure,” he smiled at you.

“Thanks,” you rolled your eyes jokingly, knowing he didn’t mean it.

There wasn’t a spell-casting bowl readily on hand anywhere on the ship that you knew of, so you settled on converting the room’s empty countertop coffeepot into a temporary container for the ingredients.

You started by drizzling all of the measly holy oil you had on hand into the cylindrical, metal container, then placed the opal in the center. Dean graciously volunteered to retrieve the salmon eye from the minibar, holding the bag that it sat in as far away from himself as he could. You both averted your eyes when the time came to open the bag and add it in, the only indication that it had hit its target being an oily “plop” from the bottom of the coffeepot.

You briefly consulted the book from where it stood open on the table behind you with the remaining ingredients. “Looks good so far. Now we just need some of your blood.” You glanced worriedly at Dean. “You gonna be okay with that?”
Dean scoffed at you. “Totally. I’ve drawn blood for spells a thousand times before.”

You looked around the room for any remotely sharp objects. “With…what?”

“A knife, usually…” Dean joined you in scanning the room. “…Which we don’t have any of, right.”

You frowned. “We could try using a piece of paper, they’ve left us with plenty of those.” You gestured to the folder of daily itineraries and information packets left by the ship’s staff.

The confidence in Dean’s face fell in an instant. “Like…with a papercut?”

“That’s what I was thinking, yeah.”

“…You sure there isn’t…anything else?”

You shrugged. “We could try…” You looked around for an alternative, your eyes falling on the bedside cabinet and the unused key sitting in the lock built into it. “There’s a key that’s probably sharp enough.” You raised an eyebrow at Dean. “Why?”

He swallowed, repressed nervousness shining like a beacon on his face. “Papercuts hurt.”

“And cutting yourself with a knife doesn’t?”

“I’m used to that!” Dean was getting defensive. “Papercuts are in a realm of pain all their own!”

You couldn’t argue with that. “Alright whatever, as long as we get the blood.”

The key ended up working pretty well, mostly thanks to Dean’s extensive experience with drawing blood. You couldn’t bring yourself to watch the process, so you turned your back until Dean alerted you that it was over with, red drops glistening in the bowl and makeshift bandage around Dean’s hand as proof. Next, the pitiful feather was added, Dean dramatically dropping it over the bowl and watching it slowly float into place among the pot’s other contents. All that remained was to mix it all up.

You handed Dean the paradox key, and the second it left your fingers, a grim air descended upon the room. You had to wonder if this was what it always felt like when casting spells, the foreboding sense of uncertainty. Are all your ingredients sufficient? Did you follow the instructions right? Will the spell turn out the way it’s supposed to? You had to imagine witches and really anyone who regularly did spellcasting would be very stressed out people. Your nerves were frayed just from this one encounter, even if this specific spell gave you good reason to be worried. But you knew you’d get through it; all you had to do was focus on what your intuition had told you, and you’d get there eventually.

Gulping to himself, Dean lowered the key into the mixture without ceremony, carefully stirring the contents. All you could hear aside from the room’s air conditioning unit and your breathing was the foreboding sound of metal lightly scratching metal as Dean mixed and mixed the spell together in the coffeepot.

Then, all at once, something went wrong. It started with flash from inside the pot and a sharp yelp of pain from Dean, who doubled over and dropped the key into the pot. His arm flew up to cover his face as he stumbled backwards, what little of his expression you could see scrunched up in pain.

“Oh my god!” you cried on instinct. “Dean? What happened?!”

Dean backed into the table, nearly falling over it, but you reached out to steady him just in time,
holding him up by his trembling shoulders. He didn’t seem capable of a proper response, too caught up in the pain of whatever he was feeling to vocalize anything other than agonized groans.

*Oh god, oh god,* you frantically chanted in your head. *No, no, no, this wasn’t supposed to happen, my intuition said everything would be fine, this isn’t right!*

“Dean?!” you shouted right in his face. “C’mon, say something!”

He still refused to uncover his face, his free arm flailing wildly and knocking the spell book clean off the table and onto the floor. With his unsteady footing, Dean tripped over it and collapsed, thankfully onto the bed rather than the hard ground.

“Eyes,” Dean choked out as he shook on the bed, almost looking like he was in the middle of a seizure. “It’s…e-eyes…”

*What the heck am I supposed to do?!* you thought to yourself, helplessly watching Dean convulse and curl in on himself. Desperate, you remembered something Dean had said to reassure you back when you’d first found out about him trying to cast the spell.

You clapped your hands together, your clasped palms shaking in each other’s grasp. “Castiel, I know you can’t teleport right now, but please come back to your room! It’s Dean; something’s gone wrong, I need your help! Please!”

With your prayer sent, all you could do was stand and watch, offering hushed, anxiety-stricken words of reassurance to Dean where you could. His condition wasn’t getting any better, but it didn’t appear to be getting any worse, either. You could find little comfort in that fact.

Something in your head asked if you should have taken him to the medical center instead, but you brushed that off. None of the doctors there would be able to treat something like this, surely not if it was caused by a magical spell. But all the same, that destructive thought picked away at the logical walls you surrounded it with, making you wonder if that single decision could make the difference between life and death for Dean. Conclusion was leapfrog-jumped to conclusion, painting a worst-case scenario in your mind that transported you away from the dire reality right in front of you. If Dean got hurt, or god forbid, lost his life because of this, that would all be on you, Sam and Castiel would never forgive you, let alone would you ever be able to forgive yourself, and yet another innocent person would be hurt by your stupid, stupid split-second decisions, and you’d be back to square one all over again-

Castiel chose that exact moment in your thought process to all but shove his keycard into the slot outside his door, slamming it open at full force and charging into the room. His expression was all intensity, every trace of innocent, dorky awkwardness evaporated from his being.

The angel’s attention immediately fell from you where you feebly stood by the table to Dean, who was still covering his eyes and violently shaking on the bed. He put a steadying hand on Dean’s shoulder. “Dean?” he demanded, receiving no answer other than another groan. “Dean!”

The angel’s head whipped to face you, fixing you with a stare that could’ve pinned a full-grown grizzly bear. “What happened?”

“I-I, he, we…” you stuttered out, eyes darting between him and Dean. “S-s-spell, we cast a spell.”

You held out a hand towards the coffeepot on the counter.

“What kind of spell?” The ferocity in Castiel’s eyes made you quake even more.

“Angelic perception spell,” you managed, eyeing the fallen angelic spell book at Castiel’s feet.
Apparently, the angel was too focused on Dean to notice the book or your glance towards it. “No such spell exists,” he flatly stated.

Now completely ignoring your presence, Castiel turned his full attention to Dean, closely examining the afflicted hunter. His wings automatically swept out and surrounded him, phasing through the bed as the angel desperately tried to figure out what to do.

And then, all at once, Dean’s convulsing stopped. Everything in the room was still aside from your own heaving chest and the steady, gentle rising and falling of Dean’s own. No one said anything, as though held back by fear that disturbing the peace would start up Dean’s suffering again.

Slowly and hesitantly, Dean lowered his arm from his face, his eyes flinching and scrunched tightly shut. He managed to barely squint them open, taking in what little he could through their slits. Within seconds, his eyes widened tremendously and opened fully.

“Cas…” he breathed out in a daze. “Why are your…” He went rigid, realization dawning in his clouded eyes. “Wings.”

The pair stared at each other for a few long, tense moments, Castiel leaning over a star-struck Dean as reality settled in and made itself cozy. Suddenly aware of himself, Castiel swiftly and self-consciously withdrew his wings, fear flickering in his expression as he took a step back.

“Y-you,” Castiel stuttered. “How can you- how long have been able to see them?”

“Since…just now, apparently,” Dean answered, wonderstruck eyes taking in as much of the wings as he could.

Castiel noticed Dean’s eyes on him and reflexively hid his wings behind his back. “That-that’s impossible.”

“Not with a little angelic magic,” Dean craned his head to peer around Castiel and get a better look at his hidden wings.

Once again, you nervously eyed the book on the ground, and this time Castiel took notice. He retrieved it from the carpeted floor and flipped to your bookmarked page. After taking a few seconds to read over its contents, something akin to enraged incredulity appeared on his face.

“This…this can’t be real,” he said, more to himself than anyone else, but Dean continued to eyeball his wings, his head bobbing and turning to follow them wherever they went.

“It sure must be, or else I am having one hell of a fever dream right now,” Dean said, sheer amazement lifting his voice.

That was around the time Sam awkwardly knocked on the wide-open door, utterly and completely confused as he tried to take in the scene he’d just walked into. His gaze drifted between Dean staring intently at the air behind Castiel, Castiel glaring into one of his spell books with a look of pure contempt, and you stuck in the middle of it all shrugging helplessly at him.

Sam blinked to clear his head. “What did I miss?”

Castiel shut the book with a loud thump, shoving it into Sam’s arms. “Your brother has been tampering with untested and unproven angelic magic,” he explained. “And as of now…” The intensity in Castiel’s features was lessened by a light blush that stained his cheeks. “It seems that he has gained the ability perceive my wings.”
Sam’s mouth fell open in disbelief. “He…what?” At that moment, he suddenly became aware of the book that had been pushed into his hands. “This is one of the bunker’s spell books! Dean, what were you doing with this?”

Dean’s hands rose defensively. “Hey, don’t look at me! She’s the one who brought it to me.” He nodded in your general direction.

You fumbled as all eyes fell on you. “W-whoa, I didn’t- I mean, I did bring it to him, but I didn’t tell him to- I just wanted to show him, he decided to cast it on his own!”

“And then you decided to help me,” Dean not-so-helpfully added.

“R-right, yeah, but only because I was worried something would go wrong if you did it alone!”

Castiel directed a glare at you. “You aided Dean in this foolish endeavor?”

“My intuition told me it would turn out okay!” Your defense sounded weak in such a heated discussion, but it was really all you had left to fall back on.

“Okay, everyone calm down,” Sam cut in, holding out his hands in a peacemaking pose. He took a deep breath to collect himself. “So, Dean cast this spell, and now he can see Cas’s wings. [Y/N] helped him do it, but she intuited that it would end up being fine. Dean looks fine as far as I can tell, but there may be lingering side effects we aren’t aware of. As dumb of an idea as it was to cast this spell,” Dean scowled at Sam for that comment, “nothing else appears to have gone wrong. So everyone just take a deep breath, relax, and we can figure this out.”

That subsided some of the tension in the room, though a considerable amount still remained.

“I will have to keep you under close observation in the event that there are any side effects,” Castiel told Dean, a scolding look on his face. “But…” his face softened ever so slightly. “Even after your violent convulsions earlier, you appear to be in good health. You are very lucky that this turned out the way it did.”

“No kidding,” Dean absently agreed, never taking his eyes off Castiel’s wings, which twitched in irritation.

Sam quietly clapped his hands together. “I have a proposal,” he began. “How about we all go up to the Lido Deck and have a nice, civil dinner to take our minds off this? That’s why I was coming down here anyways, to see if anyone wanted to get some food. Clearly, I got more than I bargained for, but that’s beside the point.”

You exhaled a shaky breath. “Dinner sounds lovely, Sam. Let’s do that.”

“Good, okay.” Sam nodded. “Let’s head up, then.” Sam hastily took his leave, eager to remove himself from the situation, and you did not blame him one bit.

The blush had not subsided on Castiel’s face; if anything, it had gotten more pronounced. The angel coughed into his fist. “I will…see you both up there. Do not hesitate to pray to me again if something goes wrong in the meantime.” He hurried after Sam.

Dean’s eyes trailed after him the whole way out the door, and only when he and his wings were completely out of his range of sight did he snap out of it and shake himself back into the present moment. “It…worked,” he voiced the obvious, grinning from ear to ear. “I can’t believe it, that actually worked.”
You couldn’t help but pick up on his contagious enthusiasm. “I told you my intuition was right.”

“Yeah, I’m never doubting your intuition ever again after that,” Dean was laughing, expressing a genuine joy that was so rarely seen from him. “Even if Sam’s right about the side effects, ‘cause there is always a catch with these things, it friggin’ worked.”

“What do you think of them? His wings, I mean.”

You swore you saw stars glow in Dean’s green eyes. “They’re…oh man, they’re even more than I’d hoped for. Sorry to say, your description didn’t quite do them justice.”

“No offense taken, they’re hard to capture in words.”

“I…I can’t wait to…” He quickly retracted whatever it was he’d been saying, clearing his throat and abruptly changing the subject. “Right, let’s uh, let’s go meet them upstairs for some good ol’ buffet grub.”

“Gladly. I didn’t know spellcasting was hard enough work to make you hungry.”

“After you, miss intuitive,” he stepped aside and let you leave the room first.

“Now that is a nickname I could get used to,” you smiled as you led the way down the hall.

Dinner was a tasty collection of seared kingfish and freshly cooked tomatoes, broccoli, and heaping mounds of mashed potatoes on your plate. The mood at your table was a little strained, understandably so considering what had just happened, but the food was good enough that you actually managed to tolerate it.

One thing that you couldn’t ignore no matter how delicious your meal was the way Dean’s gaze kept locking onto Castiel’s wings where he sat across the table from him. Castiel definitely noticed too, shifting uncomfortably and trying in vain to cover his wings. Dean was so distracted that he was the last person at the table left with food on his plate, something you thought you would never see.

You left to retrieve a dessert from the appropriate counter, picking a chocolate razzberry tart from the selections available. You were tempted by a slice of the “chocolate delight pie” on the top shelf, but you couldn’t resist your love for razzberries and the tart ultimately won out; though Dean would have been appalled if he’d been there to see what you’d favored.

Smiling as an idea swirled into something solid in your mind, you grabbed a plate of the chocolate pie and carried it back to your table alongside your own dessert. After sitting down and setting your own treat in its place, you dramatically lowered the plate of pie in front of Dean. Despite the tantalizing chocolatey goodness, it took Dean several seconds after you’d deposited the plate in front of him to tear his eyes away from Castiel and notice the pie.

Grinning with delight and absentely thanking you, Dean dug into his dessert, finally occupied with something other than his friend’s wings, at least for the time being. Hoping to keep that occupation going for a little while longer to spare Castiel the discomfort, another idea fell into place in your mind after Dean enjoyed his last bite of pie.

“So Dean, how about I ask you another question for our bet?” you asked, and Dean nearly choked on his pie.

“Uh, right here?” He sounded concerned, sending sidelong glances at Sam and Castiel across the table.
“It’s not anything personal, it’s a fun question!” you assured him. “Sam and Cas shouldn’t mind, right guys?”

Your tablemates shook their heads, curious to see what would unfold. They had both been made aware of what you and Dean had bet, and they wanted to see what it resulted in, Sam in particular ready to see more humor at his brother’s expense after the gold miner incident earlier that day.

Dean held his hands up and let his shoulders sag. “Alright, lay it on me.”

“Before I do, I need to know: have you ever heard of the game ‘kiss, marry, kill?’” you inquired.

Apparently, Dean hadn’t, because he appeared startled by the name. “Not that I know of. What, is that some kind game where you kiss a girl named Mary and then go on a killing spree?”

Sam snorted under his breath, and Dean sent a subtle glare at him across the table.

“Not even close,” you sighed out in faux disappointment. “It’s a game where you are given a list of three people, literally anybody. You have to decide who out of that list you would kiss, marry, and kill, assigning each one to an action.”

Uncertainty made Dean frown. “…I officially no longer like where this is going.”

“Understandable. But it’s just a fun game, don’t take it too seriously.”

Dean still looked like he was going to take it as seriously as the stock markets, which admittedly made you giddy at the possibilities of his reaction to the choices you’d assign him.

“So, my question is…” You trailed off for dramatic effect. “Who would you kiss, marry and kill out of the following: Crowley, Meg, and Castiel?”

You noticed Sam lean in even closer, fully invested now that he’d heard the choices. A pained look befell Dean’s face. “I have to choose from those three?”

“Yes siree,” you confirmed with a bit too much excitement.

Dean puffed out a breath. “Okay, let’s get this over with.” He leaned back in his seat as he pondered his choices, strongly grimacing at some points as some of the potential combinations occurred to him. “I need some clarification on the whole ‘kiss’ thing. Does it have to be on the mouth?”

“Right on the mouth, yeah.”

A grossed-out look crossed Dean’s face. “For how long?”

You thought about it for a moment. “Eh, let’s say at least five seconds.”

“In that case…” Dean hid his face, embarrassment coloring his features. “I’m gonna say I’d kiss Crowley.”

Sam’s eyes went wide in disbelief from across the table. “Dude, what?”

Dean held out a finger. “Hear me out! I was gonna say Meg, but I really, really do not want to tread into that territory with her, not again.”

Sam’s eyes went even wider. “Again?”

“Yeah, already happened once,” Dean’s face scrunched up in disgust at the memory. “I can say
without a doubt, nastiest kiss I’ve ever had. Demons never really taste good, but she was in a realm all her own…”

“I can confirm this,” Castiel piped up, shying away when all eyes turned to him. “Seeing as…I’ve had my own personal experience with her…”

Some part of you feared that the reminder of Castiel’s…erm, “experience” with Meg would stoke jealousy in Dean. Though he flinched briefly with something that may have very well been jealousy, the hunter’s reaction ended up being far from what you expected.

“Yeah, you know as well as I do!” Dean leaped to agree. “Her breath was like…horribly burnt peanuts roasted in gasoline and hellfire.”

Castiel gave a single nod. “That is a startlingly accurate description.”

Huh. Who would’ve thought that Dean and Castiel would find a way to bond over kissing the same demon? Their relationship, as much as you loved it, certainly was an odd one.

With that moment passed, Dean frowned and crossed his arms defensively. “So yeah, I would literally take kissing Crowley over repeating that particular experience, thank you very much. Surely he wouldn’t even taste half as bad as her…”

Understanding appeared on Sam’s face. “Alright, fair enough.”

“And Crowley, he basically kisses people for a living, I could find an excuse that way if I didn’t have another choice.”

Nobody had the drive to ask why apparently Castiel hadn’t even been included in the equation of who Dean would kiss, but that was probably for the best. It would have only brought tension tumbling back down upon you all, and you’d had more than enough of that for one night already.

“What about the remaining options?” Castiel asked, apparently more interested in the question than any of you had noticed or expected.

“Well, ah…” Dean was caught off guard by Castiel asking him. “After I narrowed it down to Crowley, the others were pretty straightforward. I’d kill Meg, and m-marry Cas. Because…killing Cas is absolutely out of the question, and domestic life with Meg?” Dean drew a finger across his neck and made a fake choking sound. “Yeah, not happening.”

Castiel nodded his head. “I appreciate you choosing marriage over murder in this hypothetical scenario, Dean.”

Dean managed a bashful smile. “Yeah, of course, Cas…”

You and Sam shared a knowing look that thankfully neither of your other tablemates caught sight of. With dinner and dessert fully consumed, you left the buffet with an air of much less tension than what you’d walked in with. The ship departed from Skagway while you took the stairs down to your rooms, unanimously deciding to hang out there for what little remained of the day.

After reminding Dean to watch for any potential side effects from the spell, Sam entered your room, flipping on the TV to see if there was anything to watch. One channel was playing Jaws, which being one of your favorite movies, you insisted he watch with you.

“Look!” you pointed enthusiastically at the screen as a new character was introduced. “It’s Hooper, my son! My smart, snarky, marine biologist son!”
Though confused, Sam seemed amused by your attachment to the character, even going so far as to cheer along with you when he heroically got in the shark cage near the end of the movie. As the credits rolled up the screen, Sam turned the TV off, announcing that he was going to bed. You stayed up a little longer than him to scribble some ideas in your new journal, following suit and rushing through your bedtime routine in anticipation for what would unfold in Dean and Castiel’s room tonight. With the day’s events, it was sure to be interesting.

Sure enough, a conversation between them started in less than a minute after you’d seated yourself on your bed and heard Dean emerging from his bathroom.

“I think I finally got the coffeepot cleaned out,” Dean said. “I did not wanna have to explain that one to the cleaning staff…”

Nothing was said for a long time after that, only the sound of barely shuffling feet not carrying anyone anywhere.

Eventually, Castiel piped up. “I must admit, I was surprised by the spell’s simplicity.”

“Yeah, it did seem a bit too easy. They should really write an updated version of that book that includes a warning about ‘intense eye pain’ for that spell though, that was one hell of a ride…”

Another long silence permeated by awkwardness and unspoken questions descended.

“You still appear to be in good health,” Castiel eventually observed. “I am still watching for any side effects, but so far, none have presented themselves.”

“Good, good…”

More silence. Jeez, you weren’t even technically a part of this conversation and you felt the awkwardness just as weightily as if you were an active participant. All of these long pauses were no doubt tied to the elephant in the room, or rather, the two large feathery elephants in the room. Neither of your neighbors seemed willing to so much as acknowledge their impossible-to-ignore presence.

“Dean,” Castiel finally intoned. “You are staring at my wings again.”

“O-oh, s-sorry man, I didn’t mean to…they’re just, uh…” I could literally hear Dean swallow. “Really distracting.”

“I apologize.”

“No, no, you don’t have to apologize! Hell, I’m the one who made it so I could see them, it had nothing to do with you.” The tone of Dean’s voice made it sound like it had everything to do with Castiel.

Yet another silence drenched in tension happened.

“I am not certain of your answer, but I wished to ask regardless…” Castiel bashfully began. “Would another evening of cuddles be within reason?”

“Huh?” Dean sounded distracted.

Castiel sighed. “You are staring again.”

“Oh, s-sorry man, I didn’t mean to…they’re just, uh…” I could literally hear Dean swallow. “Really distracting.”

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“Huh?” Dean sounded distracted.

Castiel sighed. “You are staring again.”

“Ah, god. I’m sorry, Cas, I’m really tryin’ here. I’m just not used to them.”

“That is understandable, Dean. I assume that due to your enhanced perception of my true form,
cuddles are no longer within reason for the night?"

“I…didn’t…say that.”

“You…wouldn’t be impacted by the presence of my wings during our time together?” Castiel sounded undeniably, heartbreakingly hopeful.

“Dude, I probably should have said this earlier, but…” Dean swallowed again. “Your wings? Are freakin’ awesome. Like, exceeded every expectation I’d ever had about them awesome. The only impact they could make would be a good one.”

“That is…very kind of you to say, Dean.” The pleasant surprise in Castiel’s voice lifted a weight off your chest you hadn’t even been aware of. “So, cuddles are…?”

“Shush already and get over here,” Dean dismissed more dreaded talk about gushy feelings, leading to the sound of rustling sheets and settling that you’d committed to memory by that point. A minute or so relative silence passed, broken only by brief readjusting and more settling.

“You are squirming an awful lot, Dean,” Castiel eventually observed. “Are you uncomfortable?”

“N-no, not really, I just…” he sighed into a blanket. “It’s…weird, ‘cause like, I can see ‘em, but I can’t feel ‘em, you know? It’s messing with my head a little.”

“I can make them corporeal if that would make it easier for you.”

“Sure.”

In the near absolute quiet of the night, you heard the faintest ethereal whoosh, followed by a very, very surprised gasp from Dean.

“Oh…wow…” Dean breathed out. “They’re…friggin’ soft as hell.”

“Hell is not soft, Dean. You have been there, you should know that.”

“No I mean…” Dean didn’t even finish correcting Castiel, and you heard the subtlest sound of something running over feathers. “Jesus, Cas, your feathers…”

“I’m…not sure what my half-brother has to do with any of this, but okay.”

Dean huffed a shallow, mirthful laugh of a sort that you don’t think you’d ever heard from him before, one tinged with affection, security, and peace all at once. “You are such a dork. You know that, right?”

“So I’ve been told.” The sound of something running over feathers rose ever so slightly in volume, eliciting a barely-there sigh from Castiel.

“Is this…okay?” Dean asked hesitantly.

“Yes, Dean, of course,” Castiel assured him. “Although I’ve never had my wings pet by someone before. It is very…calming…”

In the mostly silent minutes that followed, no more dialogue was shared. All that could be heard from the room was the continued sound of what was evidently wings being petted, the occasional contented hum of an angel, and eventually a single snore from Dean which signaled an end to the fluffy festivities.
You literally melted back onto your bed. These two, you *swear*.

Satisfied that your angelic spell endeavor had ended in a more positive outcome than either you or Dean could have hoped for, you let yourself drift into your own state of sleep, your contentedness making the boat not even necessary for you to drift off into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Halfway done already? It seems to go by so fast...I guess that's what I get for posting on a predetermined schedule for once. :P

Picture in this chapter belongs to me.

Inb4 someone questions Dean being squeamish about a papercut: https://i.pinimg.com/564x/f1/08/e4/f108e4727e32d43bcd9e107c7c392ec9.jpg

(By the way, that tour guide who sounded just like Chris Pratt was a real person who I met in Alaska. I was just so amazed by his voice that I had include him in this. He just...*literally* sounded exactly like Chris Pratt, it was a transcendental experience. I think maybe Mr. Pratt has a secret brother living in Alaska...
In which you meet a vampire, Dean fights a glacier, Cas just wants to help, and Sam flees from a cougar

Chapter Notes

Quick warning: there is off-screen alcohol use in this chapter, as well as on-screen consequences from said alcohol use.

Can the terms off-screen and on-screen be applied to a fanfiction? Probably not. Oh well, you get what I mean.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~7/7/17~

Eight A.M. on the dot marked when you pulled yourself out of bed with purpose. Memories from last night were still swirling fresh in your brain, and as you brushed your hair in front of the bathroom mirror, you reached a satisfying conclusion: today was the day. The day that marked the inevitable high point of what had been years of tension, longing looks, and silly flirtatious interactions: today was the day that Dean and Castiel did the thing.

As it was, the thing didn’t really have a solid definition or even framework in your mind. It was just a vague term to describe whatever form those two dorks’ love took, be it an outright a confession, heat of the moment first kiss, or whatever else fate had planned. Because after last night, how could the thing not happen?

In short, the thing could be described as the fateful event in which one or both of the pair in question finally fell over the precipice they’d been precariously walking on since they’d collided. Once one of them had fallen, the other was sure to follow, and from there a relationship years in the making would blossom forth as it was always meant to.

But, in order to ensure that the thing happened on schedule and at all, you knew you would have to take action, because even though these two love-struck knuckleheads were perhaps closer than ever before to crossing that precipice, some outside force would still have to push them the few remaining inches before they would tumble into it. There had been close calls in the past for them, but without anything or anyone nudging them forwards, they always stepped away from the precipice and back to square one.

Of all the many close calls they’d experienced, this was easily the closest the two of them had been to that edge, cautiously but curiously approaching it and daring to peek into its unknown depths. The window of opportunity to take advantage of this was closing fast, and there was only so much time left before they would re-constipate their explorative feelings and lose all the boldness that had drawn them towards that edge, shrinking far away from the precipice as they always inevitably did on their own. Both of them were in prime position by that precipice; you just had to wait for the right time and place to make your move, and only then would the thing occur as you were determined it would.

The first hour or so of your morning was spent laying the groundwork for a game plan, making various notes and diagrams in your journal to prepare. You were dearly familiar with this relationship
and its participants, so you knew what was most likely to play out and work best. You used your trusty intuition as a guide, settling on what needed to be done and how to get there.

Early on, it was obvious to you that you would have to devote most of your time to working on Dean, because while Castiel would be unlikely to cross the precipice on his own, if Dean fell first, he would follow in a heartbeat. The problem presented by this was that Dean was stubborn as a mule when it came to all things feeling-related and would not go over this precipice quietly. There would have to be some...shall you say, force involved. You were fully aware of this fact and steeled yourself accordingly, pushing down your absolute detestation for conflict by reminding yourself what was to be gained from it in this instance. You had to do this now; an opportunity with conditions like this may very well never present itself again, and if you let it pass you by, the thing might never happen the way it was supposed to, at least not for a long time.

Sam entered the room around 9:00, probably having been awake since five A.M. or some other equally unholy hour of the morning. He informed you that breakfast was being served and that you should probably get something to eat, so you prepped to leave the room and stepped into the hallway with him. Just as Sam had locked up behind you, the door beside yours opened up, Castiel walking out with Dean right behind him.

After fully emerging from his room, Castiel appeared pleasantly drowsy and well-rested for someone who didn’t require any sleep. This was a good sign, surely a positive omen for the thing’s eventual, long-awaited occurrence.

Your party took an elevator to deck nine and was set free in the buffet like a pack of dignified but hungry hyenas, Dean in particular going a bit wild over the fresh, sizzling bacon being cooked right behind the glass of one of the counters. Simply because you felt like it, you decided to make your breakfast fruit-themed that day, with a bowl full of grapes, strawberries, watermelon, pineapple, and apricots and apple juice on the side.

You noticed as you were carrying your loaded plate back to your table that Dean and Castiel were sitting together on one side of it. On its own, this was nothing unusual, but after the transcendental events of last night, it took on a whole new significance, especially because Castiel was pressed against the side of his chair to be as close to Dean as possible. Surely this was yet another good omen.

After you’d settled in and taken to enjoying your fruit plate, Dean released a short, casual yawn, letting his eyes stay closed for a few moments as he quietly smacked his lips. Sensing an apparent opportunity, Castiel visibly braced himself and idly pulled his wing up and around Dean’s back. Dean’s eyes shot open and he tensed the second he caught the feathery black shape in his peripheral vision.

Before Castiel could properly wrap his wing all the way around, Dean took a furtive look across the table and caught you staring. Panic arose in his widened eyes.

Reflexively you turned your gaze downwards at your breakfast, trying to pretend that you hadn’t seen anything. By the time you’d lifted up and begun drinking from your glass of apple juice to get another subtle, hidden look at what was going on, Dean was harshly mouthing something to Castiel and stiffly jerking his head in your direction. Castiel’s face fell and he nodded in resignation, completely lowering his wings out of the way and out of sight.

Uh oh. Dean was already getting cold feet. You might have even less time to intervene that you’d thought.

Sam, who was apparently the king of great timing, plopped himself down in the chair to your left
with a steaming omelet and slices of cheese on his plate, blissfully unaware of what had just transpired in the time he’d been off collecting scraps of food.

“So apparently,” Sam addressed the quiet table after a few bites, “today we’re spending the entire day on the water in someplace called Glacier Bay. It’s a national park with…well, lots of glaciers.”

“More glaciers?” Dean repeated, evidently having recovered from his “close call” with Castiel’s wing. “That means more cold air,” he deduced with dismay.

“I thought you’d adjusted to the Alaskan climate using…what was it again?” Sam mimed being in deep thought. “Your ‘macho attitude and stark perseverance even in the face of hypothermia?’”

Dean promptly changed his tune when he heard his own words played back to him. “Right, yeah, that. I can handle it just fine.”

Sam just nodded at him the same way someone would at a child who claimed they could use bedsheets to parachute off their roof and went back to his breakfast.

The remainder of breakfast was quiet; not particularly tense, but more characterized by a comfortable, silent acceptance of each other’s presence. Sam recommended that you all go outside to enjoy the views that the park had to offer, so everyone who needed to stopped by their room to bundle up accordingly. You implemented the known Winchester tactic of staying warm through plaid and layers. After everyone was ready, you congregated on the third deck balcony, leaning over the railing at the boat’s edge to take in the impressive sights.

Glacier Bay was indeed chocked full of glaciers, as well as ice floes on the water, snow-capped mountain ranges, and other frozen wonders. The water in the bay was a light, frigid blue dotted by white chunks of shaped ice bobbing about independently or in tightly-packed clusters. Each glacier that you passed was a sheer wall of impenetrable, blocky ice reflecting sky blue light and streaked with the debris of worn-away mountains. It was easily one of the most wintery places you’d ever been, even if you were technically there during the middle of summer.

Not particularly a fan of the cold, you retreated to the balcony’s back wall and perched in one of the padded armchairs stationed there, enjoying the view from a distance. The Winchesters and Castiel stayed put, taking it all in. You realized that it was entirely possible Sam and Dean had never been somewhere like this before. You couldn’t imagine that their work in the field of supernatural hunting would ever lead them to places like this, unless they’d ever been tasked with hunting down the abominable snowman, which would be a story you’d love to hear from them.

All was well until you caught sight of Dean beginning to visibly shiver. Though he tried to hide it, tightly hugging himself in a fruitless effort to stay still, Sam noticed within seconds.

“Dude, ‘stark perseverance’ or not, you look like you’re going to freeze out here,” Sam told him, watching him with concern.

“I’m f-f-fine,” Dean managed between faintly clacking teeth, staring resolutely at the snowy shoreline before him.

Castiel in particular observed Dean with worry, his wings tensing and untensing as they restlessly shifted against each other. He firmly held himself standing in one place and it seemed that he was having to force himself to stay still. You could see in the way his wings twitched and his fists clenched that Castiel was actively resisting the urge to wrap his feathers around Dean to warm him.

The ship slowed for a few minutes as it passed by a particularly large glacier, a mighty creeping wall
of packed ice and ground stone forming a frozen vein at least a mile across in the landscape. The direction of the wind was hitting it at just the right angle to send subtle blasts of cold air from over the glacier and towards your balcony. With every new gust blown your way, Dean’s shuddering grew in intensity.

“Seriously, Dean,” Sam eventually snapped, “if you need to go inside-”

Dean didn’t let his brother finish. “N-n-no, I am not going inside. This may be our only ch-chance of seeing s-something like this, and I am n-not missing it.” He gestured to the icy terrain all around him. “You th-think we’re going to find a hunt in Alaska-a, e-ever?” When Sam had no immediate response, Dean plowed on. “I du-dunno whatever h-happened to my temperature resistance, but I’m n-not letting this glacier win-n.” He stared daggers at the compacted ice wall in question. “I’m staying-g put.”

“…Well, I’ll give you one thing,” Sam admitted, defeated. “If nothing else, you’ve still got your stark perseverance.”

“Never lost it,” Dean held his chin up high, which would have looked more impressive if it wasn’t for the fact that his whole body was vibrating. “Must’ve lost whatever else I had k-keeping me toasty somewhere along-g the w-way.”

Yeah, you sure did, you thought to yourself as you watched Castiel force himself to shrink back and keep his wings as close to the ground as he could. Your window of opportunity was closing; fast.

For a few minutes, you tried to relax and focus on the natural marvels of the Alaskan bay landscape, but your tranquil thoughts were completely shattered as a young girl came dashing down the lengthy balcony towards one of the other armchairs.

“Seals!” she was shouting. “Momma, there are seals, come look!”

That definitely got your attention. You jumped up from your seat to where your companions were standing, also having taken notice of the girl’s excited yelling. You all unanimously looked to Castiel, who swept his gaze over the cluster of ice chunks between him and the shore.

“I do sense several small mammals in and above the water,” he confirmed, gaze still locked on the field of ice.

Sure enough, laying atop the gathered ice and poking their heads out of the water were wild harbor seals of various sizes. You counted a total of seven off the ship’s starboard side as you passed them, many of them watching with unbridled, innocent curiosity as the ship eased by their resting spot. A few even slid into the water to get within closer range so they could better glimpse the cooing, entranced people staring down at them.

Dolphins, orcas, humpbacks, and now seals? How many dream-come-true marine life encounters could occur in one trip?

Even after you’d made it past the seals and they were out of sight, you remained by the edge of the balcony with Castiel while the Winchesters decided to take up residence in the armchairs behind you. You stuck with Castiel in part because he looked so lonely, forlornly staring out at the expanse of impossibly blue water and drifting floes. The angel had a despondent air surrounding him, and as someone who’d had an insider’s view of recent events, it wasn’t much of a puzzle for you to figure out why.

As the waves of his melancholy hit you, pity welled up in your chest. The sooner you could get the
thing to happen, the better off everyone would be. There had to be something you could do to buy yourself more time, because that perfect moment to strike hadn’t presented itself yet, but soon the window would be closed and you’d have lost your chance.

Desperately glancing around the balcony, you caught sight of what looked like someone laying in an armchair with a massive plaid jacket draped over them. You inched closer and realized it wasn’t a jacket, but a blanket.

You could almost see the lightbulb pop into existence above your head. Dean didn’t want Castiel using his wings to warm him up, but that didn’t mean Castiel couldn’t use something else to warm Dean up.

Quietly excusing yourself from Castiel’s side, you walked for a few minutes down the balcony and found what you were looking for in a compartment protruding from the wall labelled “complimentary towels.” They looked more like blankets than towels, made of a soft, cottony material and all in blue plaid patterns. Regardless, you took one anyways, scurrying back to Castiel and panting so hard by the time you reached him that he turned to look at you all on his own.

You gasped out another few breaths of cold air. “Here,” you handed him the blanket. “If you wanna help Dean, you should probably give him this. Look, it’s in plaid, a Winchester favorite. It’s perfect!”

Castiel looked between you and the blanket with curiosity. “If you say so,” he eventually said. “I do greatly wish to protect Dean from the cold.”

Without waiting for any response, Castiel took the blanket and made his way back to where Dean was sitting in his armchair. The chilly hunter still held onto himself for dear life, failing to shield himself against the chill assaulting him. Once he noticed Castiel approaching him, he tried to straighten out his posture a bit to look more presentable.

“H-hey, Cas,” Dean greeted. “What’s-s up?”

“I have a blanket for you,” Castiel told him, holding out the plaid cloth.

Dean made the beginning of a stiff movement to reach out and take it, but he was so slowed down by his lower body temperature that Castiel beat him to it. The angel unfolded the blanket from its neat, square shape and spread it over Dean, who was frozen both literally and from surprise. Castiel finished up by tucking the edges of the blanket around Dean’s body, standing back to examine his handiwork.

“Is this acceptable?” he asked Dean.

Dean blinked several times in rapid succession before he faced Castiel again. “U-uh, yeah, thanks man…” He then settled down more firmly into his chair, holding the blanket tightly against himself as his shivering slowed.

Castiel smiled affectionately at him. “You are quite welcome, Dean.”

Now that is how you extend a window of opportunity.

You ended up settling back into your own armchair, Castiel taking one beside Dean and sitting upright as he tracked the movements of each scattered piece of ice in the water. Your group ended up spending the majority of the day there, relaxing and lounging as the ship steered you through the bay. You think Dean even fell asleep at one point, wrapped up in the blanket and no longer suffering from the temperature at all.
If Dean was asleep, he must have woken up, because he spontaneously asked, “Is this all we’re gonna do today? Look at ice?”

You had to admit, as amazing as it was to see all the glaciers and icy features of Alaska, it did get repetitive after a while. “I’d be fine with doing something else,” you put in your opinion.

Sam leaned forward from where he’d been reclining in his chair to join the conversation. “I saw a sign up on deck two that said tonight is another gala night, so there’s that.”

You slapped your hand against your forehead. “Aw man, we never bought any formal wear! I completely forgot!”

“I think there’s a clothing store onboard somewhere,” Dean recalled. “I saw it when I was at the jewelry shop. I dunno if it’d be worth it, though. It’s just gonna be talking with a buncha people with more money on hand than any of us have ever had in our lives.”

You couldn’t help but notice Dean sounded bitter throughout his last statement. “We can at least try it, right? As long as you guys don’t mind doing most of the talking. I’m too shy for socializing with random strangers.”

Dean sighed in defeat. “Well, the only other thing I can think of to would be to take a nap, and I just did that, so I’m out of options. Fine, we’ll go.”

After retrieving a hefty amount of your money from your rooms, Dean led the way to the clothing store, which turned out to be one of the fanciest places to buy clothes you’d ever seen. You were used to the basic sort of browsing through the clothing aisles of Target and the occasional trip to Sears in your local mall, but this store was basically like mars to you it was so alien.

Everything in sight was white and pristine, with classy jazz pouring out from speakers mounted to the ceiling. Everything was organized into neat sections, which you were very appreciative of. Whereas every other clothing store you’d seen had mismatched outfits and items stuck in the middle of racks and shelves, this place had no such chaos, everything bunched together with others of its kind. This made it mercifully easy to find suitable clothes, comfortable and as modest as could be while still qualifying as “formal.” You settled on black dress pants and a frilly white shirt within two minutes of entering the store.

It took Sam and Dean fifteen minutes. Though to be fair, there were considerably less options for suits than dresses and not many of them were appealing. You highly doubted either of them would choose one of the more plentiful dresses just to save time. Eventually, they did decide on just taking the simplest, black and white suits they could find, purchasing differently colored cheap flower pins so they had at least one difference between their outfits.

As for Castiel, Dean simply instructed him to remove his trench coat and stick with Jimmy’s snazzy suit underneath. The angel was easily the most well-dressed among you, your thrown-together apparel sufficient but weak compared to his. It would have to do; the gala was set to begin just five minutes after you’d changed back in your rooms.

Feeling a little ridiculous in your new clothes, you tried to think calming thoughts as the elevator let out a crisp “ding!” to alert you that you’d reached the second deck. One thing was certain about the evening: you would be sticking to at least one of your companions for the entire night. Socializing on your own was out of the question in such an upscale environment.

The environment at the center of the ship where the gala was held was indeed extremely upscale. A crowd of quietly chatting and laughing passengers in all manner of flashy clothing and accessories
were clustered outside by the spiral staircase and within the dining room, many of them older rich folk. Your stomach twitched with pangs of anxiety, but you kept your attention focused on the presence of Sam, Dean, and Castiel to calm your nerves.

Waiters wandered among the gala attendees, balancing trays of wine glasses and h’orduvers. Off in a corner of the ornate, gold accented room was a string quartet playing all the stereotypical fancy background songs one would expect at such an event. Everything was glistening, from the freshly-shined mirror walls to the jewelry that adorned most everyone in the room. You felt heinously underdressed, your ruby necklace being the only remotely flashy thing on you. Normally you preferred to wear simple outfits so as not to stand out, but in this instance, it had the opposite effect.

You stepped out into the middle of it all, glancing around at the unfamiliar environment. You felt truly out of your league, and you hoped that the Winchesters’ experience with keeping up facades and interviewing people would serve you in your time there.

“Alright,” Dean said with confidence that you couldn’t gauge as genuine or not. “Let’s mingle.”

Dean split off from the group practically immediately, his social prowess drawing him further into the depths of the jungle of decorated people. You instinctively followed him like a magnet, figuring that sticking with him would be your best bet for safely gleaning some enjoyment from the night.

There wasn’t much space for moving around the packed room, and you found yourself holding your breath as you followed behind Dean and the path that he carved, shuddering every time someone accidentally brushed against you and vice versa. An empty pocket did open up near the far end of the room, and Dean thankfully came to a stop once he’d reached it, giving you a chance to separate yourself from the mass of cultured people and catch your breath.

“You doin’ alright?” Dean thought to ask as you inhaled long, deep breaths.

“As long as you don’t abandon me with these people,” you breathed out, “I’ll be fine.”

Dean caught sight of something over your shoulder. “Get ready. Socialite at six o’clock.”

Without even waiting to see just who this “socialite” was, you instinctively retreated behind Dean’s side, signaling that you wanted him to take charge of the ensuing conversation. From your hiding spot, you were able to see the socialite. She was a youngish blonde, either in her thirties or perhaps beyond that with a bit of help from the wonders of plastic surgery. She had on a long, tight-fitting blue dress and as many silver and diamond-studded accessories as possible; earrings, four necklaces, too many bracelets and rings to count, and you think you even saw an anklet or two peeking out past the flap of her outfit.

“How do you do?” the woman asked in high-pitched New Jersian voice, eyeing Dean through bushy, fake eyelashes. “Forgive me for being so forward, but I don’t think I’ve ever seen you at a gala night before.”

Dean put on his signature charismatic grin. “Yeah, this is our first time.”

“In that case, welcome!” She extended her hand. “I’m Charlotte, Charlotte Perkins.”

“Name’s Dean.” He firmly shook Charlotte’s hand, managing his best version of a welcoming smile.

“Pleasure,” Charlotte said airily, bowing her head slightly. She turned her intimidating attention to you the second her hand fell away from the handshake, regarding you with an enthusiasm hadn’t seen from a newly-introduced stranger since you were twelve years old. “And who’s this?”
Dean glanced at you, asking silent permission to divulge your name. Something occurred to you as your brain thought through the potential options for how this conversation could proceed. You tried to hide your smile as one possibility raced past behind your eyes. Maybe you really could find a way to enjoy the evening…

You subtly mouthed a single word at Dean out of Charlotte’s line of sight: “dare.” Dean’s face lost all traces of confidence the second that word registered in his mind, but he didn’t have time to delay; Charlotte was still awaiting an answer, and she was starting to get impatient if the way she batted her massive, spiky eyelashes was anything to judge by.

Dean cleared his throat. “This,” he said very slowly, “is my daughter, [Y/N].” He reached out to grip the top of your shoulder just a little too tightly, which in all honesty you probably deserved for putting him through this.

“Oh, how nice,” Charlotte said in an overly-sweet, syrupy tone. “Is this just a father-daughter trip, or are you travelling with anyone else?”

“My brother Sam is with us…” Dean tried to look over the layered heads of the crowd for Sam, somehow not spotting him despite his unfair height advantage. “He’s…somewhere around here. And there’s also…” Dean captured Castiel in his range of vision, the angel attempting to make conversation with a very confused waiter trying to offer him a glass of red wine. “My, uh…my…” Dean cleared his throat too loudly, forcing out the last word in a sort of cough, “husband.”

Charlotte traced Dean’s line of sight to the well-dressed angel, grinning playfully. “My, he’s quite the catch, isn’t he?”

Swallowing nervously, Dean stiffly nodded. “Don’t I know it.”

This was perfect. You wanted to enjoy the night, and enjoy the night you would if this kept up.

“I’m on a family vacation as well,” Charlotte told us. “I’m here with my husband Mark, our son BJ, and our older daughter, Chloe.” She frowned, revealing wrinkles in her cheeks. “Chloe’s holed up in our room, though. She can be so anti-social.”

Based on that single character trait alone, you felt that you and Chloe would get along swell. Unfortunately, she wasn’t available for you to test that theory.

The conversation with Charlotte went on for ten minutes that felt like an eternity. You weren’t sure how much more small talk and tittering, accented laughter you could take, restlessly glancing around the room and trying to focus on the peaceful music emanating from the string quartet. Dean seemed just as pained as you were to be endlessly talking with Charlotte, who somehow was exhausting merely through her presence; it was as though simply listening to her speak sucked out your energy through your ear canals. Like a…conversation vampire. Yeah, the more you looked at her high cheekbones and unnaturally pointy white teeth, the more that vampiric impression solidified itself. Thankfully, Castiel appeared just when you thought you were about to implode, approaching Dean with a full wine glass in hand.

“Dean, I tried to explain to a waiter that I didn’t require sustenance;” Castiel explained, holding his glass firmly by the stem. “He didn’t believe me and forced me to take an alcoholic drink.”

“It’s fine, you can drink it,” Dean told him dismissively. “Live a little! Besides, we know your alcohol tolerance is through the roof compared to everyone else.”

Charlotte took immediate interest in the new face. “I don’t believe I got your name.”
“My name is Castiel,” Castiel formally greeted.

“Oooh, exotic!” Charlotte clapped her hands together in delight. “Where is that from?”

“I…don’t know.”

Recognition shone in Charlotte’s face as it was alighted with renewed glee. “Oh wait, I recognize you! You’re Dean’s husband, correct?”

Dean tensed at that, sending a warning glance to Castiel. You watched with anticipation; this was either going to turn out with amazing results, or appalling results.

Castiel squinted at Charlotte, but upon meeting Dean’s stern gaze, he opened his mouth and nodded his head once in understanding. “Yes, that would be me.”

“Splendid! My own husband’s somewhere around here with our son…” Her eyes grew disturbingly wide as she thought of something that apparently really tickled her. “Would you by any chance be interested in a meal in the dining room?”

Dean and you exchanged a look of concern. “Uh, well, we don’t really have any dinner plans, but…”

“Excellent!” Charlotte again clapped her hands, their discordant sound hitting you like a slap to the face. “You simply must join us for dinner, then! Mark made our reservations yesterday, but he accidentally put us down for a table to seat eight rather than just four.” She let out a haughty laugh as though she’d just told the funniest joke in the history of comedy. “Your brother is welcome to come along as well.”

That just about settled it: you were being invited to dinner with a filthy rich vampire lady and her family against your will. You were really starting to see why Dean had been so salty about the whole “rich people aboard a cruise” stereotype now that you were witnessing the personification of it live.

“Our table is number sixty-seven,” Charlotte informed you. “I’ll be waiting!” She waved her hand up and down as she retreated into the crowd, disappearing from sight in seconds. What had you just been roped into?

You found Sam trapped in a conversation with an elderly woman that for whatever reason was making him extremely uncomfortable, and he seemed exceedingly grateful for the excuse to leave her behind and regroup with you.

Dean smirked at Sam as he approached. “Man, Sammy, you can’t go anywhere without a cougar jumping on you, huh?”

“Shut up,” Sam was clearly not in the mood. “Please tell me one of you has had better luck with this whole ‘socializing with the upper class’ thing.”

“I dunno about that,” Dean shook his head. “We, uh…might be having dinner with some rich lady and her family tonight, by the way.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s a vampire,” you added, only half-joking. “Also, our ‘cover’ is currently active, so be mindful of that.”

Worn out already after only a brief session of socializing, Sam just blinked, nodded his head, and accepted all of this on the spot. Bless him, he really needed a break; as did all you, really. Not that you were going to get one with dinner coming up.
After taking a brief breather in the lobby of the nearby dining room, you navigated through the bustling activity in the classy restaurant towards table sixty-seven, where you found Charlotte, a man who you assumed was Mark, and their son. Mark was average looking aside from being tall enough to almost give Sam a run for his money, a very distant and spacey fellow; you supposed that he’d have to be in order to marry someone like Charlotte who could talk your ear off without hardly having to say a word. He was the exact opposite, literally not saying a word in the entire time you were in his presence and instead observing and introspecting the entire time.

As for BJ…you got wave upon wave of negative vibes from him the first time you saw him, warning flags flying up in your head. He was small, no more than twelve years old, you estimated. Something about the way he looked at everyone with scheming, judgmental eyes and the way he kept purposefully turning the bowtie of his suit so that it was crooked set you on edge. This was the kind of kid that even adults, of which you were now one, should be afraid of; the dreaded spoiled troublemaker. You knew his type, and you did not care to be within ten feet of them, let alone share a dinner table with one of them.

“You must be Sam!” Charlotte exclaimed, shooting up from her place and clasping a startled Sam’s hand in her own, shaking it with determination. “I met your brother and his husband and daughter earlier.”

Sam just nodded, still trying to take in what was happening as you lowered yourselves into your seats, Dean making sure to take a space next to Castiel to keep up the illusion of their marriage. After introductions were made and promptly shoved aside, Charlotte set to once again sucking the life force out of everyone in what you were growing more convinced with each word she said was genuinely a vampiric way. The Winchesters may very well have a case on this trip after all…

Your waiter stopped by, mercifully giving you a break from Charlotte’s chattering. She and her family all ordered appetizers that you couldn’t pronounce, and feeling pressure to appear normal in some semblance, you asked for the only one on the menu that you could confidently pronounce: “honey pineapple.” This turned out to just be a fancily-arranged plate of pineapple slices and strawberries, which you were fine with, except that you felt silly and out of place eating what was essentially a fruit plate while the people across from you sampled refined mixtures of high-end ingredients and exotic dishes. At least it was some darn good pineapple.

Another few minutes of torturous oversharing about Charlotte and her entire family line’s history compacted into a neat, seemingly rehearsed package of information passed, and she finally allowed your side the chance to speak. She nodded excitedly to Dean and Castiel, who were sitting directly across from her. “So, how did you two meet?”

Dean’s mouth was occupied by a glass of water, so Castiel casually answered for him. “Dean stabbed me in a barn.”

Dean nearly choked on his drink, the ice in his glass clinking as it shook and sprayed droplets everywhere. Playing it off as a laugh in a not-so-smooth recovery, Dean hastily grabbed his napkin from where the waiter had laid it in his lap to clean up the mess of liquid that had spilled on his suit.

“Ah-ha! Ha!” he forced out more laughter. “Good one, Cas. He’s got a real good sense of humor, this one.” A nervous grin split Dean’s wavering face as he replaced his napkin.

Oblivious to the debacle, Charlotte let out another stereotypical rich white lady laugh and lightly waved a hand. “Do tell the real story, then; it’s bound to be marvelous.”

Dean’s eyes darted between Sam’s and Castiel’s, desperately begging for support where they wouldn’t be able to provide any. “Well, ah, it’s not much, really,” he finally got out. “What Cas
meant to say is, I almost *accidentally* stabbed him in a barn.” Dean paused. “Because…I worked on a farm.” He flinched as bit as he lost control of the fabricated story. “And…and I almost accidentally stabbed him, like I said.” Another pause. “With a pitchfork.” Pause. “Because, I worked on a farm, and those are on farms.” I could literally see him sweating at his suit collar. “Yeah.”

On the far side of the table, Sam hid part of his face, whether to conceal laughter, embarrassment, or both, you couldn’t tell. And Dean said that *you* needed improvisation lessons…

“That’s…one way to meet somebody,” Charlotte replied politely, puzzled but amused by Dean’s excuse for a story. “Just for curiosity’s sake, how does almost accidentally stabbing someone with a pitchfork lead to romance, hmm?”

Somehow, that question petrified Dean even further, which seemed impossible with how he’d all but turned into an internally-screaming statue during his lie gone wrong. “I, uh, well…”

“I saved Dean from Hell,” Castiel swooped to the rescue in the only way he knew how, which was literally just telling people what happened no matter how crazy it sounded. Luckily for all of you, this particular truth didn’t sound nearly as crazy when taken in a more normal context.

“Oh my…” Charlotte regarded Dean with pity. “Would you mind sharing with us the details of your ‘hell?’”

The prying way Charlotte phrased it made it sound like Dean didn’t have a choice but to comply. He tried to calm himself down and think more rationally, constructing a generic response. “There was some rough stuff going on in my life. I made some bad choices, got tangled up in some stuff I shouldn’t have-”

Charlotte gasped. “Drugs?!” she guessed, sounding just a little too excited by the potential scandal to be listening to such a sensitive topic.

Understandably, Dean blanked. “Y-yeah, sure. Drugs.”

You had no doubt that Charlotte would have pried for more details if BJ hadn’t chosen that moment to break his silence from where he sat between his parents. “Are you guys married?” he asked Dean and Castiel in a loud, demanding voice.

Dean and Castiel exchanged an indecipherable look, Dean managing a patient smile when he addressed BJ. “Y-yeah, we are.”

BJ’s face twisted in disgust. “Eww! That’s…*gay*!” He said it like it was most revolting thing on the planet earth.

You got the sudden urge to smack him upside the head and wipe that bratty look right off his face, but thankfully, you didn’t have to, because Castiel intervened.

“Why yes,” Castiel fixed BJ with a blank stare and spoke in an equally blank voice. “It is rather homosexual of a man to marry another man. You have excellent observational skills for someone your size.”

You couldn’t be sure if this was Castiel’s attempt at snarky sarcasm or just Cas being Cas, but in any case, it was a glorious moment if only for the look on the kid’s face.

BJ was silent for the rest of dinner, a fact that you were very thankful for. Unfortunately, you couldn’t say the same for his mother, and by the time your entrees had been delivered, you were literally about to pass out from having your ears talked to the brink of death.
Your group’s exit from the scene was made in a hurry, all of you silently concurring that you needed to eat as quickly as possible to get away before one of you passed out on the table. You left with polite “goodbyes” and final handshakes, taking your leave with obvious haste; not that you cared at that point, because for your part, you were utterly done with socializing for the night.

Even Castiel seemed sufficiently drained from the evening’s events, alerting you that he was going to go up top and stretch his wings out again to find some solitude and promising Dean that he’d return in under a half hour. At that, you smelled opportunity poking its friendly face in your general direction, promising you that perfect time you’d been waiting for since your eyes had first opened that morning. Time alone with Dean after a day like today was just what you needed to set phase one of your plan into action and get the thing started.

Sam went to bed the second he was back in the room, so tired that he didn’t even bat an eye when you followed Dean into his own room rather than yours. Dean was so tired that he either didn’t notice or didn’t care that you’d gone after him, letting out a relieved “phew” the second he was behind a closed door.

“Man, I thought we’d never get away from her,” he complained. “That lady was insane. I think you might’ve been right on the money about her being a vampire, I’d believe it.” He huffed an exhausted laugh. “I mean, who the heck names their kid after the abbreviation for a-”

“So Dean,” you started out, nervousness clawing at your chest as you jumped right into executing your carefully-laid plans. “You did a pretty good job with keeping up our cover tonight.”

Dean looked at you in disbelief. “Huh, really? ’Cause I thought I blew it out there multiple times. I was just off my game, I guess, but-”

You plowed on, refusing to let your fear halt you as you were so tempted to allow it. “No, I mean, you really messed up with the barn story and all that, but…I’m talking about the subtle things. You did such a good job with your role that even I started to believe it. It was all small stuff, and it was barely there, but I noticed it. You did well with pretending to be Cas’s husband…” You narrowed your eyes. “Too well.”

Something in Dean’s expression faltered. “What…what do you mean?”

You threw your hands up in exasperation, trying to lay it on as thick as you could. “I mean, you actually were acting like you were married to him! You barely even had to try!”

Bemused, Dean raised his eyebrows at you. “Really? ’Cause it felt like it took a whole lotta effort on my part with very little in the way of returns. I don’t know what the heck you’re talking about.” He began to stride towards the bathroom, intending to get ready for bed you assumed, and you could feel your chance slipping away.

“W-wait!” you called after him, and he sighed tiredly and stopped. You had to think of something; you’d been grasping at a single, pathetic straw so far, but it was all you could think of to get the ball rolling in the direction you wanted it. If you could just recover from this rocky start to the conversation you knew you had to have in order for this work…

“W-wait!” you called after him, and he sighed tiredly and stopped. You had to think of something; you’d been grasping at a single, pathetic straw so far, but it was all you could think of to get the ball rolling in the direction you wanted it. If you could just recover from this rocky start to the conversation you knew you had to have in order for this work…

“My intuition,” you realized, barely even registering that you’d said it out loud but rolling with it. “I…I made a connection based on what I saw, and it was one that was a long time in the making.”

That wasn’t even a lie or anything; you really had picked up on subtle cues between the two of them throughout dinner that night, from the softness in the way they looked at each other to the way Castiel’s wings ruffled with repressed delight every time he was referred to as Dean’s “husband.”
You couldn’t read Dean’s expression very well after you aired that, but he slowly and methodically closed the bathroom door and faced you squarely. “Alright, miss intuitive, what is it? Because I am this close,” he held out his thumb and pointer fingers barely touching each other, “to falling asleep right here on this floor and waking up with a sore neck.”

This was it. This was the moment. You took a deep breath to steady yourself, keeping foremost in your mind what the eventual results of this endeavor would be to keep your doubts and anxiety at bay. “I just…wanted to ask my last question, from our bet.”

Something akin to relief flickered over Dean’s face, and he rubbed a hand over his drooping eyes. “Oh boy, alright. That’s fine, give me your worst.”

“Remember, you have to answer truthfully, okay?” You wanted to reiterate, because you were relying on getting as much transparency from Dean as you could possibly have with this question. “I know, I know, just get it over with. I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, yadda, yadda, yadda.” Dean waved a hand to indicate that he wanted you to hurry up.

You took another deep breath. This would just have to be like ripping off a band-aid, hopefully for both you and him. “Dean…are you in love with Cas?”

You were impressed with Dean’s ability to keep a straight face considering the very non-straight implications of your question, but that did make it frustratingly difficult to read what was going on with him. After a few moments that dragged on of you and him at a standoff, Dean turned back towards the bathroom. “No, can it. Bet or not, I am not having this conversation.”

You sputtered. “Y-you promised!”

“Okay then, I’ll answer,” Dean absently said as he opened the door and stepped into the bathroom. “No, I’m not. Easy as pie, you wasted your last question.”

“You’re lying!” you insisted.

“How would you know?” his voice echoed from inside the bathroom, mingling with the sound of running water in the sink.

“I just…do!” This was not going as you’d hoped, but you could still salvage it. “I can read people, Dean, and aside from your overt enjoyment and usual charisma, I’ve been getting nothing but vibes of denial from you this whole trip whenever Cas is so much as in the same room as you!”

Evidently, Dean didn’t have anything to say to that, because you heard the sound of brushing teeth from down the hall. Your hope was fading, but not dead yet. There had to be a way to get him to just…talk. You had to use more force.

You let every bit of desperation you felt trickle into your voice. “Please, just…at least make an effort to explain yourself, if nothing else. If you’re not in love with Cas, then what are these vibes I’ve been getting from you for days now? Why did you go so far to cast a spell just so that you could see his wings? Why-”

“I don’t know!” Dean’s voice shouted from the bathroom, his task of brushing his teeth apparently abandoned. “I don’t know, okay? That’s my answer: I don’t know.”

Well, that was better than the outright denial you’d gotten earlier. You still had a ways to go, but progress was progress, and if your “forceful” tactics were working so far, you’d have to keep implementing them to ensure your best chance of success. All the same, perhaps it was time that you
“Well, I can’t be certain about you,” you admitted. “But I can at least be positive when I say that Cas is in love with you.”

“And what makes you think that, hmm?” Dean had finally emerged back into the small hall, annoyance and a layer of something more fearful hidden underneath his face.

“I may be no expert on avian communication, but since day one of this trip and even way before that, his wings have been sending a message that’s crystal clear to me.” You put on your best impression of Castiel’s deep voice. “I am madly in love with Dean Winchester but I’m too much of a socially awkward dingbat to know what to do about it so I’ll just quietly hope that he’ll make a move first even though that seems highly unlikely given his tactics of repression and apparent severe allergy to talking about feelings.”

Dean didn’t look impressed. “You got all that from his wings?”

“Some of it was inferred, but yes, I did.”

“Well I haven’t seen any messages of the sort since we cast the spell.” He took a step forward in a bid to pass around you, but you held your ground, blocking the hall to keep him cornered.

“Because Cas stopped sending them as soon as he knew you could see them! He’s nervous, and whether you have feelings for him or not, you should do something about it.” You turned your head to the side, adding under your breath while purposefully ensuring that Dean could still hear you, “Though it’s pretty obvious you do…”

“I heard that,” Dean snapped at you. “Why the hell would you think that?”

Something about the way Dean sounded so incredulous when he said that, so utterly in denial the way he always was, snapped a coil in you that you hadn’t intended to break. “Oh, I dunno, maybe the fact that you’ve been cuddling up to him every single night since this cruise started?”

Dean froze, traces of horror falling into place on his face. “What? N-no, I haven-”

“The walls in these rooms are thin, Dean. I’ve heard every word.”

Dean’s eyes widened in genuine shock as the implications of that hit him.

You stared him down. “Every. Word.”

Based solely on Dean’s expression in that moment, you wondered if you’d gone too far. You hadn’t gone into this intending to reveal that you were aware of his nightly cuddling exploits, but you were getting far more caught up in the heat of the moment than you’d thought possible, swept up in the drama and the release of all your frustrations regarding him and Castiel.

Dean finally seemed to collect himself, at least somewhat, though he refused to look at you. “Why do you care so much anyways?” he said quietly.

You sighed. Time to stitch up this wound before it got infected. “Because I want to see you happy. I want to see all of you happy. You’ve all been through hell, literally and in every other sense of the word, and I just want to see you happy, and…for you and for Cas, I get this overwhelming intuition that you would both be happiest together, and just as strong as that intuition is another that tells me you are both aware of that fact on some level.”
Something about your words smoothed over the shame you’d felt emanating from Dean. His eyes wavered as he stared deeply into the floor, sighed deeply, and at last looked at you again. “…Okay, hypothetically speaking, in a totally nonreal, completely separate from reality in every way scenario, if I was hypothetically for whatever reason in love with Cas, it would never work.”

You just needed to prod a little more. “And why not?”

“Because he’s…” Dean’s hands gestured wildly to the air in front of him, “an angel! A socially inept, dorky little angel in a trench coat who only wants to do what’s right for the world and all for my own sake every time, who makes me fret and freak out every time he puts himself into danger because I’ve lost him too many times, who makes me question myself and my identity every time he so much as blinks in my general direction, and who for some reason keeps coming back to me no matter how much I don’t deserve him because I can’t admit that I lo-”

Dean stopped himself short, but the damage had already been done. He gave you a desperate glance, searching for what you expected was acceptance in your expression, which you tried your best to provide to him.

“Need him,” he corrected himself. “Can’t admit that I…need him…”

He trailed off after that, and you let him do so peacefully. You hadn’t expected the floodgates to break apart easily on this one, but after much effort, there was no doubt that Pandora’s box was now officially open all the way.

Dean swallowed a massive lump in his throat and initiated a staring contest with the ground. “Christ,” he whispered, “you really hit the nail on top the head with this one, miss intuitive.”

Dear lord above, a confession. Just when you were beginning to fear you’d never hear one of those, it arose; even if it was more implied than outright, it still absolutely counted. The floodgates were now, for the most part, finally emptied of their contents. The thing had been set in motion at last. Praise the shipping gods if such beings actually exist for some bizarre reason.

“See,” you coaxed, putting a comforting hand on Dean’s arm, “was that so hard to admit?”

Dean gave you a look that could’ve killed someone not used to being on the receiving end of it. You released his arm and held your hands up in peaceful surrender, backing up a few steps to give him space in the tightly-packed room.

After staring you down for a few seconds, something in Dean’s expression broke and he heaved a shaky breath, making a beeline for the door now that you were out of his way.

“I need a drink,” he muttered as he left the room with a bit too much haste, slamming the door behind him.

Jeez. You knew you’d have to rattle him a bit to make this work, but you didn’t mean to shake him up that bad.

At a loss, you left Dean’s room and glanced down the stretching corridor that made up the sixth deck’s starboard side. You saw no sign of anyone in the entire hallway, and certainly no sign of Dean. Worry pecked at your brain as you wondered to yourself whether there really was a place to get a drink on the ship.

At that moment, you recalled seeing a location marked on a map of deck seven labelled simply as, “bar.” That did not bode well. If Dean got drunk because of you, you were going to feel awful.
Left without anything else to do, you used your keycard to get back into your own room, finding Sam fast asleep on his bed and apparently in a deep enough slumber that your confrontation with Dean hadn’t woken him. Unsure of what to do or if there was anything you could do, you changed and got ready for bed.

At some point during your bedtime routine, you heard the door to Dean and Castiel’s room opening and closing. Brimming with hope, you ran to the wall so you could listen in. It turned out to just be Castiel returning from his stretching, as evidenced by you seeing his wings briefly pass through the wall as he wandered around the room; searching for Dean, you guessed. Guilt settled like a nauseating rock in your gut.

You tried for at least an hour to fall asleep, but this time, even the rocking of the boat and the usual sounds didn’t ease you. Your brain was too active, worry picking out its favorite variety of consequences, those being the worst-case scenarios, and playing brief movie clips of each behind your eyelids as you sought rest that never came. What if Dean got drunk and fell down the stairs? What if he met some other lonely soul at the bar and made a mistake he’d regret in the morning? What if he wandered outside and accidentally fell over the railing and into the Pacific?

A rapping on a door somewhere snapped you back to reality. At first you thought it was on your door, but when you heard the next door down opening, you scrambled out of bed and pressed yourself against the wall, desperate for some closure on Dean’s current status.

“Good evening, sir,” a polite voice you didn’t recognize spoke. “Mr. Winchester here got a little too… ‘tipsy’ at our bar, so I’ve come to personally escort him. I believe he belongs with you.”

Yeah, you have no idea, Mr. Noordam staff person. What you heard next sent your heart racing in your chest: half-awake mumbling of a voice you recognized immediately as belonging to Dean. He was okay, he’d make it back to his room safely after all! But, oops, he was apparently super drunk. You were so ecstatic about proving your worrying, sleepless brain wrong that you couldn’t linger on it by that point, though.

“…Thank you,” a confused Castiel said.

You heard a few stumbling steps and the squeak of a body landing on the bed, followed by a sigh from the Dean deliveryman and the door gently snapping closed.

“What have you done?” Castiel asked, mostly to himself as you heard him lean on the bed. “I was concerned when I failed to locate you in the room upon my return.”

Dean wordlessly mumbled and you heard covers haphazardly shifting.

“Dean…” Castiel said worriedly. “Dean, what are you doing?”

“M’just…Iunno,” the drunken hunter managed.

There was more shifting of sheets, which this time abruptly halted. “Dean, you are highly inebriated,” Castiel scolded. “And this time, it is not due to the effects of my grace.”

“Jus’ wanna…stay close.”

More brief shifting of sheets. “No, Dean, no cuddling tonight; not while you’re in this state.”

Dean made a pouty noise. “Wh’not?”

“Because I cannot sufficiently determine whether it is ‘within reason’ to you as your mental state is
hampered by alcohol.”

“You wan’ consent for cuddlin’?” Dean whined. “C’mon, Cas…”

“No means no, Dean.”

“Oh, don’t use that here, Cas, this isn’…” Dean paused. “I…Immuna throw up.”

You averted your ears from the wall at that point, the last thing you fully heard being Dean all but tumbling towards the bathroom. You grabbed the pillow from your bed to use as a giant makeshift earmuff for what followed, and though it didn’t really work too well, it was better than nothing. After that, Dean was strikingly silent, and judging from Castiel’s lack of response to that other than a sigh, you deduced that the hunter had passed out.

Sheets did eventually rustle again on one side of the room. You figured Castiel had tucked Dean in like the considerate friend he is. No more sheets rustled afterwards, but you did hear what sounded like someone sinking into a chair cushion, signaling that Castiel was more than likely going to sit and keep watch over Dean for the night.

With that ordeal over, you withdrew from the wall and crawled back into bed. Dean drunk on alcohol did not bring the same fun that Dean drunk on angel’s grace did, but you kind of already knew that.

You eventually were taken by the embrace of sleep at sea but were still left wondering if your well-intended actions had done more harm than good.

Chapter End Notes

Oh snap, there be drama! :O Dean, Dean, Dean…y u gotta be in denial, buddy?

Another fun fact no one asked for: Charlotte was inspired by a woman I encountered well outside of Alaska; I saw her and her family in a fancy restaurant in New Orleans! I don’t mean to throw judgement upon the real people who inspired the Perkins family; they seemed quite nice, although I only observed them from a distance.
Because of how abnormally long it took you to fall asleep the night prior, you slept in until just after ten o’clock the next morning. As your mind stirred to wakefulness, memories of last night poked and prodded at your waking brain, stoking a gumbo of crisscrossing emotions. You sure had accomplished phase one of your plan to bring on the thing like you’d hoped, but at what cost?

One night of Dean drinking himself into passing out? In all honesty, it could have been much, much worse. As you allowed a few alternative outcomes to form in your “worst-case scenario generator” that had been hard at work during this trip, you promptly decided that reality was better, if not ideal.

You nearly fell out of bed when the boat made a particularly sharp roll, but you caught yourself on the headboard. Sam, who was laying on his bed and reading one of the books he’d brought with him, took notice of this.

“Hey, good morning,” he greeted with a single wave. “I was starting to think you were never going to wake up. You could give Dean a run for his money for sleeping in.”

Not this particular morning, you thought with dismay, imagining a hungover Dean rolling with the waves clean off his bed. Out loud, you said, “What’s with the waves?”

“We’re back out at sea for the whole day. You slept through an announcement from the cruise director earlier. He said we’re going towards Seward. This is our last full day on the boat.”

Your surprise must have showed on your face, because Sam added, “We’ve been on the sea for a week now.”

Holy crap, really? Had it been a week already? You’d been having such an experience aboard this ship that you hadn’t even thought to keep track of time. That brought up another concern: once you’d left the ship, then what? Where would you go to stay on the move and get away from the genie? The fact that you were literally on the run from a multiversal maniac had completely slipped your mind. Based on your estimation, you all still needed to keep going for as long as you could to keep your genie off your trail.

“Are we…gonna be okay?” Sam broke through your thoughts. “With your genie? Are we away from him yet?”

You wished you could give him a solid answer. “I…don’t know. I-I think we need to keep going.”

“For how long?”

You couldn’t meet his gaze. “I…I don’t have a clue. I’m hoping my intuition will give me a sense of when, but it hasn’t yet.”

Still uncertain but letting the subject drop, Sam got out of bed with a huff and shook his head. “Yeah, alright. I’ll take a look at some options for what to do when we get to Seward. How about some breakfast?”
Happy for the change of subject and the opportunity to get some food, you instantly agreed and got ready in record time, only realizing how hungry you were when images of the buffet that awaited you popped into your head. You chose a simple breakfast this time around, taking a peach, some bread, a donut, and a scalding mug of hot chocolate.

The entire time your eyes scanned over the baskets and trays of breakfast items available, your mind was elsewhere, still worrying over Dean. Was he still passed out on in his bed trying to sleep off what you’re sure would be a killer headache? Or was he up and about, trying to move around and shake off his hangover? Would Castiel help him? God, just what would unfold between Dean and Castiel after last night?

You were overthinking this beyond all reason. You just needed to sit down and enjoy your breakfast.

Little did you know just how difficult that would prove to be, as when you tracked down the table Sam had picked out, you found Castiel already sitting across from Sam waiting for you.

Shaken, you simply waved and sat down next to Sam, focusing on your breakfast and resisting the urge to erupt with questions that you knew would overwhelm the poor angel. Instead, after calmly taking a bite of your donut, you asked in an even voice that contradicted the storm in your head, “Where’s Dean?”

“He’s…” Castiel looked behind him. “…On his way.”

“How is he?” You tried not to sound too concerned so you wouldn’t betray the fact that you were aware of Dean’s less-than-sober condition.

“At present, he is struggling through the aftereffects of copious alcohol consumption. I offered to ease the effects with my grace, but he refuses to let me use it on him again.”

Right on cue, Dean himself staggered over to your table, holding his head in one hand and carrying a tall glass of water in the other, with evidence of several small spills on his sleeve. He took one look at the arrangement of the table, realized that the only available seat left was beside Castiel, and muttered something about punching fate in the gut for its supposed sense of humor.

Now that you knew he was at least up and about, you could relax a bit more and eat your breakfast. There was undeniably a tension that existed between you and him that morning, Dean refusing to so much as glance your way except for when he thought you wouldn’t notice. Whenever he did look at you, it was with hurried, searching determination, more than likely trying to gauge what you were up to. He had a right to wary of you after last night, wondering what your next move might be now that you’d proven what you could do and what your intentions were.

He was probably most afraid of two things from you: 1) that you would once again corner him and force our more of his deepest secrets with the pain of pulling teeth, or 2) that you would choose any moment to climb up on top of the table and divulge the one secret you had already pried from him, proclaiming to the whole buffet, “Dean Winchester is in love with Castiel the angel!”

Despite your raging social anxiety, that second idea was really tempting just to see how he would react, but you would be far better off if I stuck with your plan. Despite the setback from Dean getting drunk, you were still fully capable of carrying out said plan, you realized with glee, feeling your spirits rise for the first time that morning. The thing was still going to happen, just not as soon as you’d hoped.

You still felt bad about indirectly sending Dean in the bar’s direction last night, but now that you were seeing him up and about and could confirm that he was okay aside from an apparent headache,
the guilt weighing on you lifted a bit. If Dean’s method of coping with overcoming his denial was a night of drinking, so be it, you guess that was just the Dean Winchester way. Besides, it was better to do so in the relative safety of a cruise ship populated by friendly, designated delivery people to make sure he got home alright.

Now was when you switched to diplomatic tactics, which you much preferred as they rarely invoked the conflict you dreaded. No more of the force you’d implemented last night would be necessary now that you and Dean had leaped the biggest hurdle in this process, that being getting him to vocalize and admit to himself and someone else the truth about his repressed feelings. With your help and his eventual action, you would get him and Castiel over the precipice and bring on the thing.

As of now, Dean was stuck teetering on the steep edge of that precipice, closer than he’d ever been before, and this time he was locked in. There would be no easy way out for him to back away through anymore. Because of that, the thing was now set in stone, bound to happen; it was only a matter of time. But that certainly didn’t mean you had to sit idly by. You could help speed this process up considerably, because with how long it took Dean to get to this point, lord knows how long it’d take him to get to the next ones on his own, even without his denial.

In actuality, it was apparent to you that Dean was still clinging to the quickly retreating coattails of his evaporating denial. In fact, to add another layer, he seemed to be one level deeper in denial regarding his pre-existing denial, denying that his denial was denying him the ability to deny his denial. You decided to stop following that track of thought there before it got any more convoluted.

In any case, this new layer of denial was of a different type: the first of five stages of grief. The subject of this grief was Dean’s own denial and his ability to use his denial effectively, hence where the double-layered denial confusion arose. Alongside that, Dean was also grieving the platonic relationship he projected having with Castiel to outsiders and his façade of heterosexuality, though that last one had basically been on its deathbed for a while now. And once he moved from stage one of grief to stage two and so on, he would inevitably reach stage five, acceptance, and that was where he needed to be for the thing to happen.

It was through being aware of those stages of grief that you hoped to speed them along and get to the realization of the thing sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, as you were well aware, denial was immediately followed by anger in the sequence. You were not looking forward to that one.

Sam was visibly concerned with Dean’s obviously hungover condition. “Dean? Are you-”

“I’m fine,” he grumbled out without missing a beat. “Rough night, that’s all.”

Making it clear that he wasn’t open to further questioning, Dean chugged the remainder of his water and took to balancing his head in his hand on the table, keeping his eyes low and avoidant of everyone else.

Knowing better than to pry, Sam unwillingly went back to eating his breakfast. The remainder of your time at the table was characterized by definite tension that no one could really place but everyone was aware of. You and Dean were the only ones who truly knew what was going on while Sam and Castiel inferred a general picture.

Finishing off the strained meal, Sam was the first to excuse himself from the table. “I’m gonna go see what I can find for us to do in Seward,” he told you, managing a smile and then scurrying off to do what he did best: research.

For a few more minutes, you silently ate the last of your breakfast while Castiel watched the other buffet patrons and Dean remained with his head down. At some point after your plate was empty,
Castiel cleared his throat and rose from the table.

“I’m…going to go stretch,” he announced, flapping his wings for a few moments before striding out of the buffet and leaving you alone with Dean and the entire weight of the tension that existed between the two of you in that moment. You were not particularly happy about that, squirming uncomfortably in your seat as Dean still refused to look up at you. If nothing else, this would at least be an opportunity to initiate phase two of your plan.

Taking a minute to do some deep breathing in preparation for something you weren’t really all that eager to face, you worked up the will to speak to the hungover man in front of you.

“So, uh…” You fumbled for a friendly, diplomatic topic of conversation, glancing out the doors of the buffet and examining the activities on the outside portion of the Lido Deck for inspiration. “I see a ping pong table outside. You up for a game?”

Dean’s face tightened behind his hand and he tilted it upwards just enough to glimpse you. The bags under his eyes and the challenging expression they held sent a simple message: “Whatever it is, I’m not in the mood.”

Regardless, you pressed on, determined to stay on track with your plan. “I haven’t played ping pong in a long time, so I was just wondering—”

“Are you just gonna pretend that last night didn’t happen?” Dean growled out. “Because I know what you’re up to, missy, and lemme tell you right now, it is not happening.”

You and your intuition begged to differ on that, but for the moment you had a confrontation to deal with. Your priority was to get back on good terms with Dean; only then would your diplomatic tactics be accepted and of any use.

“I haven’t forgotten,” you said carefully. “I just…thought you’d like to smooth things over with a game of ping pong.”

Groaning in annoyance, Dean wiped his hand down the remainder of his face and tried to sit up straight, which you imagine was difficult considering he wasn’t straight himself.

Okay, okay, you’ll stop with the not straight jokes.

“Let me just get one thing straight here,” Dean addressed you.

You literally snorted loud enough for other diners to turn and look at you, which was probably the last response Dean anticipated from you. Okay, nope, you lied, definitely not stopping with the not straight jokes anytime soon.

With Dean giving you a death glare tinged with confusion, you collected myself. “I’m sorry, just…you could not have chosen a worse phrasing for that.”

Right about then Dean got the joke, groaning again, louder this time, and he pinched the bridge of his nose. “Listen,” he leaned forward, putting his palms together on the table and feigning a sweet, businesslike smile. “Whatever you think you’re doing, whatever you think you’re planning in that intuitive little noggin of yours, it’s not happening, plain and simple.” He waved a hand at you. “Whatever you heard from me last night, or whatever information you think you’ve gotten ahold of…” he trailed off, face falling. Switching to a different tactic, he warned, “Just don’t even think about making that information known. You’d do best not to look too deeply into it yourself, actually.”
Well, it’s much too late for that, you thought, but you didn’t voice that to risk upsetting Dean further. Instead, you settled on, “I know what I heard last night.”

“No, you think you know what you heard last night,” Dean twisted it around, trying to play some psychology trick on you that was not going to work.

You decided to take a risk and divulge some extra information. “I don’t mean what you spilled to me. I mean I heard you after you came back to your room from drinking last night.”

Ah-ha. Dean stiffened at that. You’d caught him off guard.

“The walls didn’t magically get any thicker,” you informed him when he had nothing to say. “I heard everything, again.”

Heaving a frustrated sigh, Dean turned away from you, instead staring out the window at the expanse of blue sea. “Whatever you heard doesn’t count,” Dean didn’t even sound convinced of that himself. “I was drunk.”

“And when you’re drunk, you lower your inhibitions and are reduced to your barest instincts. Apparently, those barest instincts told you to stay as close to Castiel as possible, even if he wouldn’t let you.”

“I was drunk,” Dean repeated as though that made a difference.

“And when you’re drunk, you don’t have your denial around to protect you from your feelings.”

“It doesn’t matter!” Dean swung around to face you, annoyance having upgraded to fury at the drop of a hat.

Oop, here comes stage two: anger.

“Feelings or no feelings, or whatever, this is not happening!” Dean insisted, thankfully keeping his volume low enough to not worsen his headache or draw any attention from the people around him. “I’m not gonna…Cas isn’t gonna…we’re not gonna…” Dean’s anger now appeared to be directed at himself and his inability to articulate at that moment.

Deciding to step in and help him, you spoke in a calm, gentle voice. “Even if you were drunk, that doesn’t explain what happened on all the other nights. I mean, my god, the night before last you were petting his wings, no alcohol even remotely required. How do you explain that?”

Dean almost looked like an angry dog, breathing heavy and mouth barely hanging open as he stared you down, either unsure of what to say or refusing to say anything.

“And then there’s Cas,” you continued, trying to soothe his temper while keeping things moving along. “He’s happily accepted all of your affection and even returned it when he knows that he’s able. Did you ever figure out why it was that you were able to stay warm outside in the rain and by that glacier?”

Balling one of his hands into a fist, Dean gave a single, light shake of his head, no longer looking at you.

“That was him,” you told him. “He’s been using his wings to keep you warm. The reason you were so cold again yesterday is because he was afraid after what you told him at breakfast that morning, so he didn’t wrap you up in them.”
Surprise peeked out somewhere among Dean’s remaining anger, a sure sign that you were on the right track. He dared to look up at you again.

“I know this is all a little crazy,” you admitted. “And I understand your anger. But it isn’t going to change anything that’s already there.”

Another few seconds passed as that sank in, Dean looking at you in desperation. Finally, Dean’s face softened and he abruptly fell into the cushioned back of his chair. Suddenly, he looked more like a dejected puppy than a rabid guard dog.

And then we reach stage three: sadness. At the rate you were progressing through these, you might reach acceptance before the day was even over.

Rubbing his face with both his hands and staying put in his chair, Dean mumbled, “Even if there is something there, like I’ve already said, it wouldn’t work.”

“Why?” you tried to sound as gentle as you could, realizing that you sounded exactly like a therapist, which you may as well have been at that point.

“Because…he’s an angel, and I’m just a guy who he, for some reason, cares about.” He uttered a momentary, broken laugh. “Turns out getting to see his wings made that really hit home. They’re like a constant reminder of what he really is. Makes me wonder what his true form would make me think. Even if his wings are…” a dreamy expression overtook his face, but he reeled that in, “awesome, they’re making it more difficult to…”

When he didn’t finish, you did it for him. “Be in denial?”

You took his silence as confirmation. Looks like the floodgates still had some stuff they needed to let out, and although that meant more work on your part, you were content to do however much work it took to see this through to its conclusion.

“If you wanna hear my thoughts,” you said, embracing your role as therapist, “I think that no matter what your doubts may tell you, it would work. Take it from ‘miss intuitive’ herself.”

Dean halfheartedly rolled his eyes at your use of his nickname for you, but didn’t have much else to say, preferring to look out over the water again.

“And just to put your mind at ease,” you assured him, “I promise that this all stays between you and me. Nobody else will hear a thing about it from me, I swear. Not Sam, not Cas; nobody.”

Absently nodding his head and still not looking at you, Dean took an apparent deep interest in the wake generated by the boat below him.

“And also,” you glanced back outside again, “I was serious about that game of ping pong. It might help you feel better,” you offered.

That wasn’t what Dean had been expecting to hear, because it surprised him enough that he actually looked back at you, opening his mouth to say something, closing it, and then muttering a “Yeah, okay.”

Well. That conversation went in several unexpected turns, but in the long run, it ended up being massively productive. Dean had jumped all the way from stage one of grief to stage three of grief, and though he still had yet to let go of the few remaining wisps of the denial he was grieving, he was getting past it.
The outside portion of the Lido Deck was a hub of activity. With no shore to visit, many of the other passengers took to entertaining themselves with the recreational facilities onboard, which on this particular deck included a pool, some bubbling hot tubs, a giant playable chess mat, and two ping pong tables underneath the sheltered corner of the deck.

Little known fact: playing ping pong against someone who is hungover is some of the most fun you can possibly have. You weren’t even all that good at ping pong, but with your opponent, winning each game was a cinch. Nine out of ten times, Dean would miss the ball entirely, instead swinging wildly and whacking into something else instead. One of the few times he did manage to aim the paddle to make contact with the ball, he hit it so hard and so far that it landed in the pool. You never got that one back, as some group of swimming kids honed in on it and took it for themselves.

In the middle of your fourth match, none other than the angelic object of Dean’s affections himself came walking up, having finishing with his daily stretching. Dean tensed and sent you a warning glance, and you sent him a reassuring one in reply.

Castiel squinted at the table and the small net splitting it in two. “What is this?” he wondered aloud.

“Ping pong,” you said, holding up your paddle and the ball to show him, which didn’t seem to ease his confusion in the slightest. “Here, we’ll show you.”

You greatly overestimated Dean’s attention for the demonstration. While you bounced the ball against the table and set to whacking it over the net towards him, it completely passed him by, instead hitting a window behind him, ricocheting, hitting the edge of the table, ricocheting again, hitting a bundle of towels against the back wall, and finally bouncing on the ground until it rolled through a partially-opened window and flew out to sea.

*Well, at least some little fish out there will have a ball to play with now.*

Even after all of that, Dean’s attention was elsewhere. When you saw what had him so distracted, you suddenly understood why: Dean was back to his habit of staring at Castiel’s wings, which were
primed and stretched behind him in the open air. The sun was shining brightly over the ocean, casting its rays down on the entire Lido Deck, and Castiel’s solid black wings were dancing with ripples of deep blues and spots of white from the most intense points of sunlight hitting them.

Right, Dean hadn’t seen Castiel’s wings in proper sunlight yet, only inside the boat or in the shade. With how entranced he already was with the angel’s wings in their normal state, you couldn’t imagine what was going through his mind in that moment.

You cleared your throat and laughed it off. “Well, usually ping pong involves two players, but Dean’s still having a little trouble with his motor functions.”

Concerned, Castiel took a step towards Dean, his wings ever so slightly angling towards the hunter on instinct. “I can still use my grace to rid you of your symptoms.”

“I-I, uh…” Dean blinked rapidly as his eyes stayed locked in place on the wings moving towards him. “O…kay…”

Though at first surprised, Castiel recovered and set to work, placing two fingers against Dean’s forehead. You heard the faint sound of grace swirling around and watched guardedly as Dean’s eyes fluttered closed. The sound abruptly stopped when Castiel retracted his fingers. Dean was left very dazed, but no longer hunched over as much and appearing much more awake.

“Is that better?” Castiel asked with a hint of nervousness as he backed away. At Dean’s unconscious nod, the angel straightened up and turned his gaze towards the other activities on the deck. “In that case, I am going to observe the other recreations in this area. I am curious about the black and white mat with the large statues…”

With that, Castiel wandered off, leaving you barely able to contain yourself and Dean staring after him and his wings the whole way.

When he finally came back to his senses, Dean immediately swiveled towards you and defensively shouted, “I-I didn’t mean to let him do that! With his grace, I mean.”

That certainly wasn’t where your focus was regarding what just transpired. “Clearly. How about those wings, though?”

A raging blush overtook Dean’s face and he tried to conceal some of it by resting his cheek in his hand. “They’re…” his hand fell way and he turned downtrodden. “…awesome.”

Crap, you’d forgotten he was still in stage three, sadness. You didn’t even have time to try to be a good friend by offering words of reassurance, because Sam chose that moment to saunter up with that amazing timing he always had.

“So get this,” Sam jumped right into it, apparently oblivious to any of what had transpired. “I found a company in Seward that offers bus rides to Denali. They’re pretty long, eight hours I think, but it would keep us on the move for another day.” He presented a small stack of printer papers with websites inked on their surface. “Then, I did a little bit more research and found a company that offers motor coach rides from Denali to Fairbanks. That should give us at least two days to ensure we’re still moving.”

“What’s the difference between a bus and a motor coach?” Dean asked his brother.

Sam shrugged. “Not much. One has a bathroom and one doesn’t.”

You were genuinely impressed with what he’d managed to come up with, even going so far as to
print out even the smallest details about the trips. “That…sounds perfect, yeah,” you flipped through the pages.

“Are we settled on that then? I need to know so I can book our tickets or else there won’t be space for us.”

Upon hearing that, you hurriedly handed the papers back to Sam. “Yeah, in that case, go! We need those rides.”

Taking the papers in a bundle, Sam nodded vigorously. “Yeah, got it. I’ll take care of it.”

After Sam had gone back inside, you turned to Dean. “You brother seriously deserves an award for being a class A nerd.”

“That he does,” Dean said with undeniable big brotherly pride.

You voted to abandon ping pong for the time being, and since he’d been humiliated with his string of losses Dean was happy to agree, so you spent some time with Castiel by the oversized novelty chess set. You and Dean spent a few minutes trying and largely failing to explain how to play chess to him, which was made more difficult by the fact that neither of you actually knew how to play chess yourselves. Thankfully, Sam returned a few minutes into your floundering once he’d reserved the seats for your approaching trips, and he was able to give everyone a short lesson on chess 101.

Just for fun, Sam asked if anyone wanted to play a match against him, and only Castiel was brazen enough to take him up on the offer. Sam’s confidence in his practice with the board game faltered with each oversized piece Castiel picked up and moved, and ultimately, Castiel ending up claiming victory.

“I won’t lie Cas, that’s…very impressive for your first game,” Sam told the angel while he reset all the pieces.

“This game is a simple matter of taking every possibility into account and choosing from a limited list of possible actions accordingly,” Castiel explained his strategy.

Sam blinked. “Yeah, but chess has, like, billions of possible combinations,” he objected, before remembering that he was talking to an angel and settling on a congratulatory, “Yep, good job, Cas.”

Having had your fill of amusement with the chess mat, Sam said, “We’ve still got the rest of the day to spend on the boat. Anything anyone wants to do before we have to leave tomorrow?”

Your eyes drifted towards the pool in the center of the Lido Deck, and Sam frowned. “I see what you’re thinking,” he said with disappointment, “but none of us have anything to swim in.”

“Clothing store,” you reminded him with a grin.

Sam nodded his head. “Right…everyone else okay with swimming?”

Castiel titled his head. “I’ve never been in a swimming pool before. Usually my ventures into water are for the purposes of searching for some object on the ocean floor, but I have never gone into water recreationally.”

“Dude, you’ve never gone swimming for fun?” Dean questioned on reflex, then remembered who he was talking to. “Okay, that’s it, we are definitely swimming.”

One quick trip in and out of the snazzy clothing store later and an even quicker trip back to your
rooms to change, you were riding the golden elevator back up to deck nine in nothing but bathing suits. You wondered if you should have purchased coverups for the walk back to the pool, especially when the elevator made a stop on deck seven and opened to reveal an elderly couple. The pair took one look at the scene, exchanged a fearful glance, and then waddled away.

Jeez, old people, they’re just partially exposed human bodies, chill the heck out. But you will admit that Castiel in swimming trunks was disturbing to you in some degree, probably because you’d never seen the guy without his tie on, let alone without a shirt.

The pool was a welcome sight, its clear, chlorine-scented waters still and just waiting to be defiled with waves and splashes. Dean was the first to disturb the tranquility, positioning himself at the deep end and doing an overly-enthusiastic cannonball right into the water. Sam took the more peaceful route of simply descending via the pool ladder like a sane person.

You jumped in from the side of the pool, basking in the feeling of water surrounding you. After a week of being on the water, it was endlessly satisfying to finally be in the water, twirling and paddling and maneuvering in a way that was instinctual to you. You seriously must have been a fish or some other aquatic being in a past life.

“Come in, Cas!” Dean called from the other end of the pool. “The water’s great!”

You double checked to see that Dean wasn’t going to get distracted by Castiel’s wings again, but some cloudy weather had rolled in to partially block the constant stream of sunlight, so there was nowhere near as much to see on the angel’s wings. You hoped for Dean’s sake that it stayed that way.

“You should jump in, Cas!” you suggested. “It’s way more fun that way.”

Watching you quizzically, Castiel walked to very edge of the pool, closed his eyes, held out his arms and wings, and proceeded to faceplant right into the water’s surface in one of the loudest belly flops you had ever witnessed in your many, many years of swimming.


Thankfully, it did not hurt in the slightest since Castiel was an angel, and he bobbed back up to the surface with a blank expression that made you laugh so hard you almost went under the water.

You spent a solid two hours in that pool, apparently intimidating everyone else so much that no one else decided to get in the water with you. Sam was swimming laps back and forth between the shallow and deep ends like the athletic moose man that he is, while Dean initiated a brief splash fight with you that escalated into a war when you discovered a bin of water guns at the pool’s edge. It was nice to be having fun with him again, all of the conflict having apparently thawed between you after a day of opening up and just having a good time to forget your troubles. Castiel simply waded around the perimeter of the pool, testing out his ability to stay afloat when the depth was too much for him to reach and getting caught up in your water war more than a few times.

After surrendering under the pressure of Dean’s superior collection of water guns, you dug a mask out of the bin of pool supplies and dove under the water, enjoying the freedom that came with being able to submerge yourself and swim most anywhere you wanted.

It was during what must have been your hundredth time breaking through the water’s surface and back into the air that you noticed Castiel experimentally waving his wings through the water, creating swishing whirlpool formations and waves. He must have decided to make them corporeal to feel the water on them.
The angel spent a minute messing around like this, but eventually had enough and lifted them grandiosely out of the pool and above his head. They were dripping water everywhere like a concentrated raincloud, their feathers shimmering and clinging to each other as dewdrops of water rolled off them. The sun of course saw its chance to make a magnificent sight even more magnificent, peeking out from behind the cloud cover to shine down, intensifying the blue sheen on Castiel’s wings and making every drop of water on their surface glimmer like diamonds amidst coal.

You looked across the pool at Dean, who was open-mouthed and staring intently at Castiel like his life depended on it.

*Dear lord, you thought to yourself, someone please help this poor bisexual boy.*

Then you remembered that, oh yeah, you were a someone who was willing and, in theory, able to help him. You were already indirectly helping him through your plan, so a bit of closer help couldn’t hurt, right? It would be the perfect chance to use more of your diplomatic tactics.

You swam across to the opposite side of the pool where Dean was still hypnotized by the sight of Castiel’s wings. You made a show of lightly splashing Dean back to his senses with a flick of your sopping fingers. He wasn’t terribly happy with your splash attack, but didn’t say anything.

“Okay, here’s the deal,” you said, trying to approach this from a business angle in the hopes of furthering your chances of success. “I know you’re pining for Castiel like nothing else; we’ve established that. And even if I am a girl with literally no romantic experience whatsoever and only just recently became a qualified ‘adult,’ I am offering you my help.”

You’d lost Dean the second the word “pining” had left your mouth. “I’m sorry, what?” he shook his head in befuddlement, sending water flying in a ring around him.

You decided to try approaching it more casually. “I’m volunteering to be your wingman! Or, winggirl- wingperson? Oh, whatever. You get the idea.”

Somewhere in the middle of what you’d been saying, Dean’s eyes had drifted back to Castiel’s drenched, spread wings of their own accord. You had to snap your fingers to draw Dean’s attention back to you.

“In this case,” you smirked, “the ‘wing’ part of the title is more literal.”

Dean just groaned and sank a little further into the pool, only keeping his eyes above the surface as he tried to hide his blush underwater. You were tempted to laugh, but then you noticed how miserable Dean looked, tapping into whatever Winchester gene it was that allowed for the use of puppy dog eyes. You sighed out and took on a more serious tone.

“Listen,” you told him gently, sinking closer to his lower level in the water. “I know you’re bummed out, but you don’t have to wallow in sadness. I’m gonna help you! I’m your winggirl now!”

That didn’t appear to have any immediate uplifting effect on Dean other than him shifting so that his entire face was above water. He looked at Castiel out of the corner of his eye, then shut his eyes tight before addressing you. “Do you really think that there is even the slightest chance of-”

“I do,” you said before he could finish, looking him right in the eye with a somber expression to show him that you meant it. “And that’s why I’m going to help. All you have to do is follow my instructions.”

Slowly but surely, Dean shifted his weight and a distant brightness lifted his features, so subtly that only someone who was really paying attention would notice it. “Okay then, winggirl, if I follow your
instructions for a while, will you stop bugging me about this?”

And there it was: stage four, bargaining. You’d come a long way in the short time you’d had, and now there was just one last level to reach before the wondrous thing came to be.

“Right,” you clapped your hands together, accidentally catching water between them and forming a split-second geyser that hit you both in the face. “S-sorry, uh…anyways, let’s start with something simple: invite Cas into one of the hot tubs with you.”

“…Why?”

“Because hot tubs are romantic, I don’t know! All steamy, and hot, and…tubby…”

Dean facepalmed. “Whatever, I was thinking of getting in a hot tub anyways. I’m starting to get cold in this pool.”

You gave him a thumbs-up. “Good, good. You ask him, and I’ll wait until you’ve both made it into one of the tubs to join you.” You paused, putting a finger to your chin. “That’s what wingpeople do, right? Stick around to advise in the wooing?”

By the time you’d asked that out loud, Dean had already left you to swim towards Castiel. Mercifully for poor, wing-infatuated Dean, Castiel had made his wings incorporeal again and the cloud cover had returned for the time being, so there wasn’t nearly as much to get distracted by. You watched him talk with Castiel for a brief while, the angel eventually turning to look at one of the nearby hot tubs and nodding at Dean. The pair then climbed out of the pool together and walked to one of the tubs, Dean in particular hurrying as the cold air hit his damp skin.

You let them slip into the bubbling brew of foam and chlorine before exiting the pool yourself and going after them, also making haste to escape the cold. The hot tub was nice, really nice. Dean apparently agreed with you, reclining as far as he could on the tiled seat attached to the tub’s wall.

“Ah, I really need to figure out how to install one of these in the bunker,” Dean sighed out.

“The warmth is rather enjoyable,” Castiel commented.

Sensing an opportunity, you poked Dean’s arm to get his attention. He looked a bit annoyed at his relaxation being interrupted but looked to see what you wanted anyways.

You pointed a finger just barely out of the foam towards Castiel, mouthing the word “flirt” emphatically at Dean. He gave you the look of a man who was approximately 1000% done, but remembering his bargain with you, took a steadying breath and turned to Castiel.

“The…warmth isn’t the only enjoyable thing in this tub,” Dean pieced together, yet again showcasing his superb improv skills. You stuck a hand out at him to say, “what the heck was that?” and he shrugged helplessly back at you.

“Yes,” Castiel agreed, oblivious. “The bubbles are quite enjoyable as well.”

When Dean didn’t say anything else, you poked him again, harder this time, and he relented. “I meant you, Cas, as in you’re enjoyable.”

Castiel smiled warmly at Dean. “Thank you, Dean. I find you quite enjoyable as well.”

You legitimately couldn’t tell if that was Castiel’s way of flirting back or just him being his dorky, romantically ignorant self, but you took what you could. Clearly, you were a highly underqualified
winggirl, but it wasn’t like Dean had anyone else around to fill that role for him.

Since you were genuinely enjoying the hot tub, you figured Dean deserved a chance to as well, so you left him without any further instructions for few minutes. The next time you poked him, he looked as though he’d been expecting it and had prepared himself accordingly.

This time, you gestured to Castiel, then to Dean himself, then held out both your palms facing Dean. You slowly inched one towards the other until they were right up against each other, hoping that your pantomiming would get across your intent.

It apparently did not, because Dean watched the whole thing with absolutely no comprehension. You overdramatically rolled your eyes and whispered to him in a voice that could barely be heard over the brewing of the tub, “get closer to him.”

Although his resulting expression said he would do no such thing, he did scooch a couple times to the right to get closer to where Castiel was sitting stoically on the tiles. Dean looked back at you for reassurance, and you made a “go on” motion with your hands, shooing him away.

One more scooch resulted, then another, then another. He was close enough now that the two’s shoulders were almost touching. You gestured for Dean’s attention, and once you’d caught it, mimicked the motion of someone putting their arm around another person. Though momentarily frightened upon seeing this, Dean let out a breath through clenched teeth and raised his arm nearest to Castiel out of the water.

For whatever reason, Castiel’s left wing twitched and shifted ever so slightly in the water. Once Dean caught sight of this, he very abruptly halted his move and sank his arm back below the water. He was skittish as a kitten around those wings.

Just as you were about to motion for Dean to try again, something happened that left you in shock: that wing that had been twitching absently, as though it had a mind of its own, extended and rose until it was wrapped around Dean’s back. Dean basically turned into a terrified-out-of-his-wits statue.

Well, it was the reverse version of what you’d been aiming for, but it still worked.

At least until Dean finally unpetrified his neck enough to turn and look at the offending wing that held him. Only then did Castiel seem to realize what had happened, his wing twitching again and scurrying to retract from Dean.

“I-I’m so sorry,” Castiel rushed to apologize, stirring up wake in the tiny tub as he shifted his wings to be as far away from Dean as possible. “I didn’t mean for…my wings…I didn’t take notice of your closeness, and my instincts…”

Dean’s face softened, but he didn’t make a move to get any closer to Castiel. “It’s…fine. It was an accident.”

Castiel appeared relieved to be off the hook, but did plant himself further away from Dean to create a gap between them and reduce the risk of contact that he believed would make Dean uncomfortable.

Darn. So much for that plan. Operation “Cuddles with a Live Studio Audience” would have to wait until later to be executed in full.

There wasn’t time for you to devise or test out any other plans, because Sam came to find you and let you know that the pools were closing. You hadn’t realized that you’d been in the water that long, but you reluctantly pried yourself away from the hot tub and made a beeline for the towel rack to bundle up and dry yourself off before you got hypothermia.
It took a lot of convincing from Sam to coax Dean out of the hot tub, but he did eventually leave the tiny heated pool behind, grabbing too many towels as he herded everyone back inside towards the elevators and your rooms. Once everyone was properly clothed and back to normal body temperatures, you came to the conclusion that dinner was a must and returned to the Lido Deck for the buffet.

Since this was going to be your last meal onboard the Noordam, you wanted to make it count, so you went for fancier options than you normally would, including an artistically-arranged plate of salmon tartar with the most thinly sliced rolls of cucumber you’d ever laid eyes on, a sophisticated mashed potato mixed with spices, and a slice of exotic rainbow trout.

By the time you had everything arranged on your plate, you had to admit that it looked kind of over-the-top, so to balance it out you took a single slice of white sandwich bread from a basket and added it in. Nothing could look overly fancy with a slice of plain white bread alongside it.

On your way back to the table, you ran into Dean with a plate of steak and some chard that Sam had convinced him to try. You walked back to your table together, where Castiel was sitting by himself beside the window. The deep blue of the ocean perfectly complemented the pure black of his wings. You heard Dean take in a steadying breath beside you and patted him on the shoulder.

“Alright, take a seat next to him,” you told him, your role as winggirl still going strong.

Not even trying to act annoyed, Dean just strode over to the table and planted himself in the seat right beside Castiel, managing a smile at the angel before cutting into his meal. You sat across from Dean in the event that you needed to offer him further instruction, which you had a feeling that you would.

Dinner passed slowly, all of you taking the time to enjoy your complimentary upscale meal for what would be the last time. You consistently found your gaze drawn towards the sight outside the window of the great big blue, your home, your safety, and your cradle. You would be sad to leave this ship behind, but provided that things turned out fine after this trip was over, there was always the possibility of taking another cruise like this one day.

Looking at your group sitting at the table, satisfied, relaxed, and at peace, you felt a sense of rightness that you hadn’t in many months. These three had basically sacrificed their shot at any semblance of a normal life to be heroes, and here they were, finally getting their much-deserved vacation away from the insanity that was their hunter lives. They all deserved better, so much better, you thought, and for once they appeared to be truly at ease and, generally speaking, happy. They were able to enjoy each other’s company and jokes and history without the weight of the world added to all that. You were happy for them, truly and deeply feeling their contagious positivity, and were realizing more and more with each passing minute that your decision to purchase those cruise tickets was easily your best split-second decision of the entire trip.

As always, the dessert counter called to you, and you invited Dean to join you since he’d finished his main course. He followed you up to the selection of sweets available for the night, immediately honing in on one in particular: fresh cherry pie. It did not take even a remote genius to figure out what Dean would choose. You yourself took a ginger mousse chocolate cake decorated with cocoa shavings, strawberries, and whipped cream. As Dean took his first step to return to the table, you stopped him, sensing another opportunity.

“Okay, this has got to be my best idea yet,” you enthused, peering around Dean to ensure that everyone else was still in place at the table.

“Whoop-dee-doo,” Dean sarcastically cheered.
“Your pie?” You glanced at the plate of crusty cherry goodness and Dean nodded. “You gotta share it with Cas. And I don’t just mean cut it in half and put one side on his plate; I mean eat from the same plate, maybe even feed him yourself if you can manage that. It’ll be perfect.”

Dean took one look at the pie, then back at you, and exhaled in a way that you knew meant you were trying his patience. “This is ridiculous,” he mumbled, but he still turned around and made it back to the table, retaking his rightful place beside Castiel and setting the plate down. You hurried after him, trying not to appear too eager, and waited to see what would unfold.

Nervously picking at his pie, Dean kept looking at Castiel to see if he’d ever turn his stern attention away from the ocean outside, but it didn’t seem that the angel would on his own. Dean was too jumpy to make the first move, and so the two were stuck in limbo, creating the paradoxical sight of Dean sitting with a slice of pie waiting to be eaten right in front of him but not so much as touching it.

Figuring that you’d have to wait a while to see anything significant occur, you turned to Sam, who was sitting beside you, and pointed a fork at your dessert. “You have got to get some of this,” you told him. “It’s too perfect; it’s called ginger mousse cake, and…you’re the moose!”

Sam frowned. “That doesn’t even work. Mousse as a term for a dessert is completely different than moose as a term for an animal.”

But you didn’t have time to argue the merits of chocolate puns at his expense, because across the table, something magical was unfolding. While you’d been distracted talking with Sam, Dean had somehow gotten Castiel’s attention and had moved the plate of pie between them. He gave you a nervous glance, and you threw a barely visible thumbs-up his way from just over the table’s edge. Swallowing, Dean stabbed a portion of the pie onto his fork and extended it in front of a very perplexed Castiel.

“I am perfectly capable of consuming food without outside assistance,” Castiel stated, engaging in a staring contest with the fork. Dean was just about to lower the forkful of pie out of the way, but Castiel surprised both him and you by leaning forwards and cleanly taking the bite anyways.

Stunned into silence, Dean watched as Castiel chewed and swallowed the offered pie. “That being said,” Castiel continued, “I do not object to sharing presented sustenance.”

Now that was a show worth waiting for. Fumbling with himself, Dean took another bite of pie for himself, might you add using the same fork, then cut off another piece for Castiel, which the angel gladly took in the same manner he had before. This went on for two minutes until none of the pie remained.

Even Sam silently watched with rapt fascination once he caught on to what was happening, like a scientist watching the bizarre mating ritual of two wild animals. After the final bite was consumed, Castiel surprised both him and you by leaning forwards and cleanly taking the bite anyways.

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Not wanting to risk anymore public displays of affection, Dean stood up from the table. “Alright let’s call it a night,” he gushed, impatiently drumming his fingers on the top of his chair as everyone took their time gathering themselves to leave.

No one said much of anything on the elevator ride or the walk down the corridor to your rooms, a tension of a very different nature having descended upon the group. For once, it was a tension that
you could enjoy for its hilarity and implications rather than anything uncomfortable.

Dean uttered a rushed “G’night” to you and Sam as he entered the safety of his room, Castiel slowly following after. You were dismayed by his quick exit; you’d been hoping to give him some pointers on how to handle the inevitable cuddling situation that arose every night, but you supposed it would have to wait.

Sam was sitting down on the edge of his bed when you entered the room, deep in thought. As soon as you’d closed the door behind you, he asked with genuine curiosity, “Did I miss something that happened with Dean and Cas?”

You smirked mysteriously. “Oh yeah, you saw what happened at dinner. Unfortunately, I’m not at leisure to disclose any information about that at the moment.”

Sam looked genuinely disappointed. “What’s that supposed to mean?” His expression turned to one of unbridled suspicion. “Did you do something?”

“Yeah, but nothing sinister, I promise,” you assured him. “Just…helping along something that was a long time coming.”

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad to see them pulling their heads out of their asses and actually doing something about…” He gesticulated to a brief extent. “But if there’s something fishy going on here with a love potion or another spell—”

“There isn’t, I swear! If I could tell you, I would be gushing right now about what’s been going on, but I’m sworn to secrecy. It’s not my place to decide.” Sam was going to object, but you cut in, “You’ll find out soon. Promise.”

That finally got him to settle down. “Well, as long as they’re happy.” He huffed a genuinely glad laugh. “It’s about damn time, that’s all I’ll say.”

You couldn’t agree more.

Once Sam was certifiably out like a rock in his bed and you were changed, you perched yourself in the usual position by your wall to hear what would transpire tonight. This was bound to be one of the most interesting conversations yet, better even than the one on the first night Dean could see Castiel’s wings.

You had to wait a minute to hear anything other than Dean brushing his teeth and Castiel pacing around farther into the room, but once Dean had stepped out of the bathroom, Castiel spoke up.

“Dean. I…know that officially, my week of requests is now over.”

“What? Oh, right, that…I’d nearly forgotten. That’s done now? Already?”

“It has been a week since you made the promise, so yes, your obligation is now complete.”

Dean whistled. “Wow, a week of doing your bidding. You know, you didn’t request a whole lot from me. I appreciate you keeping it simple, man. Honestly if I had a deal like that with someone I’d have made them do a lot more stuff…’bring me pie,’ and ‘make the bed’ whenever I asked. Can’t say I’d have the same restraint as you, I’d abuse that power…”

A beat passed with no dialogue.

“Are you…planning on sleeping?” Castiel asked hesitantly.
“Duh? I need my four hours. Don’t have the same angel mojo as you to keep me running without sleep. Not that I’d want it, really, because who doesn’t love sleep?”

“I have come to understand the pleasures of laying in the comfort of a bed this past week…” Castiel trailed off shyly. You knew what he was trying to steer the conversation towards, but would Dean catch a clue?

“Speaking of that, I’m gonna be getting to bed now,” Dean said with purpose, and you heard footsteps advancing towards the bed on the far side of the room. “Four hours and all that…” Was it just your imagination, or did Dean sound nervous?

“I was wondering-” Castiel tried, but Dean cut him off.

“Wondering? Wondering. Wondering is good, yeah. You should…take a seat and do your wondering there, that’ll be more comfortable than just standing all stiff over there. You’re gonna make me get sore feet just watching you.”

Covers rustled on one side of the bed, and Castiel tried again. “Is there any chance-”

“Of rain tonight? No, I don’t think so, but then again, we’re on the ocean so who knows. We’ll stay dry in here, don’t worry.”

More determined rustling sheets, and one more desperate attempt from Castiel. “Dean, I just want to know-”

“What love is?” Dean inhaled at the song lyric he’d reflexively tacked on the end Castiel’s statement. “I. Mean. That’s a song. I didn’t mean. Uh, yeah.” You could literally hear his fearful swallow. “You should listen to it sometime.”

There was a final sound of frantic shuffling blankets and hurried settling, Castiel sheepishly giving it a final go with a quiet, “Dean-”

“Yeah g’night Cas.”

Silence. Dead, unbearable silence that settled like an all-encompassing void. No, this wasn’t right, this is not how this was supposed to play out! You knew you should have made a better effort to talk Dean through the cuddling situation; not that he’d have let you, with how resolute he seemed in not letting Castiel get so much as a word out about the matter.

The only other sound that broke the void of physically painful silence was a defeated, heartbreaking sigh from Castiel followed by him sinking into his room’s single chair, most likely to sulk in that brooding way he had.

This was absolutely, one hundred percent, completely and utterly unacceptable. As Dean’s winggirl, you were ashamed of him, but as his friend, you felt sorry for him. His dismissal and purposeful ignorance of what Castiel was so obviously trying to ask him for was born from a place of fear, which you could understand after what all he’d been through since last night. After a whole week of going along with Castiel’s requests, he was suddenly afraid to continue now that’d he’d progressed through nearly all the stages of grief. He had a right to be afraid, but you longed to help him overcome it and attain the happiness he deserved.

But how were you to fulfill your duties as his winggirl and communicate with him when there was a wall between you? A hushed idea whispered to you somewhere in your brain, and though at first you wanted to set it aside as stupid, you realized it was really the only tool you had at your disposal.
You raised one hand, your palm flat and facing the wall, and lightly slammed it down on the wallpaper and hard, hollow framework of the boat underneath.

_Thump._

The only results you got from that were barely audible stirrings among the blankets, but that was enough of a promising sign to warrant continued action. You hit the wall again, slightly harder this time.

_Thump._

That time you definitely heard something moving in the sheets, but it settled after a moment or two. You hit the wall again, twice in succession.

_Thump thump._

You were rewarded with a groan of annoyance from Dean, followed by heavily rustling sheets. You had to keep this going.

_Thump thump thump._

“Oh my god,” Dean breathed out in irritation. “Someone, somewhere, is having just a little bit too much fun tonight.”

Ew. That was not at all the impression you were intending to convey. Regardless, you tried again, hitting the wall even harder this time.

_Thump!_

Releasing an outright growl, Dean sat up in bed. “Where the hell is that coming from?” he asked, borderline livid at his sleep being interrupted.

“I believe it is emanating from Laura and Sam’s room,” Castiel calmly informed Dean.

“What the-” he stopped short. You took the opportunity to hit the wall again now that you potentially had his proper attention.

_Thump thump!_

No one said anything for a few tense moments. Then, Dean inhaled sharply. “Oh, no. I know what’s going on.” He leaped out of bed and took a step closer to the wall. “It’s little miss intuitive,” he told Castiel. “And if she’s listening, I have a message for her: it’s not happening.”

You gave the wall an indignant thump at that.

_THUMP!_

“Yes, real mature,” Dean commented with snark. “What, you gonna try to keep me up all night ‘til I cave to your demands?”

That…actually wasn’t necessarily a bad idea. The thought of using your wall-thumping technique as a weapon hadn’t even occurred to you; you’d only considered it to be a method of communication. Way to be your own downfall, Dean.

_Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!_
“…Wait, seriously?” Dean asked as the thumping continued. “Oh, c’mon, I was kidding! That’s a stupid idea!”

To reiterate how serious you were about it, you picked up the rhythm and volume.

*Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump Thump*

Dean just let out a muffled groan of disbelief and bubbling frustration, all the while being subjected to your incessant noisemaking. “This is my life. This is what my life has come to.”

*Thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump thump-

“Alright, I’ll do it!” Dean exclaimed. “Stop it, stop it, I’ll do it!”

You immediately halted your thumping and put your ear back against the wall, still holding your hand up and at the ready in the event that you needed it again.

“Jeez…” Dean exhaled with relief once the noise ceased. “You know, I’m pretty sure this isn’t sanctioned wingman- o-or, winggirl behavior, or whatever.”

You thumped the wall again, quieter and just once this time.

*Thump.*

“Please don’t start up again,” Dean halfheartedly begged. “I’m doin’ it, just gimme a minute…but you’d better not eavesdrop when I do, you understand?”

Not sure of how else to convey your unwilling agreement, you thumped the wall again.

*Thump.*

“…I don’t know if that means yes or no, but at this point I can’t really be bothered to care.”

“What is going on?” an extremely befuddled Castiel finally spoke up.

Dean exhaled a shaky breath. You heard a couple of footsteps away from your wall. “So, miss intuitive over here thinks I need to…do something.”

Way to get to the point, Dean. You were tempted to hit the wall again, but you figured it would only cause more confusion so you kept your hand in place.

“That something being…?” Castiel questioned.

“I’m supposed to…” Dean steeled himself as he tried to force out the next word. “C…cud…”

*Cud? As in chew cud? You aren’t a cow, Dean, get on with it! I believe in you, keep your eye on the prize and get what you want and deserve!*

With another intake of breath, Dean forced out the word “Cuddle” in a rushed exhale. There was a brief silence in which you could picture with vivid clarity Castiel doing his head tilt.

“Cuddle?” Castiel repeated, a rising note of hope in his voice. “I…I was attempting to ask earlier, but…”

“I was being an ass and didn’t let you speak, yeah, I know,” Dean ground out. “Sorry about that.”
“Is it…within reason for me to ask that of you? Even after my week of requests is over?” Castiel wanted to make sure, the sweet angel.

“I’m kinda the one asking…you, actually,” Dean observed nervously. “So what about you?”

Even without seeing his face, you could tell Castiel was thrilled. “I am completely okay with that so long as you are,” he answered without hesitation.

“Okay then,” Dean said in a tight, high-strung voice. You wished he would let go of his stress, but he was sure to lose the pressure this was apparently putting on him by the time he actually engaged in the eventual cuddles.

You heard Castiel standing up from his chair and walking across the room. “Would you prefer that my wings be corporeal or incorporeal?”

“I…get a choice?” Dean seemed incredulous.

“Of course. This is as much for your comfort as it is for mine, so you have the option. Either way is completely fine with me…t-though,” Castiel stuttered with uncharacteristic nervousness, “if I am being honest, you being able to pet my wings was…extremely nice…”

God, you could literally imagine the blush that must have put on poor Dean’s face. “C-corporeal, then,” he decided a bit too quickly.

And then at last, there was that familiar rustling and settling of sheets that you’d been waiting to hear. You were beginning to think you’d never get to hear that.

There were a few seconds of silence as the last traces of settling sound effects dissipated, Dean quietly commenting, “Man, I swear I am never gonna get used to these things…”

“My wings?” Castiel inquired. “Do they…cause you issue?”

“You have no idea…” Dean must have realized how that could’ve sounded to Castiel, so he cleared his throat and clarified. “I mean, I really like ‘em, but I think I like ‘em…too much, you know?”

“…That is very flattering, Dean.” He hesitated, but eventually divulged, “Sometimes I think the same thing about you.”

Oooh snap, crackle, and pop, this was going places.

“Th-that’s…” Dean was at a genuine loss. “F-flattering, like you said.” He allowed himself a nervous chuckle.

A peaceful quiet descended for some moments, neither of the pair apparently knowing what to say to each other after that, which was in all honesty very understandable. Of all their late-night pillow talk, this was definitely some of the most intimate.

Slight shifting emanated from the room, followed by an uncertain Dean asking, “Uh…do you want me to…?”

More shifting, then Castiel contentedly confirming, “Yes, if you don’t mind.”

Then came the sounds of the feathers, ruffling out and about and calming when you heard something begin to comb through them. A steady, soothing rhythm fell into place of feathery petting and contented sighs which must have lasted for five minutes at the very least. You didn’t have a clock on
hand to check, but you wished you did.

At some point, Dean asked in a sleep-worn voice, “You gonna fall asleep on me?”

“No,” Castiel’s voice was unbelievably soft for someone who normally spoke so gravelly and with such power. “I do not fall asleep, but this brings me as close to it as I can be.”

“No sleep? I can’t imagine a life like that. You are friggin’ lucky you have me to help with that, then.”

“I…’have’ you?”

“I, uh,” Dean choked out, his stress returning with a vengeance. “I didn’t mean like, but um, yeah.”

“That was not a very articulate sentence for me to respond to, Dean.”

“Y-yeah, I know.” A beat passed. “Sorry I’m so…bad at this.”

“Whatever are you talking about? You are, in my admittedly unprofessional opinion, an excellent cuddler.”

“N-not that, I mean…talking. I’m bad at talking. About…things…”

“I’d venture to say that I’m the more socially awkward of the two of us.”

Dean laughed that same quiet laugh from the last time they’d properly cuddled. “Damn right you are, you dork.” All the humor in his voice evaporated upon his next statement. “But that’s not what I mean. I mean, like, talkin’ about stuff that matters.”

“You speak of many things which matter greatly.”

“Not the way I’m thinkin’.” There was a brief bout of more shifting. “Tell ya what: I’ll make a deal with you.”

Yup, Dean was definitely still in the bargaining stage.

“A…deal.” Castiel considered. “Do tell.”

“If you keep quiet for the rest of the night, I’ll…p-pet your wings ‘til I fall asleep. How’s that?”

Gosh, he was still too afraid to talk about those dreaded feelings of his. He was still teetering on the edge of that precipice, but he was held back only by the fact that he hadn’t reached stage five, acceptance, yet. He was pushing his luck, making the penultimate move to match his penultimate stage of grief, postponing the inevitable even further.

“I would like that very much,” Castiel happily sighed as he evidently shifted, more feathery sounds filling the room.

“In that case, you’ve got yourself a deal, buddy,” Dean said, sounding rather unabashedly happy himself.

The sounds of feathery petting and peaceful angel hums and sighs resumed, and after sticking around just a few more minutes to ensure that Dean’s “deal” would really hold up and provide no more dialogue for the night, you pulled away from the wall and crept back into bed.

Only when you were fully lying down under the blankets did you realize that you hadn’t even
thought to obey Dean’s instructions about not eavesdropping. *Oops.* Oh well, it was too late by that point anyways. Aside from that, something told you that you would’ve still been able to hear their conversations whether you wanted to or not; these walls were really quite thin.

Dean and Castiel may not have quite been at the **thing** yet, but with the rate things were moving, they were hurtling towards it at a hundred miles an hour. That and the fact that the boat was rocking and drifting heavily from being out in open ocean waters helped you sleep very soundly that night.

Chapter End Notes

Before anyone says anything: yes, I know fully well that I mixed up two of the stages of grief in this chapter. In my defense, I was writing this aboard a cruise ship in the middle of the ocean with absolutely no internet access to fact check myself. TwT Switching Sadness and Bargaining around would have in turn shifted the entire series of events in this chapter and beyond, so I opted to just...leave them be. I actually researched it, and some people consider Sadness and Bargaining interchangeable, so...I guess it works?? *shrugs*

Source for picture of Noordam's Lido Deck:
https://images.r.cruisecritic.com/features/2016/08/noordam-vs-maasdam-2.jpg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwAajOtfNT8
“Alright, up and at ‘em,” Sam’s chipper voice cut through your lovely contented sleep. He had no right to sound as chipper and wide awake as he was, because it was six A.M. in the freakin’ morning.

You buried your head underneath your pillow, burrowing down into a nest of sheets. Rousing you at seven thirty you could deal with, but six in the morning on the dot? You had your limits.

“We have to get moving,” Sam insisted, prodding at your exposed shoulder. “Our bus is leaving in forty minutes. Everyone else is disembarking the ship already.”

Okay, that was admittedly a very valid reason to be waking you that early. Your required hours of rest would have to wait if that was on the line. You forced yourself to come out from under the cottony shelter of your pillow, keeping your eyes clamped shut to protect them from the bright, nearly blinding light flooding the room.

“I’m up,” you announced even if you didn’t sound like it.

“Good, ‘cause we’ve gotta get going,” Sam said as he moved about the room gathering what few items he’d brought. “We have to pack.”

“There isn’t much to pack,” you observed as you tried to rub the sensitivity out of your eyes so you could actually see.

“Luckily, or else we might not have time. I’ve still got to wake up Dean.”

Your heart panged with sympathy. “Oof. Dean is going to actually kill you this time.”

“Yeah, I know.” Sam seemed resigned to his fate.

Having managed to open your eyes, you emphasized, “No, like, you don’t even know. After what he and Cas got up to last night…” You smiled as the memories of what you’d heard resurfaced in your waking mind.

That stopped Sam in his tracks. “Did. Did they- um.”

In your sleepy state, it didn’t even occur to you how that could be misconstrued. “No, still nothing bad. I promise.” You held out your hands in a reassuring stance as your lagging brain worked to devise the most innocent way to put it. “They were just…staying close together, like cute little bunny rabbits.”

“Like rabbits?” Sam looked mortified. “Oh wow, I am so sorry you had to hear-”

“No! No, no, no, that’s not what I meant! Poor choice of fuzzy animal on my part.” As your sluggish brain still struggled to keep up, you conjured a much better image of adorable, furry creatures to illustrate your point. “Think more along the lines of…otters.”
Yeah, that sounded much better. Otters were the pinnacle of adorableness, cuddly and pure to the extreme. They bundled themselves up in nests of seaweed and clung to each other while they slept to ensure one wouldn’t lose the other as they drifted across the tumultuous waves of the ocean together.

Wow, the more you thought about it, the more perfect that analogy seemed for your situation. Considering you were at sea, the connection made sense. It was official: Dean and Castiel were otters, at least when they were snuggling together.

Understanding, Sam calmed down. “Oh. Alright, that’s…better.” His face twisted in confusion. “Otters?”

“Just trust me, they’re the cuddliest creatures in the animal kingdom. You would not believe what I overheard last night.”

“I’d take the time to revel in it with you if we weren’t so pressed for time.” He zipped up his single bag over the hefty stack of angel books. “I might as well just go ahead and poke my head in the lion’s den next door and get it over with.”

You saluted him. “Godspeed.”

Wishing Sam the best, you set about gathering your few belongings from the closet and rest of the room, which just included your clothes, birthday gifts, purse, and phone with its charger. You were packed in record time for any trip you’d ever taken.

You heard a cautious knock on the door beside yours and decided that since you were all packed and just needed to change before you were ready to disembark, it wouldn’t do any harm to take advantage of the thin walls one last time. Planting yourself in the corner of the room closest to where Sam was standing in the hallway, you cupped a hand around your ear and listened in.

At first, Sam’s knocking didn’t seem to affect anything, but after a couple more tries, Castiel whispered, “Dean, I believe someone is at the door.”

Resentfully groaning into what must have been a pillow, Dean finally acknowledged his brother’s presence. “Whaddaya want?”

“It’s time to leave the ship.” Sam told him, treading carefully as he really was standing just outside a lion’s den. “Our bus is already waiting outside on the docks.”

“Ten more minutes,” Dean countered, followed by the sound of both shifting sheets and feathers.

Aww. The otter didn’t wanna leave his other otter and their seaweed nest yet. Though you wished you could let them stay bundled together for at least a little while longer, you knew that wasn’t a luxury you possessed at that time.

“Dean, we need to get going,” Sam asserted. “The bus is supposed to leave in less than forty minutes now.”

“Sammy, I’m kind of in the middle of…” Dean stopped himself, evidently only becoming fully aware of what he was partaking in when he nearly vocalized it. He came to his senses with a spontaneously awake-sounding, “We’ll be out in five.”

With nothing left to hear, you quickly changed and made yourself presentable for the day. You and Sam met up outside, each carrying a single bag as you patiently waited for your travelling companions to emerge from their room. When they did, it was apparent that they’d prepared themselves in a rush, Dean sporting a thrown together outfit and Castiel’s feathers unevenly sticking
out in the angel equivalent of bed hair.

Giving your rooms a last once over to ensure that you had everything packed, you headed to deck two and exited the boat via a gangplank into the town of Seward. You didn’t get to see much of Seward beyond its massive marina, which was a forest of sailboat masts and wooden dock pathways.

Many motor coaches were lined up along the dock right in front of a large bus terminal, all of them intimidatingly humming and lying in wait as though they were raring to run someone over. You had no idea which one was yours, so Sam recommended that you split up and ask each of the coach drivers about their destinations to figure out which to board. You didn’t part ways, being too afraid to approach anyone on your own, and tagged along with Dean since you’d been wanting to talk to him all morning anyways.

The entire time Dean spent asking the first two drivers with no results, you watched him with an expectant expression, taking care to waggle your eyebrows whenever he turned your way. He caved in the middle of walking to the third bus, glancing at you out of the corner of his eye.

“Don’t give me that look,” he grumbled awkwardly.

“Sorry,” you apologized. You turned your face to a more neutral expression, but you couldn’t keep your giddy grin at bay no matter how hard you tried. “It’s just, did I do a good job as your winggirl or what? I scored you a whole night of cuddles! You’re welcome for that, by the way.”

Slowing slightly, Dean exhaled, turned red, and casually tried to cover his face with his hand. That was what he always seemed to do: sigh, blush, hide his face, wash rinse and repeat. The pattern was getting too easy to predict. You could accept that, which was particularly important because your work was far from over.

“All eight hours, yes. Bonus pro-tip: if at any point you feel yourself starting to fall asleep, don’t be afraid to lay on his shoulder.” Dean looked like he wanted to object to that, but you shut him down. “After the night you had, I’m sure it would make him very happy, and even if you might not admit it, I intuit that you’d feel much the same.”

Before Dean could pull out what very little remained of his pathetically dwindling denial, Sam rushed over to you with Castiel in tow. “Found it, guys! It’s at the end.”

Just as you were about to board your bus, you met eyes with an eerily familiar stare accented by ridiculous fake eyelashes from the other side of the dock. Said eyes widened in overt excitement as their owner and her family hurried to intercept your group.

“Oh, if it isn’t our friends from dinner the other night!” A vampiric grin spread across Charlotte’s face as she reached you, every last one of you sporting deer-in-the-headlights expressions (except Sam; he was wearing his signature moose-in-the-headlights face). “Dan, Casteen, and their little pumpkin, [Butchered version of Y/N]!” Her smile twitched upon noticing the final member of your group. “Oh, and Sam, too,” she identified with considerably less enthusiasm.

Although the urge to declare to Charlotte that you were definitely not a pumpkin was overwhelming,
you knew it wouldn’t do any good; she seemed oblivious to the fact that you were an adult and above sickeningly cute pet names. If nothing else, at least she correctly remembered one of your names.

Behind her, Charlotte’s family kept a slight distance, her husband taking a deep interest in staring at the forklifts driving luggage down the dock and her son BJ sticking his tongue out at Dean and Castiel. There was a new face with them this time, a teenager no younger than fifteen and no older than seventeen who you assumed was Chloe. She stood with her arms crossed, a resting death glare peeking out past her curtain of short hair.

All you can really say about Chloe is that she was the emo stereotype come to life, complete with dark clothes, uneven bangs, eyeliner that perfectly matched her dark skin tone, and choker. She pulled it off well though, and you found yourself instantly connecting to her without saying so much as a word if only because you felt the pain she must have to bear being around her mother all day. No wonder she was “anti-social.”

“Our cruise has been just lovely,” Charlotte gushed, everyone nodding at her to try and move through what was sure to be an endless conversation as quickly as possible. “We’re all just ecstatic to be moving on to the next leg of our journey!” Her family sure didn’t look it; not that Charlotte bothered to turn around and check.

“That’s…great,” Dean forced out. “Where ya headed?”

“We’re on our way to Denali next.”

Denali…wasn’t that where you were heading?

Crap. You found yourself internally begging on your knees for fate not to play this cruel, cruel trick on you, but knowing your and the Winchesters’ combined luck, you already knew what was going to inevitably unfold.

“I believe this is our bus right here,” Charlotte shined her unnaturally pearly whites at the giant vehicle behind you. “You wouldn’t happen to also be…?” She made a highly disturbing, headache-inducing noise that sounded like the unholy lovechild of a raspy gasp and a little girl’s squeal. “Imagine that, both of our families on the same bus! This is quite a twist of fate, if I do say so myself!”

At least you agreed with Charlotte on her last point: this was a twist of fate, but more of a cruel and unusual punishment for some bad karma you’d earned rather than the cute little coincidence she seemed to think it was. You were almost about ready to let the bus leave without you, even if it meant risking an encounter with the genie. No torment he could think up could possibly be worse than eight hours stuck on a bus with Mrs. Charlotte Richy-Richy-Richy the vampire.

Turning helplessly to your friends, you all shared a look of suffering, and silently agreed to bear the burden together for as long as you could manage. Allowing Charlotte one more minute to express her complete and utter exhilaration, you finally found a rare gap in conversation to take your leave and board the bus, taking up a row of seats near the front.

Sam took a window seat and you slipped in beside him. You noticed Dean took the aisle seat beside Castiel just as you’d suggested. BJ planted himself in the window seat of the row behind them, stretching out to somehow take up two entire seats with his puny body. Chloe and Mark took the seats behind you and Sam, and Charlotte sat herself down in a seat beside a lone travelling Chinese man another row back. You were thankful to have some space between you and her, as minimal as it was.
Even though Charlotte was two rows behind you, you could hear practically every distinctly-voiced word that left her mouth as she ignored the man beside her and tried to chat up an older woman in her neighboring row who kept nodding off in the middle of listening. You prayed that she would be enough of a distraction to Charlotte to keep her attention directed away from you. The bus’s engine roared to life as it got moving, and though rumbling and loud, it was still not enough to cover up Charlotte’s voice grating on your soul. Rather than endure it, you resorted to pulling out your earbuds from your bag, plugging them into your phone, and drowning out all the noise with Fall Out Boy. A few minutes into the drive, Sam finally couldn’t take it anymore either and asked if you could share the earbuds, which you allowed, one bud for each of you. This strategy worked surprisingly well for the first brief leg of the drive, all the way up until you made your first of three stops at a small scenic rest area on the side of the Alaskan highway.

You were among the passengers who stepped off the bus, but while most of them went straight for the outhouses, you went outside to stretch your legs and take in more of the beautiful, mountainous sights of Alaska. You didn’t have much time to enjoy them, though, because Dean hurried over to you, desperation bubbling under his skin.

“Any chance you could give me a turn with those earbuds?” he got right to the point. “That lady is driving me up the walls. She’s been talking about her vacation homes all over the globe for thirty minutes now, and she’s only her fifth of ten that she owns!”

“I would, but…” you checked your phone in dismay. “I dunno if you’d care for all of my music that much.”

Heaving an exasperated breath in the cool valley air, Dean chuckled brokenly. “Yeah, my ears are gonna bleed before this trip is over. We still have seven and half hours left, there’s no way I’m surviving this. No going out guns blazing fighting some world-threatening force like I’d always thought; no, I’m meeting my demise in a cramped bus in Alaska full of crazy people!”

You gestured for him to calm down. “It’s okay. You know…” You grinned. “I think, as your winggirl, I have a solution for you.”

A pained look of a different kind flashed on Dean’s face. Voice dripping with sarcasm, he said in a low tone, “Great, what’s next? You want me to reach all the way for second base already?”

“Um, no, definitely not on a bus full of people,” you grimaced at that mental image. “You were thinking more along the lines of distracting yourself from Charlotte with help from Cas.”

“And just how do you propose I do that?” Dean was actually desperate enough to ask for your advice regarding him and Castiel. You had to make this count.

“For starters…” You pondered what course of action would be best. “You wanna initiate conversation with him. Butter him up, if you will.”

“Like…how?” Wow, he was definitely desperate if he was actually taking the time to genuinely discuss this with you out loud. You never thought you’d see the day.

“My recommendation would be to compliment him, like a subtle way of flirting.” You snapped your fingers. “I know! You should compliment him on that bracelet of his!”

Blinking in misunderstanding, Dean asked, “What? What bracelet?”

“The feather bracelet. You know, the one he bought way back in Vancouver? He’s been wearing it almost every day since.”
Dean actually looked ashamed of himself. “I dunno how I missed that.”

“Well, now you can make up for it! Just start out simple with that, and if it goes well, try to be more openly flirtatious. Keeping in mind that this is Cas you’re talking to, of course. And if anything else escalates…” You shrugged. “Take it! I promise it’ll get your mind off of Charlotte.”

The familiar pattern of sigh, blush, and hide ensued just as you’d predicted it would, and Dean walked back to the bus without so much as another word.

The next leg of your journey wasn’t nearly as unbearable thanks to the fact that your bus driver put on a headset and began narrating parts of the journey via a microphone. Although he spoke to you invariably, Charlotte paused in the middle of not-so-subtly bragging about her vacation homes to listen, sparing you the never-ending haughty dialogue.

Another small highlight involved a single road sign that you passed, indicating that a town called “Moose Pass” was six miles ahead. The second the name of the town crossed you line of sight, you smirked and brought it to Sam’s attention.

“Hey Sam,” you pointed out the window at the sign. “It’s your pass.”

He just shook his head at you and turned to watching the scenery fly by, but you didn’t miss that he was laughing to himself as he did so.

Then there also were, of course, the two dork-a-doodles sitting in the row to your left.

“Hey Cas,” Dean tried to start a casual conversation, “nice bracelet you’ve got.”

Checking his wrist to ensure that there was indeed still a bracelet there, Castiel smiled appreciatively. “Thank you, Dean. I quite enjoy wearing it.”

“Yeah, it fits you. With the…” Dean briefly gestured to Castiel’s wings where they phased through the seat, “wings and whatnot.”

Castiel paused, humming to himself as he mulled over something. “Did you really mean it when you said you liked my wings as much as you did?”

Uncertainly fidgeting with a loose thread in his seat, Dean confirmed, “Yeah, man, I lov-” Dean caught himself before he could use the word he dreaded. “R-really like ‘em! They’re, uh…pretty.”

You might have imagined it, but Castiel’s face seemed to flush at Dean’s compliment. “Th-thank you. Your compliments are very thoughtful.”

Regaining some of his bravado, Dean winked. “I’m just ‘winging’ it.”

You listened with pride. He’d brought out the puns even when you hadn’t planted the idea in his mind. This boy was goin’ places, and those places would surely be where the thing took place.

A few hours of alternating between the sounds of Fall Out Boy and our driver’s static-filled voice followed, which kept you and Sam mercifully free of the life-sucking force that was Charlotte’s dominating conversational prowess. The more you pondered over Charlotte and the encounters you’d had with her, the more you realized what it really was about her that put you on edge: her rampant insincerity. As someone who had picked up a talent for reading people, it was blatantly obvious to you that every single overinflection in her voice and overemphasized gesture she made were completely and utterly fake. As for whatever it was she was hiding under all that fakeness, it wasn’t bound to be anything pleasant, and you weren’t keen to find out what it was.
The grimace brought to your face by that train of thought melted into a soft smile when you turned and saw what had developed beside you: Dean had fallen asleep, which was really no wonder considering how early he’d been woken up, with his head resting gently on Castiel’s shoulder. One of those “pretty” wings of his was draped around Dean, rising and falling with the hunter’s breathing. Though Castiel was facing the window to his left, you noticed that the corner of his mouth was turned up in a smile.

The sooner the **thing** happened, the sooner this would all get even better than it already was. Just picturing it made you feel so happy for them. You would’ve shared the sight with Sam, except that he too was napping with his head resting against the window.

All good things must come to end though, and half an hour later, Dean woke up. As he stirred, Castiel went rigid, frozen by fear of his cuddling being discovered. He fearfully eyed the waking hunter, but his wing was just as frozen as the rest of him, stuck in place.

Dean noticed the wing blanketing him almost immediately. “Cas…what’re…?”

By then Castiel had regained some control over his movements, hesitantly beginning to slip his wing away. “M-my apologies.”

You had to act fast. You waved to get Dean’s waning attention, and thankfully you hooked him in time. You hastily made a motion to grab and pull at the empty air beside your shoulder, miming holding onto and tugging a blanket over yourself.

Even in his barely awake state, Dean must have gotten your message. He told Castiel before the wing was gone, “N-no, man, it’s fine. You don’t…have to stop.”

Though visibly surprised and still quite flustered, Castiel brought his wing all the way back down and hugged it a bit tighter around Dean. “V-very well.”

The pair stayed like that up until the second rest stop in front of a lodge fifteen minutes later. Though they didn’t look at each other, both of them faintly blushing every once in a while when they remembered what they were doing, they seemed content. Dean in particular was so content that when the bus parked and he stood up to take a bathroom break, he did so slowly, trying to prolong contact with his feathery soft blanket.

Still not in need of a restroom break and having no other reason to step outside, you remained on the bus, letting everyone else around you file out. You gritted your teeth as Charlotte strode past with her husband and son in tow, going on about some “exquisite meal of exotic pufferfish” she’d recently tried. It wasn’t even like she was trying to be subtle about invoking envy out of everyone around her.

Sighing and laying back in your seat, you decided to get comfy and wait for the bus to start moving again. That was when you felt a pair of eyeliner-drenched eyes watching you from the junction between your and Sam’s seats.

Reflexively, your eyes darted back to meet Chloe’s, and instantly an awkward silence fell. You were literally the only two people left on the entire bus; even Castiel had stepped outside to stretch his wings in the parking lot. You considered spending the entire duration of this awkward coexistence staring out the window, but you couldn’t relax knowing that there was someone right behind you the whole time. Apparently, Chloe couldn’t take the tense quiet either, because she cleared her throat and leaned forward slightly around your seat.

“So…you have two dads?” Chloe decided to try for a polite conversation. “What’s that like?”
You steeled yourself for impending socialization with a stranger. “It’s not that different,” you said, because although you couldn’t speak from real experience, you doubted it was. “Just twice the dad jokes.”

Chloe actually huffed a laugh. “Yeah, still sounds like it beats the hell out of living with Charlotte.”

Though caught way off guard by her using her mother’s first name, you tried to be diplomatic. “She’s certainly, uh…”

“A bitch,” Chloe plainly tacked on the end of your unfinished statement. With you being dumbfounded into silence, Chloe elaborated for you. “A rich, stuck-up, literally-eats-caviar-for-breakfast bitch.”

It took considerable effort to get your mouth working again, but you managed. “I…take it you don’t get along with her.”

“What was your first clue?” Chloe huffed to herself. “She’s hated me from the first time she met me; but that’s fine, ‘cause the feeling is definitely mutual.”

You hadn’t gone into this conversation expecting to uncover some deeply-layered family drama, but you found that last statement hard to believe. “Surely she didn’t hate you from the moment you were born-?”

“I’m her foster kid. Just been with her for six months.”

Oh. Well, you felt pretty dang bad about what you’d said after hearing that. “I…didn’t know.” You peered around at BJ’s vacant seat. “Is…?”

“BJ’s actually her kid. Full-blooded rich brat.”

Now that explained a lot.

“Living with him is half the nightmare,” Chloe lamented. You could tell she hadn’t been able to vent about this to anybody until now, and your heart hurt for her.

“I can imagine,” you sympathized. “I’m not really a fan of troublemaker kids like him. They all have that same vibe, you know? Like they wanna cause a ruckus because they know they’ll get away with it.”

“BJ is the epitome of that. As an added bonus, he’s also super bratty and gets whatever he wants from his mom.” Chloe let out a single, spiteful laugh. “And I get nothing aside from my weekly resupply of make-up; whenever Charlotte actually remembers to pick it up, that is.”

By then, a few people had streamed their way back onboard the bus, wandering towards their seats behind you. You tried to wrap up the conversation. “Well, I sincerely wish you the best of luck with finding a better family, because clearly this one is not the right match.”

Chloe executed just about the most perfect emo scoff/hair flip combo you’d ever been blessed enough to witness. “Yeah, we’ll see about that. Charlotte mostly holds on to me to keep up appearances with her other rich white lady friends.”

“She’ll have to let go eventually,” you told her hopefully.

“Yeah, but in the meantime, I’ve been doing whatever I can to speed up the process.” A devious glint shined in her eye.
Now you were undeniably curious. “Like…?”

Chloe smirked proudly. “Like putting all the wrong luggage tags on all her stuff so it’ll end up in the wrong city.”

Despite your relatively goody-two-shoes nature, you couldn’t deny you were impressed. “That…is amazing.”

“I’m glad someone can appreciate my genius.” She suddenly frowned. “No telling if it’ll actually do any good, though. It rarely does.”

Sympathy once again swirled in your chest. That comment made you wonder how many times she’d tried deliberately acting up or sabotaging Charlotte’s life in an attempt to get out of it. However bummed out she acted externally, you couldn’t imagine the sort of turmoil a life with the Perkins family would brew inside someone. More than anything in that moment, you wanted to help her; not just offer comfort, but actually help her out of her crappy situation. Remembering what you’d done in my darkest time that ended up bringing you out of it, an idea sprung forth before you could even wonder if it was worth sharing.

“Have you ever tried…wishing?” you blurted.

Chloe looked at you like you’d sprouted a third eye. “Uh…not consciously, no. I mean, I wish more than anything that I could get away from Charlotte and to a family that’ll actually care, but I don’t go wishing on every star I see.”

“You should start,” you suggested as sincerely as you could. “Wishing, that is. You’d be surprised what it can do.”

Your cheesy sentiment was met with unamused frowning of the utmost emo degree. “Yeah, sure. Wishful thinking is gonna get the foster agency to retract all their paperwork.”

“It actually might.” You leaned in a bit closer and tried to maintain a serious tone. “I…I’m not really supposed to say this, but I’m technically in trouble already, so…you should know, there are forces out there, supernatural forces, that can help you. If you wish hard enough and are really in a situation where it would help you, you can make a business deal.”

Mouth turning up in a scheming grin, Chloe seemed very invested now that you’d brought supernatural forces into the equation. “You mean like a deal with the devil?”

“No! No, don’t make a deal with a demon, that’s a really bad idea.” You looked away briefly and mumbled under your breath, “Not that any of those exist here, or at least I hope they don’t…”

Perturbed, Chloe prodded you further. “How do I know you’re telling the truth, huh? This is a pretty wild claim you’re making.”

Honesty seemed to be the best policy here, so you stuck with it. “I made a wish when I really, really needed it, and it came true; courtesy of a corporate genie.”

Raising her eyebrows, Chloe let out a single, disbelieving laugh and humored you. “A genie? What’d you wish for, then?”

That was the one question you couldn’t directly answer. Swallowing a lump in your throat, you told her, “To be able to escape from…a bad situation. That’s…how I met my family.” That last bit wasn’t technically a lie, since you truly had come to consider the Winchesters and their angel companion to be like a second family to you.
Understanding settled somewhere in Chloe’s expression. “So you’re saying they adopted you?” She almost looked like she might believe you once you nodded. Though reluctant, she quietly admitted, “Well, that would explain the lack of resemblance.”

Now that you’d hooked her, you had to reel her in. “I know it sounds weird; trust me, I know. But I promise, if you try it, I bet it would work.”

Squinting at you, Chloe relented and sighed, shrugging as she fell back into her seat. “What the hell, couldn’t hurt to try.”

You could hardly believe that you’d managed to convince her. “Oh! Good, good, try it. But, uh, a little warning…don’t break the guidelines of your deal, okay? Whatever they may be.”

Face scrunching in confusion, Chloe repeated, “Guidelines? You mean I’m gonna be limited?”

“No by a lot!” you assured her. “The guidelines are easy to follow as far as I know, but if you break them…” A faint shiver ran up your spine at the reminder of your broken contract. “It can get messy.”

“Gotcha,” Chloe warily accepted.

Around then Castiel walked back onto the bus, wings sufficiently stretched as he took his window seat once more. Chloe took one look at him, then gave you a friendly face and fell back into her seat.

Well, at least you could say with confidence that one member of the mess that was the Perkins family was a decent human being. You still weren’t sure about Mark, since he still hadn’t said a word since you’d met him, but if he was insane enough to marry a woman like Charlotte you think you had a right to question his sanity.

Ignoring any further thoughts about that tangled up mess, you turned to Castiel. “Hey Cas, I have an idea for you.”

Curiosity piqued, Castiel leaned over to listen.

“I was thinking, after what you and Dean were just doing,” Castiel turned a shade of medium-done salmon dinner at the reminder. “I think you should do it again. I can say with complete confidence that Dean would appreciate it.”

Flustered, Castiel opened his mouth to say something, shut it, and nodded his head before falling back into his seat. Who said you couldn’t work your winggirl magic on both sides?

Satisfied that you’d planted the seeds for more eventual progression towards the thing, you settled back in your seat and calmly awaited departure.

“You call your dads by their first names?” Chloe broke through your peaceful state with a suspicious whisper between the seats of your rows. Somehow, you’d forgotten that eavesdropping was a thing.

You were caught red-handed. “I, uh…” Formulating a cover-up wasn’t easy, but you managed. “Th-they just adopted me a few months ago. I’m still getting used to called them ‘dads’, heh…”

Chloe raised an accusatory eyebrow. “You’re lying.”

Crap, you’d met a fellow people-reader. “It’s…a long story.”

“Clearly.” Apparently not bitter in the slightest, Chloe changed to a more chipper but still hushed tone. “Not that I’m gonna go telling anyone. And by the way? That matchmaking thing you’re doing
for them? Cute as hell.”

With a final smirk in your direction, Chloe leaned back into her seat, just in time for the return of her flawed foster family.

Sam returned to his seat with Dean in tow a few minutes later, which you were unendingly thankful for because Charlotte’s conversation with the narcoleptic old woman had started up again and was not going well. Sam slipped into his seat beside you while Dean took his own seat beside Castiel, who eyed the returned hunter with caution. With immense hesitation, Castiel shifted his wing through the chair so that it was hovering around Dean’s back.

Oooh, looks like he was following your advice right off the bat. Eager much?

The angel’s face was drawn tight with concentration as he fought to keep his wing still, though you could see it faintly shaking; whether that was from the effort of staying motionless or from nervousness, you weren’t sure. Within seconds of sitting down, Dean noticed the feathery mass barely touching him, giving Castiel a questioning look.

Castiel opened his mouth, but no words came out, dying in his throat with Dean’s eyes on him. He cleared his throat in an unusually humanlike fashion and tried again, whispering to Dean, “M-may I?”

Dean glanced at you out of the corner of his eye and you nodded your encouragement, him nodding permission back to Castiel in turn. The angel immediately turned limp in his seat from relief, embracing Dean the rest of the way and turning his wing corporeal once in prime position. Even if he tried to hide it, you didn’t miss how Dean barely sank back into the feathers to get closer still.

Your contentedness lasted for about a minute before your ears picked up that New Jersey voice you’d come to fear. Taking one last look at the “otters” to ensure they were fine to be left on their own, you brought out the earbuds and offered one to Sam. The next one hour was laidback, spent watching the passing evergreens and bodies of water that looked cold enough to turn you into a popsicle upon contact. It was when the music streaming through your earbud abruptly cut off that a problem disturbed your fair travels.

“What happened?” Sam asked, having apparently lost all sound in his earbud as well.

One look at your phone screen solved the mystery: its battery was dead. Great. That meant another hour of listening to “Let Me Boast about My Rich Lifestyle That’s Better than Yours” with vampiric host, Charlotte Perkins.

Except…one of the first things you noticed upon actually removing the useless bud from your ear was that the bus was dominated by a serene silence. Hardly able to believe the lack of what you were hearing, you leaned out into the aisle walkway to check on Mrs. Perkins herself, and miraculously, she was sound asleep in her seat. She was snoring loudly, but it was nothing compared to her speaking loudly. Even in sleep she couldn’t be quiet, apparently.

Chloe noticed you eyeing her sleeping foster mother with hesitant hope, giving you a thumbs-up.

“When she’s out, she is out,” she whispered to you. “No more obnoxious speaking for the rest of the ride.” She looked just as happy about that fact as you felt.

Though you may be without Fall Out Boy, you at least had some relative peace and quiet aside from the rumbling of the bus down the bumpy, barren Alaskan highway. One look at the otters beside you didn’t reveal whether they’d even noticed the absence of Charlotte’s chattering; they seemed too invested in each other’s company to pay any mind to the world around them. At least that meant
they’d found a way to block out Charlotte when she was still awake.

Probably due to resurging drowsiness, Dean wondered aloud, “Why’re you so obsessed with holdin’ me in your wings, hmm?”

Now it was Castiel’s turn to sigh, blush, and hide; though his pattern was slightly different, more of a shallow, startled inhale, massive blush, then regaining enough self-control to block said blush with his grace.

“It, uh…” Castiel took to looking out the window, “allows me to personally ensure your safety and comfort, and additionally it puts me greatly at ease and is…highly relaxing.”

So basically, it was like mega cuddling for angels. Got it, good to know. You made a mental note to keep this information handy on file.

Your final rest stop was a small veteran’s memorial park filled with statues and tributes. This time you did need a restroom break, so you left the bus, but that wasn’t the only reason you went outside: you had to continue your ever-present duties as winggirl. Jogging to catch up to Dean outside of the compact outhouse building, you gave him an overly-enthusiastic pat on the back for a job well done.

“You’ve been doing great in there!” you cheered, and he watched you with confusion. “With wooing Cas, I mean.”

Rolling his eyes, Dean didn’t have much to say to that, saving you the trouble of cataloguing another one of his sigh, blush, hide patterns. “You have any more of your precious advice for me? How long are you gonna keep giving me advice, anyways? I thought you said you’d stop bugging me about it at some point.”

“I’ll keep giving you advice until you’re ready to stop bargaining.” Aka, whenever he reached stage five of grief. “But for right now, I’ve really only got one thing to say: just keep doing what you’re doing. It’s working amazingly well!”

“Yeah, we’ll see about that…”

“I’m serious! Oh, and whatever you do, keep up the wing cuddles! They’re easily your best way of getting even closer to him. I dunno if you picked up on it or not, but I got the sense that Castiel was implying wing cuddling to be rather intimate for an angel, so the fact that’s he doing it so often is a great sign.”

“So you’ve been eavesdropping again?” Dean didn’t sound remotely surprised.

“Just a part of my winggirl duties! Unless…that’s too much of an invasion of privacy…”

“At this point with all the listening in you’ve been doing, that’s the least of my problems anyways.”

You clapped your hands together in finality. “Right, good. So you’ll keep it up?”

Used to your advice at this point, Dean just wordlessly nodded.

“Maybe you could even get some wing petting in?” you tired.

The look on Dean’s face said you were pushing your luck, so you muttered, “Okay, maybe not yet,” and continued towards the restroom.

The final third of the ride was easily the most peaceful, what with Charlotte being dead to the world
and everyone else pleasantly drowsy from the humming and bouncing of the bus. It got off to a good start as well, as when Dean returned back to his seat, he set to following your instructions immediately.

Dean simply gestured to Castiel’s wings. “Could ya make ‘em corporeal?”

Nodding warily, Castiel did just that with a barely-there shimmer of blue grace. Quietly offering his thanks, Dean actually reached out and gently guided Castiel’s wing until it was firmly wrapped around him, tucking himself in like it was a feathery blanket and making himself at home. Castiel didn’t resist this in the slightest, though he was shocked into silence. Upon recovering, the angel tightened his hold on Dean.

“Not gonna lie,” Dean said lethargically as he settled in further, “your wings are like the best blanket in the whole damn universe.”

Castiel turned a shade of Barbie Pink™. “I…haven’t felt many blankets for comparison, but thank you, Dean.”

Somewhere behind them in his luxurious two-for-one seating arrangement, BJ narrowed his eyes. “You guys keep talking about wings, but I don’t see any wings.”

Of course the little devil wouldn’t be able to mind his own dang beeswax.

Castiel smiled overly-sweetly and faced the boy behind him. “In that case, I see I was sorely mistaken about your observational skills. Perhaps one day you’ll learn to be quiet and open your mind, and then you might see more.”

The angel lightly brushed this free wing right over the tip of BJ’s nose, which made the boy yelp and push himself back into his seat. You couldn’t deny that it was satisfying to see such fear in the eyes of a child who intended to cause that same thing in others. You’d have to remember to call on Castiel next time you encountered another troublemaker like him; you were impressed with how he’d managed to be passive-aggressive (something he’d probably picked up from the Winchesters) for the sake of putting BJ in his place. And BJ stayed in his place, burying himself into his chair and not making so much as a peep for the entire rest of the trip.

As you pulled into Denali, you discovered it wasn’t so much a town as it was a small tourist settlement in the middle of a vast wilderness. Every gift shop and hotel, which made up the bulk of all the buildings there, was made of wood and built from the same or highly similar blueprints; their signs and advertisements in their windows were the only way to differentiate them. The true wonders of Denali lay in the park itself with its towering, cloud-topped peaks and array of untouched flora and fauna.

The bus’s official drop-off point was in the parking lot of the second largest resort in the area. You only knew it was the second largest because promptly after the bus came to a halt, Charlotte snorted her way back to wakefulness, cheerily explaining to another passenger that she was going to stay in the largest resort of them all down the road. When asked by that same, blissfully oblivious passenger if she was planning an excursion into the park, Charlotte put a scandalized hand against her chest as though offended.

“Heavens, no!” she exclaimed. “I’m here to spend a day at my resort’s spa.”

*Who the heck goes to national wilderness park to visit a spa?* Charlotte Perkins, stinkin’ filthy rich
vampire woman, that’s who. The relief you felt at watching her walk in the opposite direction as your group upon exiting the bus was palpable, with her husband wordlessly trailing behind and her son pointedly avoiding eye contact with any of you. Chloe was the furthest behind, not particularly eager to keep up with the more-than-eccentric bunch, and she stopped and gave you a lopsided smirk.

“Good luck with getting those two together,” she whispered inconspicuously. “Even if they’re not your dads, I can tell they’re made for each other.”

“Good luck with this crazy family,” you said, and you really meant it. “And remember to wish.”

“I’ve got it under control.” She playfully held up a luggage tag labelled “To Vancouver” and slipped it into her jeans’ pocket. You laughed and saluted her as she ran to catch up with the loonies, and you truly wished her the very best.

For convenience’s sake and because you still had the money to do so, you booked a room at the second largest resort; the fact that Charlotte was not going to be there was an added incentive. The resort as a whole was more of a village of Lincoln Log cabins of reddish wood and green roofs. Every facility imaginable was on the premises, from restaurants to a fully-stocked spa that you were sure Charlotte would declare inferior to the one she planned on attending. The only thing the resort lacked was a pool, but that was no doubt due the fact that you would have to be either a born-and-raised native or a criminally insane foreigner to go swimming in Alaska.

Your room turned out to not be so much of a room as it was a majorly downsized cabin. All in all, it consisted of a living room through the entrance, a single sofa, a bathroom, and one bedroom in the back with one double bed and one single bed.

“Well, looks like I’m taking the sofa,” you decided, flopping down on the floral print couch. “I’m the smallest, it’s only fair.”

That left the others to figure out the remainder of the bed situation. It was resolved in what must have been record time. Without so much as a single word, Sam took one blank look at Dean and Castiel and then unceremoniously dropped his bag on the single bed. Dean didn’t even try to negotiate, which was somehow both surprising and unsurprising to you at the same time.

After you’d settled in, Dean declared he was hungry. Only then did you feel your own hunger, having not eaten anything all day. With all the restaurants available on the resort property, you settled on grabbing dinner at an upscale seafood place with a view overlooking one of Denali’s churning whitewater rivers.

Aside from an appetizer that you could actually pronounce, you chose salmon off the extensive menu of pricy meals because you still couldn’t get enough of the local brand of your favorite type of seafood. Even if you got mercury poisoning, it still felt worthwhile to get more of that fresh Alaskan Sockeye that you couldn’t obtain anywhere else. There was no way you could adjust back to regular salmon, or heck, even civilian food in general after being culinarily spoiled for over a week now.

Then out came your appetizer: scallop-topped, breaded, cooked goat cheese.

Sweet mother of Zeus. Yep, there was officially no way you were ever adjusting back to civilian meals after this. Needless to say, you ate well that night.

Still left with a bunch of daylight, since the sun practically never sets in summertime Alaska, your group meandered through some of the shops in the resort/village. Most of them were surprisingly more artsy than touristy, with lots of wood carvings and blown glass in shapes tied to Alaska. You
were particularly interested in a knitted hat you found made to look like a moose.

When you brought the moose hat to Sam, he already knew where it was going. Sighing but grinning, he took it from you and slowly put it on top of his head. Clapping like an amused five-year-old, you jokingly told him to buy it. For whatever reason, Sam actually took you seriously and brought it to the cash register.

When Dean gave him a look next time he was seen wearing his new hat, Sam defended himself by saying, “What? It’s really comfortable.”

One of the last shops you visited was a particularly pricy one, full of giant fur pelts and paintings on the walls. There was no way any of you were buying anything here, not when your funds were significantly lower than what they had been at the start of the trip, but it didn’t hurt to look around.

What did hurt was the fact that Dean and Castiel were literally inches away from doing the thing but still not there yet. While Dean was looking at a particularly expensive piece of pottery and betting to himself aloud how much it would cost without looking at the price tag, Castiel walked up to join him in speculation. This would have all been fine and dandy if not for the fact that Castiel automatically put his wing around Dean once he was close enough, a fact neither of them seemed to realize until their interest in the pottery had run out and they walked away. Aside from brief sidelong glances and more blush than would be in a make-up kit, they didn’t acknowledge it.

If Dean didn’t hurry up and get to stage five already, you were going to shove him off the edge of the precipice yourself. Except you knew that wouldn’t work; the precipice metaphor only worked so long as both of them fell voluntarily. You got that relationships were hard, especially for people who had known each other for as long as Dean and Castiel had, but you were getting antsy. Thankfully for your and everyone’s sanity, Dean cracked and took his opportunity to find and speak with you alone on the shop’s upper level, which was populated exclusively by bear memorabilia and artwork.

“Alright, look,” Dean sounded resigned as he cornered you against a towering stuffed, real-life bear. “This…’thing’ that you’re doin’ as a w-winggirl or whatever…how long are you planning on keeping it up?”

“I told you,” you reverted to all-business mode, “I’ll keep working until you’re readying to stop bargaining.”

Frustration and a deeper undecipherable something creased his brow. “Okay, well, I don’t know how much longer I can take this. This…s-stuff with Cas, it’s not stopping, but it’s not going anywhere else. I’m stuck in limbo here.”

Ah, this appeared to be the first big step towards acceptance: acknowledgement and voicing something akin to feelings. “Like I said, whenever you’re ready to stop bargaining…” You gave him a few seconds to think about it before adding, “Whatever you do, it’s totally your call. But you know that you’re closer to getting this now than you’ve ever been before.”

“But Cas isn’t-”

“If you’re still for some reason doubting that Cas has feelings for you, I will literally pull this giant bear down on top of both of us.”

His eyes flicked up to the bear. “We don’t have the money left to pay for that or the hospital bills.”

“The point is, no duh he has feelings for you! Have you been paying attention?”

Preferring to maintain eye contact with the bear rather than you, Dean replied, “There’s no way to
tell with him.”

You didn’t even have to try to muster up a look of utter disbelief. “He’s been completely receptive to you and initiated plenty of things on his own besides that!”

Dean was starting to crack. “H-he’s an angel, he doesn’t know what all this really means.”

“How do you know that?” you challenged. “If he doesn’t, then why has he been blushing like a maniac every time you so much as brush against him?”

That was the straw the broke the denying squirrel’s back. Still staring into the glassy eyes of the bear, a blush of Dean’s own rose on his face, and he exhaled in defeat, lowering his head. He glanced up at you and asked, “Since when were you so keen on emotional confrontation?”

“Since I started hanging out with you guys,” you honestly answered. “Call it an adaptation for living among Winchesters and their affinity for family drama.”

Eyes slowly falling back to the floor, Dean performed the familiar sigh, blush, and hide pattern once more. “Okay, let’s say that, in theory, Cas returns my feelings.”

You could’ve hooked onto that single statement and bludgeoned Dean over the head with it for the fact that it was literally the first time he ever openly admitted his feelings in a direct manner, but you didn’t because you knew precisely what it meant; he’d reached stage five at long last: acceptance. Somewhere in the depths of his subconscious, Dean’s denial had finally keeled over and kicked the bucket, a fact he didn’t even seem aware of and that you were certainly not going to bring to his attention.

“No matter what Cas feels or doesn’t feel,” Dean was starting to sound desperate, “I’m still stuck here. I…don’t know what to do.”

Your face brightened. “So…you’re asking for my help?”

“Yeah. I mean, you’re supposed to be my winggirl, right?”

Overcome by emotion at being properly referred to as such, you nodded vigorously. “Absolutely. Your acceptance of all this will make my job a whole lot easier now.”

Only half-joking, Dean chuckled. “You’re welcome for that.”

Now it was time: the final piece of the puzzle, the last step in your carefully-laid plans was to be executed. This was what would at last bring the thing into existence as was destined. You had to admit, you didn’t picture this going down with an audience of lifeless bears watching, but that’s what you get for underestimating the power of Alaskan tourism.

You clapped your hands together. “Okay, and with that, I think I’m ready to give you my final dare.”

Shaken by what he thought to be a very random change in subject, Dean blinked hard. “What, right now?”

“Yes, right now. You didn’t think I forgot about our bet, did you?”

“I was hoping you had,” Dean admitted. “But all I can say is, about damn time we finished this. I never thought I would be free.” He crossed his arms as though to shield himself for whatever was coming. “What is it? Something good, I’m hoping, for your last big hurrah in this bet.”
“Oh trust me, it is.” You cleared your throat and imagined a drumroll in the background for dramatic effect. “I dare you…to tell Castiel the truth.”

Dean stared. “…What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means tell him how you feel!” you exclaimed with a tad too much passion. “Confess your feelings for him, proclaim your adoration of him, tell him you love him. This is what all my work as your winggirl has been building up to!”

Dean raised a questioning eyebrow. “You’re serious.” When you nodded your head, he exhaled tiredly. “You’re not…asking me to do this tonight, right? Like, it can wait, can’t it? ‘Cause I don’t think I have it in me to do that normally, but certainly not this late.”

“That’s fine, you can take all the time you need; at least as long as you do it before our trip is over. I don’t even care how you do it, so long as you don’t purposefully sabotage it because then you’d just be sabotaging yourself and Castiel.” You made a flamboyant motion with your hands. “Go nuts! Be as over-the-top romantic or as subtle, under-the-table confessional as you want. Just as long as you make like Shia Labeouf and ‘just do it.’”

“You did not just quote a meme at me in the middle of a pep talk.”

“You’d better believe I did.” You maneuvered past him and patted him on the back. “Now go get ‘im, tiger!”

Dean stared after you.

“S-sorry, I was just getting into my role,” you sheepishly said before hurrying downstairs.

After leaving the expensive art shop, thankfully without breaking anything in the process, your thoroughly worn-out group went back to the comfort of your cabin/hotel room. The remainder of your time spent awake that night involved gleaning amusement from Alaskan public access shows on the room’s television. Everybody was ready for bed at the conclusion of that, exhausted after your long, long, bus ride.

“Our bus tomorrow doesn’t leave until two o’clock,” Sam informed let everyone know before he settled in for the night. “Just to give you a heads-up, that means you can sleep in this time.”

“Thank Christ,” Dean tiredly muttered as he checked the digital clock between the two beds. “I still have sleep I need to catch up on after this morning.”

There were some extra blankets and a spare pillow in the room’s closet that you used to turn the sofa into a makeshift bed, and though your bedmaking skills were not the best, you ended up with a pretty comfortable arrangement. Because of the extra time it took you to create a place to sleep, you were last to get ready for bed. This ended up working to your advantage, however, when Dean began the process of figuring out what the frick frack to do about going to bed with Castiel around.

From the living room, you could only hear fractions of their hushed conversation channeled down the hallway. Darn, the walls in this building were much thicker than on the ship…but then again, this wasn’t an enclosed space like on the ship, and all that separated you from their bedroom was a short hall and an open doorway.

Without thinking twice, you got down on your hands and knees and snuck over the carpeted floor of the hallway, stopping when you were still out of sight but could finally hear some of what was being said.
“Dean, if you don’t want—” Castiel was speaking calmly and quietly.

“N-no,” Dean hissed out, nearly forgetting to whisper. “I…it’s just…”

You chanced a peek past the corner of the hallway and saw the situation. Castiel was standing at the foot of the double bed while Dean was standing between the two beds. Sam was laying with his back turned in his single bed, probably asleep, you guessed.

Dean was jerking his head in his brother’s direction, trying to silently communicate with Castiel. Squinting, Castiel said as quietly as he could manage, “I don’t see what Sam has to do with any of this.”

Putting a finger to his lips, Dean shushed the angel to keep him quiet. “I mean, with him here…”

A vague understanding befell Castiel as he relaxed somewhat. You could see him attempting to cover up what was no doubt disappointment, and your heart broke a little.

“I understand Dean,” Castiel forcibly kept his weighted voice even. “If you do not wish to cuddle with your brother so nearby—”

“Oh my god, you guys,” Sam, who was apparently not asleep at all, suddenly spoke up from where he was still facing the wall. “I’ll make this easier for you; I don’t care what you do, so long as it qualifies as quiet, PG, and the hell away from my side of the room. Now good night.”

Stunned silence fell over the room as Dean stared open-mouthed at his brother and Castiel tilted his head. You barely managed to contain your laughter, which was good because otherwise you would have definitely been discovered.

Castiel gave Dean a questioning, hopeful look, and Dean just stared dumbly at him for a while before nodding his head and focusing on the task of getting into bed. Though you couldn’t see clearly in the darkness enough to confirm it, you had well-placed suspicions that Dean was blushing like a tomato.

Now that no one’s attention was at risk of straying towards the hallway, you leaned out just a bit more to get a better vantage point, all the while keeping your movements quiet and calculated. This paid off, because you ended up with practically the best seat in the house. You noted that the only thing Castiel did to prepare for bed was remove his shoes; everything else, even the trench coat, remained on. You couldn’t imagine that sleeping in a full suit was comfortable, but since Castiel was an angel, he probably didn’t know the difference.

Dean was first under the covers, and though you wished you could see his expression, his face was cloaked by shadows and the angle of the blankets. All you could really figure out from his shadowy form was his expectant pose, laying only partway down under the layers of blankets but keeping his head turned up.

Once his shoes were removed, Castiel took to climbing over the bed and rigidly shuffling underneath the covers. It was bizarre to see him doing such a human act, particularly with the meticulous and borderline robotic movements of an angel. All the same, once he was in place, Dean finally lowered himself onto the pillow, in prime cuddling position on his back.

That was when simultaneously the most unexpected and amazing thing possible happened. Once he was sufficiently under the blankets, Castiel shuffled closer and emphatically nuzzled his head right into Dean’s side for a few seconds until he got comfortable, literally just like a cat would do. So that’s where that distinct sound of rustling sheets had been coming from this whole time.
Who would have guessed that angels cuddled just like kittens? If “Useless Facts about Supernatural Beings” was ever a category on Jeopardy, you’d have to remember this one.

Forcing yourself to clamp down the impending “awwww” in your throat, you covered your giant smile with your hand. For all the nights you’d overheard them cuddling together up until now, nothing compared to seeing it in real time right in front of you. Operation “Cuddles with a Live Studio Audience” was finally rebooted and debuting to rave ratings.

Apparently used to this feline-like behavior from Castiel, Dean just laid still and let him do it, only afterwards wrapping an arm around Castiel and holding the curled-up angel close to his side. Castiel let out the quietest of pleased hums and shifted his wings through the blankets, cocooning Dean in them and making them corporeal once in place. You couldn’t even imagine how soft they were, having felt two of Castiel’s feathers before, and realized that Dean must have been completely serious when he called the angel’s wings “the best blanket in the universe” earlier that day. Dean must have still held that sentiment, because he shuffled even closer to Castiel, the wings tightening around him to match his adjustments until he settled.

Welcome to fluff-town; population: Dean Winchester and Castiel the snuggling otters.

For a few minutes, you stuck around in the event that anything else developed, but with Sam in the same room as them, little escalated. Dean didn’t seem eager to strike up any intimate conversation when not in a private space, and Castiel carefully adhered to the guidelines Sam had set for them, not making a peep. Satisfied that you’d seen all of the evening’s festivities, you crawled back into the living room and under your own covers. Though there was no ocean or boat to carry you to sleep as you was accustomed to, you found yourself drifting off easier than usual with the peace you’d felt radiating from your favorite pair of otters.

Chapter End Notes

Things are heatin’ up in the Destiel department. OwO There’ll be plenty more where that came from in the impending chapters...

(Btw if you've never tried fried goat cheese, please do. It is...heavenly stuff. *drools*)

Image source for Denali:
https://wheretherobertmeetstheroad.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/dsc_0092.jpg
In which you fixate on sled dogs, Dean faces his fears, Castiel is a sweetheart, and Sam has some bad news

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

~7/10/17~

Having been given permission to do so by Sam, you slept in later that day than you had for the rest of the trip. It was nice to be able to wake up at your own pace for once, no interruptions, rude awakenings, or self-inflicted reason to get out of bed. You could just lay there, soaking up warmth from the rays of light streaming in through the window, and allow yourself to be comfortable.

What did eventually entice you out of bed was curiosity of whether or not those two snuggly otters were still sleeping. You took your time getting out of bed (out of sofa?), stretching and yawning in the morning light. One short trip down the hallway dragged on longer than it should have with how you allowed your feet to slog over the floor, but once you were just barely in the doorway to the bedroom, you stopped instantly.

Indeed, the otters were still sleeping soundly; or at least, Dean was. You were well aware that Castiel didn’t sleep, but with how his eyes were closed and how utterly at peace he looked, anyone could be forgiven for making that mistake. At some point during the night they’d shifted from the position you’d left them in, turned towards the wall on the left side of the bed and outright spooning; Castiel was little spoon, Dean was big spoon. It looked like Castiel had to turn his wings incorporeal again, because otherwise Dean would’ve gotten a mouthful of feathers.

Sam was nowhere to be seen, probably out and about like the morning person he was. That must have meant that he saw the otters as well, which was great because that would give you someone to enthuse about it with. You were almost tempted to snap a photo of the adorable scene to share with him, but realized pretty quickly how far into the realm of creepy that was and trashed the idea. As it was, you left Dean and Castiel be to enjoy their late morning, retreating back to your own bed and browsing your phone to pass the time.

At exactly 10:57 A.M., you heard someone grunting to wakefulness, followed by that same someone sitting up in bed. Dean was mumbling something tiredly as his cuddling partner also rose up, a brief, soft conversation playing out between them. Overwhelmed by cautious curiosity, you left behind the comfort of your sofa bed and padded down the hall on tiptoe, stopping shorter than you had the night before in case one of them decided to walk your way. If you cupped your ear, you could just barely make out Dean’s half-awake mumblings and Castiel’s low responses.

“Where’s Sam?” Dean wondered.

“He left around two hours ago,” Castiel answered with certainty. “I believe he is exploring the rest of the resort.”

“Oh of course he is,” Dean grumbled. “And [Y/N]?”

“I sense her presence is still within our building. She looked in on us earlier this morning.”

Your heart just about stopped. Why hadn’t you thought to remember that Castiel was an angel with otherworldly sensory perception?
There was a brief silence, broken by Dean breathing out, “Yup, figures.”

Floorboards creaked as someone got properly out of bed, advancing towards the hallway. Thawing yourself, you quietly took a few steps backwards to distance yourself from the bedroom, only making it as far as the bathroom before Dean rounded the corner and spotted you. He didn’t look terribly surprised to see you there, though whether that was because he’d been expecting you or was too tired to care, you didn’t know.

Without any immediate negative reaction, your pulse died down a bit to a more manageable pace. Managing a knowing smile at Dean, you backed up a few more steps to make room for him to pass. He didn’t, simply muttering a half-hearted “G’morning” before stepping into the bathroom and closing the door after him.

Unsure of what else to do, you settled on squeezing whatever bit of extra introverting time you could get from the morning by going back to the living room. Your sofa welcomed you with open blankets and your phone welcomed you with its lock screen. Aside from amusing yourself on your preferred apps, little else of significance happened that morning. Dean did eventually emerge from the bathroom, dressed in his day clothes, just in time for his brother to tromp up your room’s small wooden porch and open the door.

“Look at who decided to show up,” Dean joked as he approached from the hallway. “Mr. Bright and Early Morning Freak.”

Ignoring Dean, Sam sat himself down in an armchair in the corner of the living room, unfolding a brochure he’d been carrying. You peeked over to get a look at the page he had and saw a huge map dotted with trees and icons you recognized as representing things such as trailheads and camping spots. That was when you recognized the black border on the front of the brochure; it was a National Park pamphlet, surely one for Denali Park.

“What are you thinking of going out into the woods?” you asked as you stood up and joined Sam in examining the map.

“Kind of,” Sam replied. “It’s just that, we have some time before the bus gets here. I was going to vote that we spend it in inside the park since it’s the main attraction here.”

“I second that!” you agreed, eager to get out and about.

“The natural wonders it contains would be worth seeing,” Castiel, who had just emerged from the bedroom, chimed in.

“…Is there any point in me casting a vote, then?” Dean asked after a pause.

“Not really,” Sam admitted, folding up the map. “But your input would have made the vote more democratic.”

Democratic or not, the votes had been cast and your activity for the day had been decided. After you sped through getting ready for the day, your group stopped by a Starbucks in the resort for a quick breakfast (you ended up consuming a giant cinnamon roll) and hopped on a shuttle bus to take you into the vast Denali National Park.

The park contained a surprising amount of greenery for Alaska, boasting a wide array of crisscrossing ecosystems across its six-million-acre property. Even from your short bus ride to the visitor’s center, you could see evidence of a highly varied landscape, from the tallest mountains to the flattest plains. As it turned out, one intrinsic part of Denali’s ecosystems was the majestic, wild
“What’s that up ahead?” another one of the bus riders near the front seats asked, her face right up against the window.

The bus driver, an older but amiable fellow, slowed down to see what she was talking about, and gasped with excitement. “That’s a moose!” He stopped the bus just in time for the other passengers to gather along the left wall of windows.

The second you heard “moose,” you bolted straight up from your seat and to the opposite side of the bus with everyone else. Sure enough, standing right on the side of the road was a giant, brown, antlered creature munching on a patch of foliage. Castiel, who had been sitting beside you, ambled up behind you, squinting out the dusty window at the feeding behemoth. It was admittedly intimidating with its bulk and height, and in that moment, you understood better than you ever had before precisely why Sam was labelled a moose.

Speaking of Sam, he happened to be sitting beside the window already with a perfect view of his animal counterpart. He stared at it intensely, scrutinizing it. Meanwhile Dean, who was sitting beside him, was holding back laughter as his eyes darted between the moose and his brother.

“Alright, I give up,” Dean said in mock defeat. “I can’t tell the difference.”

Sam only spared Dean a glancing bitchface, but he didn’t put as much heart into it as he usually did. His main focus was still on the moose itself, which had by then lifted up its head to show off its full overbearing size.

Oh wow, yup. Crowley was right on the money with his nickname for Sam by the look of how tall moose really were.

You managed to maneuver around a few people in the aisle rushing to take out their phones for pictures, planting yourself by Sam and Dean’s row. You leaned over the seats to steal a bit of their view, which was considerably better than your previous spot, and watched as the moose stared at your bus. Sam stared back, an unreadable expression on his face.

“You know…” Sam mused as he narrowed his eyes at the moose. “For all the times I’ve been called one, I’ve never actually seen a moose until now.”

“Neither have I,” you jumped in. “But by the looks of it…I’d say it’s a pretty honorable title to live up to. I mean, look at the size of that thing…you wouldn’t want one of those on your bad side, that’s for sure.”

“I gotta admit,” Sam smirked, “you’re right about that.”

“I wouldn’t have pinned moose as a fearful type,” Dean added. “But uh…man, those antlers…” Dean playfully poked Sam in the side. “Hey, we should get you some antlers. You could charge at all the bad guys with ‘em!”

“Moose are known to charge at those who stray too close,” Castiel snuck up behind you to provide moose facts. “They can become quite aggressive if provoked.”

“As a certain brother of mine is going to discover very soon,” Sam grated out as Dean continued poking him in the shoulder.

“It’s a shame you didn’t wear that new hat of yours today,” Dean barely stifled a chuckle. “You could’ve gotten out of the bus to socialize with one of your kind; I’m sure you’d fit right in.”
Allowing a warbled laugh to escape him as something even more amusing occurred to him, Dean looked back at the moose. “Hell, with that hat and your natural moosiness, you could probably woo that thing. Get yourself a moose girlfriend, Sammy!”

“That moose is clearly a male, Dean,” Castiel corrected him. “Female moose do not have antlers.”

“Moose boyfriend then, whatever,” Dean was still lightly laughing to himself.

“I’m starting to wish I did have antlers to charge at you with,” Sam threatened, resigning himself to his brother’s sense of humor and taking to staring out the window.

Once the bus driver confirmed that everyone was able to take all the photos they wanted, the bus started moving again, leaving the moose to enjoy his late morning meal in peace. You were dropped off at the visitor’s center, which was a small building with a museum and information desk but nothing of particular interest to your group. What was of great interest to you in particular was a sign posted just outside the center at the bus stop. A makeshift wooden post had a laminated piece of paper nailed to it with an arrow and words that read, “Sled dog demonstration this way.”

The second you saw the words “sled dog,” you took a deep, excited breath. By the time the others had heard this and taken notice of the sign, they pretty much immediately resigned themselves to the fact that they were going to see this demonstration.

The kennel where the sled dogs were kept was near the park ranger headquarters, a gravelly patch of land with fenced-off dog houses, stakes with leashes tied around them, and of course, a multitude of sled dogs. All of the dogs were of husky decent, but varied in color from black, white, brown, and beyond. Some of the canines were attached to the leashes and free to roam about the open area with the park guests, while others napped or chewed on toys in their quarters.

Best of all, a placard at the entrance to this area read, “Please pet dogs.” Oh yes, you would be very pleased to pet as many of these dogs as you humanly could. Even if it was barely noticeable, you saw the glint of anticipation in Sam’s eyes when he read the sign. This place was basically a slice of heaven for a dog person like him.

He and you practically went to town upon reaching the first dog, a black and brown male who sat proudly atop a wooden crate accepting attention. You then moved on to a light brown female who was pacing about her space, then a pure black female who essentially pleaded for (and received) belly rubs. Lastly in the line-up of friendly, well-trained pooches was a black and white male who enjoyed getting as close to any humans in his vicinity as he possibly could, repeatedly attempting to jump on Sam and holding his large paws out to you. At one point, this dog raised up his paw and placed it squarely in your hand, holding it in place and looking at you with twinkling eyes.

You held hands with a sled dog. This trip to Alaska was now officially made.

Castiel was keen to offer some attention to the dogs as well, though he left most of the petting duties to you and Sam. Even Dean, who kept a polite distance for most of his time there, awarded one dog a soft ruffle on the top of its head when it approached him.

The actual demonstration involved a ranger with her hair back in a ponytail bringing out a sled on wheels and releasing some of the dogs to be hooked up to it. These animals may have been professional sled dogs, but they acted like oversized puppies at the prospect of getting to run, some of them bouncing up and down on their front legs and joyfully howling. After a collection of other park visitors had gathered behind a barrier and the ranger was on the sled, she gave the signal and the dogs were off. Their long legs, giant paws, and boundless stamina definitely showed as they tugged their load along the predetermined path, looping back around and coming to a practiced halt right in
front of their audience. Somehow, you found yourself cheering more energetically for these dogs than you had for any human.

With your need to interact with amiable, fuzzy animals satiated, you and Sam chit-chatted about the various dogs as your group meandered out of the kennels and further into the park. By the time you became aware of your deciduous surroundings, you realized that none of you had any actual idea of where you were going. Sam swiftly remedied this by pulling out the map he’d been studying earlier.

“There’s a nature trail not too far from here,” Sam pointed out.

“How long of a trail are talkin’ here?” Dean asked suspiciously. “Not all of us have your stamina.”

“Short, half a mile,” Sam replied without missing a beat. “It’s supposed to have a view of Mt. Denali somewhere along the way.” Sam squinted as he read over a small box of text on the page. “Which is…apparently the tallest peak in all of North America.”

“Well we gotta see that,” you piped up. “We should have just enough time for that before our bus arrives.”

“Alright…” Dean seemed uncertain. “As long as this trail isn’t as cold as the other ones we’ve been on. The weather’s not as good as last week.”

“I could-” Castiel piped up but cut himself off, self-conscious as everyone turned their attention to him. “I…was going to suggest that if you were cold, I could…” His wings made a restless movement behind him. “Use my wings…”

Sam’s eyes widened with curiosity at wings being introduced into the equation, unable to conceal how his gaze shifted from Dean to Castiel a few times. Dean, already trying to process Castiel’s request, noticed his brother’s attention and jumped in.

“W-we’ll see about that, Cas,” Dean ended the conversation before it could hardly even begin, taking off down the sidewalk and throwing over his shoulder, “Where’s that trail, Sam?”

“In the opposite direction,” Sam replied impatiently, wings forgotten in place of his brother’s poor sense of direction.

Dean stopped in the middle of a step and spun around, speed walking back and proceeding down the sidewalk without you. Sam just shook his head and started after him, leaving you and a highly confused angel behind.

“Was…was that a yes or a no?” Castiel asked as he stared after the Winchesters. “Dean is not always terribly articulate in his speech.”

“It was a noncommittal response,” you told him. The “Because he’s torn between his big, fat crush on you and his fear of letting it show in front of other people” remained unspoken, but you thought it very loudly in your head. “Let’s not let them get too far ahead. Sam’s got the map, and if it’s down to my navigation skills, we’ll be lost in this park for the rest of eternity.”

Before Castiel had the chance to question the joke that had gone entirely over his head, you hurried after Sam. You may have overexaggerated about being lost for “eternity,” but without the map you would most definitely be lost for some amount of time, and that was something you did not want to experience on this trip.

The nature trail was a pleasant, easy hike over a gravel path cutting through short evergreens with mounds of orange, yellow, and green moss covering the unmarred ground. Halfway through, the
forest fell away to reveal flat, open land and a view of the distant, towering mountains that bordered the area. Mount Denali was among them, its brown peak turned white by snow and clouds. The top of it wasn’t even visible behind the cloud cover, and that was what really made it hit home that this was literally the tallest mountain you’d ever seen in your life.

Dean whistled and crossed his arms as his eyes followed the mountain up into the clouds. “Anyone think they could climb something like that?” he asked the group.

“Heck no,” you immediately answered. “I watched a documentary about deaths on Mount Everest, and it made me swear off mountain climbing for life.”

“Honestly, I’m gonna have to agree with [Y/N] on this one,” Sam decided. “I’ve read Into Thin Air, and that’s more than enough to keep me at low elevation.”

“No fun,” Dean fake pouted, but you got the sense that he wholeheartedly agreed with you. “What about you, Cas? You’re an angel, you could do it.”

“Without the limitations of the human body, I could,” Castiel confirmed, staring intensely at the mountain. “But it would be highly unnecessary. Flying to the summit would be much more efficient.” He extended his wings slightly for emphasis. “I could demonstrate if you would like, but I would have to enter my true form as teleportation is not permitted.”

Lines of panic broke out across Dean’s face at “true form.” “N-no, that’s okay Cas, you don’t have to,” he said too quickly.

Castiel, though faintly perplexed by Dean’s sudden response, nodded his head and went back to solemnly observing Denali.

Hmm. Interesting. Something about Castiel’s true form made Dean nervous. You recalled him discussing it briefly with you back on the Noordam, about how he wondered what impression Castiel would have on him in his true form. Though he seemed to have adjusted to the angel’s wings, his true form was a different animal entirely.

Once you’d had your fill of the distant mountainous terrain, you continued along the trail, which turned out to be a loop. Luckily for Dean’s delicate insecurities regarding PDA, the temperature was mild thanks to the minimal tree cover and the angle of the mountains, so no wing warming was required. Unluckily for Dean, fate had decided to even his debt with karma for teasing his brother earlier that day.

A single squirrel scampered across your path just as you were about to complete the loop. It froze when it saw you, and you froze as well, everyone’s eyes slowly drifting to Dean as his stare turned into a glare directed at the little brown rodent.

“Well, I already know where this is going,” Dean sighed out, bracing himself for whatever you had in store for him.

“A moose and a squirrel in one trip,” you mused. “Best coincidence ever.”

Sam’s head slowly turned from the squirrel to Dean and back again. “Wow, you were right, Dean,” he said, voice dripping with amusement. “Can’t even tell the difference.”

“Shut up,” Dean halfheartedly grated.
“Not to hate on Dean or anything,” you joined in, “but I will admit that the squirrel is significantly less impressive than the moose.” The squirrel’s tail twitched, and illogically fearing that you’d offended it, you tacked on, “In terms of size, I mean!” In reality, you should have concerned yourself more with Dean being offended rather than the squirrel, but he was too distracted by his brother to counter a word you said.

“You should go up and communicate with it,” Sam suggested. “Make a squirrel friend, find out the best place for storing nuts for the winter.”

A mental image of Dean leaning down, twitching his nose and squeaking at the squirrel materialized in your brain, and you just barely held back a snort to keep from startling the poor, clueless animal.

“You gotta make friends with it, Dean,” Sam quietly insisted, childish grin upon his face. “Better yet, go one step further and get a…” Sam frowned. “I don’t know how to tell the difference between male and female squirrels, so…just get yourself a squirrel significant other.”

Castiel leaned forward to examine the squirrel better. “That squirrel is a male.”

“Okay then, it’s settled!” Sam clapped his hands together. “Squirrel boyfriend for Dean!”

At that moment, the squirrel bolted, whether due to Sam’s abrupt clapping or the prospect of being Dean’s boyfriend, you didn’t know. In any case, it ran at top speed off the trail and clawed its way up the sturdy trunk of an evergreen, clinging onto the bark effortlessly and checking to make sure no one had followed it. The entire event must have taken two seconds at the most with how insanely agile the squirrel was.

“Well, well, well,” Dean said smugly as you all stared at the speedy rodent. “That’s some agility.”

You couldn’t deny that. “I guess that is pretty impressive,” you admitted. “That’s a part of your title you can own up to, huh Dean?”

“Moose may have antlers to charge with,” Dean poked the side of Sam’s head where an antler should have been, “but I’d like to see one try and climb a tree as fast as a squirrel.”

“Fair enough,” Sam conceded, taking the lead as your group continued towards the end of the trail to leave the squirrel in peace.

The walk back to the bus station was a short one, as was the wait for a shuttle to pull up and escort you back to your resort. You arrived a mere fifteen minutes before two o’clock, giving you just enough time to pack up your stuff and check out of your room. By the time you’d exited the resort and made it out into the parking lot, your motor coach was waiting for you at the edge of the property. A clump of other passengers was streaming into the gigantic vehicle, the bus driver checking off names on a clipboard in her hand.

Sam took the lead as you strode towards the coach, Castiel obediently following and Dean sticking close behind. Admittedly antsy after Dean brushing off Castiel’s “wing-warmer” offer, you opted to take your chance and lightly tug at the sleeve of Dean’s jacket to get his attention. He stopped and turned back to see what you wanted.

Waiting until Sam and Castiel were out of earshot in front of the coach, you checked, “You haven’t forgotten the dare, right?”

Dean bristled at the mention of his theoretical confession, sneaking a glance back at Sam and Castiel where they waited their turn to be let onto the coach. “N-no,” he eventually replied. Momentarily struggling with something, he opened his mouth a few times to say something, stopping short each
time. You let him take his time, and eventually he managed, “I just…don’t know how to…”

“Say it?” you finished for him.

He absently nodded his head, staring into the distance with a hint of nervousness.

You grinned reassuringly. “Not to worry, your winggirl’s got your back! We’ve got some time before the bus leaves.” You clasped your hands together and looked at him expectantly. “So, what have you got so far?”

Face scrunching in confusion, Dean looked back at you. “For…what?”

“For your confession! Do you have any ideas for what you’re going to say?”

Dean blanked. “I, uh…” Swallowing, he nervously ran a hand through his hair. “Don’t have anything.”

You tried to hide your surprise. You had to remember that not everyone planned out every crucial interaction beforehand and rehearsed it in their head the same way you did; just another product of social anxiety, you supposed.

“Well, in that case…” you trailed off as your thoughts gently nudged together a course of action. “What do you want to say?”

Once again blanking in the face of openly discussing his feelings for Castiel, Dean let out an impatient huff. “I…I don’t know! I’m not good at talking about…stuff like this…”

“‘Stuff that matters?’” You threw Dean’s own words back at him, which he instantly recognized. “I get it, I’m the same way about a lot of things. But…surely you can manage it just this one time?”

A vaguely pained expression arose on Dean’s face, and right then, you knew that wasn’t going to be the best way to go about this.

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“Alright, how about a different approach…” You thought to yourself of alternatives. There had to be a way for Dean to successfully convey his significant message to Castiel, and considering his rampant allergy towards discussing feelings, the less words it involved upfront, the better. “How about you don’t say anything at all?”

Dean was perplexed by that. “So I just stand there and try to telepathically communicate with him?”

“But at all! Though that would be cool…” You cleared your throat before that thought could distract you any further. “What I mean is, tell Cas what he means to you through action.”

“Action?” Dean asked apprehensively.

“Actions speak louder than words!” you encouraged. “You just have to let your actions do the talking. If all goes well, it should be just as effective as an outright verbal confession.”

“If all goes well?” Dean repeated incredulously. “Yeah, that’s reassuring. How am I supposed to use action to tell Cas that I…” Dean purposefully left his statement unfinished, unable to even admit it in that moment.

You fake whistled. “Yup, if you can’t even say it here, you’re gonna have a real problem saying it to his face.” That settled it. “Alrighty, action it is, then.”

“What, am I gonna have to play charades with him until he gets it, then? ‘Cause Sam and I have tried
playing that game with Cas once before, and he sucked at it.”

“That’s not what I had in mind.” You couldn’t resist wiggling your eyebrows. “I was thinking more along the lines of...a meaningful, heat of the moment kiss.”

The mere mention of the word “kiss” turned Dean into a tomato in record time. He tensed fearfully, but you noticed the way his pupils ever so slightly dilated in anticipation at the prospect of kissing his longtime crush. You had translating Dean Winchester’s facial expressions down to a science.

“I-I dunno if that’s...” Dean was struggling to form a coherent response, so you saved him the trouble.

“Trust me, he’ll get it,” you reassured him. “He’s not completely clueless about romantic stuff. He’ll get the message if you just kiss him.”

Tomato-Dean evolved into Super-Duper-Ripe-Tomato-Dean. “How do you know that he’ll- I mean, what if he’s not- I can’t just-“

“Use your words, Dean,” you gently interrupted him. “One thing at a time.”

Taking a deep breath, Dean braced himself and spoke slowly. “What...if...that doesn’t...work?”

Pride swelled somewhere in your chest at him managing to articulate on this matter. “In the unlikely event that kissing him doesn’t work, you’ll figure something else out.”

That answer apparently did not satisfy Dean. “You mean I should just...improvise?” he questioned, all traces of self-confidence draining from his voice.

“Hey, you said I was the one who needed improvisation lessons, not you. Just think of it like one of your cases; letting things like this flow naturally is sometimes the best way to say what needs to be said.”

“Okay, well, whenever I improvise on a case, it either goes perfectly or bombs completely.”

“That’s talking with strangers! Just remind yourself that this is Cas, and I promise you’ll do fine.”

Dean prickled with anxiety, averting his eyes. “The fact that this is Cas is what’s making this so difficult!”

You felt for Dean then, you really did. There was no denying that this task was difficult, and it showed with crystal clarity how much stress it was placing on him. The only surefire, permanent cure for this stress was the thing, and even if the thing was closer at that time than it had ever been before, that wasn’t making it any easier on poor, expert feelings-repressor Dean. What he needed in that moment was reassurance, and because he had long since reached stage five of grief, you knew just how to provide that to him.

“Look,” you calmly soothed, “you can do this. I think you just need to be reminded of why you’re doing this in the first place.” Dean finally looked back up at you. “You’re doing this because you love Castiel.”

“How is that supposed to help me?” Dean murmured. “That’s...friggin’ terrifying.”

“And you have every right to be afraid,” you assured him. “But I think putting it out in the open might make it a little less frightening. You don’t even have to say it, just...answer me.”
Looking at you inquisitively, Dean bit his lip and nodded once.

“Are you in love with Castiel?”

Dean swallowed but his gaze didn’t so much as twitch for once, intently focused on you and the monumental question at hand. Inhaling shakily, he answered with impressive confidence, “Yes,” and then let his shoulders sag.

“There ya go,” you breathed out, tension you hadn’t even noticed lifting from your own shoulders. “Did that help?”

Dean methodically blinked a few times. “I…think? I don’t know. I can’t tell.”

“We’ll say that it did.” You squealed under your breath with a surge of spontaneous excitement. “This is great! Oh gosh, you guys are gonna make such a great couple.”

That visibly startled Dean. “D-don’t get too far ahead of yourself, kiddo.”

“With everything you two have already been doing together, you may as well be a couple! All you have to do is make it official; seal it with a kiss!”

The sigh, blush, and hide pattern returned, signaling that Dean was back to his regular state. “Let’s just get on the coach before it leaves without us.”

You trotted happily after Dean, a slight spring in your step as you neared the towering motor coach. Dean had seemed to loosen up after your intervention, and on top of that he now had a game plan by which to bring about the glorious thing. Maybe you had more of a future as a therapist than you’d thought possible…

Your cheery mood dissipated somewhat upon ascending the steps into the coach’s interior. It was significantly nicer than the bus you’d ridden on yesterday, with cushiony seats, footrests, a small bathroom in the back, and actual merciful legroom. What lessened your joy was the sheer amount of people onboard, specifically the fact that the coach was so packed that complete strangers had taken up residence in the seats beside your friends.

Sam sat in a window seat on the right row while Castiel sat in a window seat further back in the left row. A sleeping man slumbered in the chair beside the angel, his mouth agape as he quietly drew in raspy breaths and huffed them out.

Dean halted the second the sleeping man entered his line of sight. You think he and you both had assumed that Dean would be the one sitting beside Castiel, and to see someone taking his place beside his angel did not make him happy.

It wasn’t like you could ask the guy to move; he was out cold, in a deep, deep sleep the likes of which only occurred in sleep-deprived people. You’d experienced many a slumber like that yourself, and you knew that the worst thing one could do was interrupt that vital, much-needed rest. You doubted that Castiel would be able to shuffle past the man without waking him, seeing as the man was sprawled out and blocking the path to the aisle.

Eventually Dean started down the aisle again, angrily squinting at the man beside Castiel. Castiel himself perked up when he noticed Dean walking past, glancing unhappily between him and the snoozing man. Dean managed a charismatic smile and a “what can ya do?” shrug at the angel, but you saw how hesitant he was to keep going past Castiel’s row.

Fortunately for Dean, he didn’t have to go much farther, as he happened upon an empty row right
behind Castiel’s with two inviting, comfy-looking chairs waiting for you. You and Dean exchanged a look, and you held your hands out, inviting him to take the window seat directly behind Castiel. Dean eyed the seat warily, most likely because Castiel’s incorporeal wings were invading much of the space in front of that chair from where they phased through the angel’s own seat.

Despite his reservations, Dean did budge towards the farthest chair, pressing himself as far into the cushion as he could in the process to avoid touching Castiel’s feathers. You settled down into the aisle seat beside him, content that you were able to sit near at least one of your friends.

The coach rumbled to life just a minute after you sat down, easing its way out of the parking lot and onto the road leading out of Denali. The first few minutes passed without incident, and you and Dean were able to confirm that riding a bus through Alaska was infinitely more enjoyable without Charlotte Perkins anywhere in the vicinity.

All was well for a while, Dean taking to lazily staring out his window at the retreating mountainous landscape and yourself putting on some tunes with your phone and earbuds. Things started to get interesting about ten minutes into the three-hour-long ride when Dean got careless about keeping himself pressed into his chair.

When the landscape of inland Alaska opened up a bit more, revealing endless stretches of evergreen forests, Dean leaned forward ever so slightly in his chair to take in the view. Castiel’s left wing chose that particular moment to twitch in Dean’s direction, its side phasing right through the tip of the hunter’s nose. Dean froze; though he couldn’t feel it because the wing was incorporeal, he had certainly seen it.

Sending you a borderline panicked look, Dean jumped when the wing swept back slightly and leisurely stretched out, the long, ebony wingtip feathers reaching just far enough to impale Dean in the chest. You couldn’t imagine that was comfortable, seeing something literally going into your chest but not being able to feel a thing from it. Dean sat frozen, willing himself to sink farther into his chair even when he physically could not, until the feathers retreated. Reflexively, Dean huffed in relief, patting at the spots where the feathers had pierced him.

In the seat ahead of him, Castiel tensed and his wings tightened. Slowly but surely, he angled himself in his seat so that he could peer between the gap of his chair and the window, locking eyes with Dean. Realization flooded what could be seen of the angel’s features. You pulled out one of your earbuds when it became evident he was going to speak.

“I’m sorry, did I…” Castiel stopped himself, glancing worriedly as the sleeping man faintly stirred beside him.

“Dude,” Dean whispered back, “your wing stabbed me in the chest.”

“My deepest apologies, I didn’t mean to,” Castiel nervously muttered back, careful to keep his volume lower so as not to disturb the person at his side. “I was merely stretching. I had forgotten that you were behind me…” His wings shifted closer to his body, trying to give Dean as much space as possible.

“No harm done,” Dean assured, his eyes darting towards the wings. “You, uh…you got enough space?”

“My wings are admittedly rather…cramped,” Castiel confessed. “But for the sake of your comfort, I can keep them confined to a limited space.” The way his wings restlessly shifted in the small space Castiel allowed them made it all too obvious how uncomfortable the cooped-up arrangement was for him.
Evidently, Dean noticed this as well. “If…” His voice cracked slightly, so he cleared his throat and tried again. “If you…wanna…stretch your wing a bit, you could always…” He cleared his throat one more time. “Stretch…it…around me.”

Smooth, Winchester, you sarcastically thought to yourself. But really, you were amazed by Dean bringing this up on his own without any recommendation from you or situational circumstance. Your earlier talk must have really had an impact on him.

Though at first shocked by Dean’s proposal, Castiel collected himself. “Are you certain? I will not be able to make it corporeal with my chair in the way.”

“I-it’s fine,” Dean stuttered. “Just…whatever makes you comfortable.”

Though still appearing somewhat uncertain, Castiel slowly nodded. “Very well. As you wish, Dean.”

With that, Castiel’s wing methodically stretched out and went completely through Dean until it was in position to curl around him from behind. Though it was incorporeal, it was still carefully arranged to encircle the hunter in a ring of relaxed feathers. Even without being able to feel Castiel’s wings, Dean looked undeniably pleased to have one of them around him, and he returned to staring out the window, a smile he only barely attempted to hide tugging at his lips.

Beaming at the sight, you waved to get Castiel’s attention from between the seats of his row, and he leaned towards the small space to see what you wanted.

“If you want, you can stretch your other wing over here,” you told him. “Not in a cuddly way!” you hurriedly added. “I mean, you can stretch it out flat in front of me if you want.” You stuck out your arm towards the aisle to show him what you meant. “I don’t mind.”

Nodding gratefully, Castiel did extend his other wing straight outwards, pointing towards the aisle and flat against the seatback in front of you. Satisfied that the angel had a comfortable arrangement, you popped your earbud back in and reclined in your seat, content that you had all settled in for the duration of the trip.

You must have dozed off at some point during the ride, consumed by the rumbling of the bus over the bumpy permafrost-distorted roads of Alaska. A song with particularly loud bass was what roused you, snapping your eyes open and reviving your awareness of the outside world. It took a minute or so for you to really “wake up,” your head still reeling from your accidental catnap.

Crap. Looks like you weren’t getting much sleep tonight; this would inevitably impact your regular sleeping schedule.

Speaking of impacted sleeping schedules, Dean was passed out beside you, his head lolling against his chair’s headrest and his features relaxed. Castiel’s slack wing was still surrounding him.

Checking the time on your phone, you were startled back to wakefulness once you saw your lock screen; it was already four forty-five. The trip only had about fifteen minutes left, and you’d spent the prior two hours and forty-five or so minutes sleeping to your heart’s content.

You looked out the window just in time to see a green road sign pass by welcoming you to Fairbanks. The highway you were driving on was considerably more commercial than any of the roads the coach had travelled while you were awake, with multiple lanes, fresher markings, and actual other vehicles travelling alongside you. It was faintly jarring to not be the only one on the road; if one thing could be said about most Alaskan roads, it was that you’d seldom have to worry
about traffic on them.

The coach drove into the city of Fairbanks shortly after that. It was a humble city, but much larger than any of the rural settlements you’d grown accustomed to seeing. It gave off the vibes of a modernish spread-out community, with wide streets and local businesses taking up the bulk of what your coach passed. Though it was a relatively large settlement for inland Alaska, it had many characteristics of a rustic town, from repurposed, aged buildings to cement lots overgrown by grass and sparse vegetation.

As with your previous bus ride, your journey ended in front of a hotel. This one wasn’t a resort in the slightest, more of a typical tall, apartment-style building that stood on its own.

You had to softly jab at Dean’s side to wake him, the hunter snapping wide-awake with a startled snort and rapid blinking. Castiel jumped a bit where he sat, his wing ruffling and eventually withdrawing when he noticed the other passengers standing to leave the vehicle.

The sleeping man was also startled by Dean’s loud awakening, inhaling a massive snore as he at last returned to consciousness. Dazed and confused, the man took one look back at Dean, another out the window past Castiel, and finally gave his head a violent jostle and rose to his feet.

At least someone got the sleep they needed, you thought, watching him shove his way into the line of disembarking passengers in the aisle.

Though Dean was still a little out of it, you, him, and Castiel managed to find space in the aisle and caught up to Sam outside of the bus. You hadn’t been able to get a look at him throughout the entire drive because of the angle your seats were at, but if his tousled hair and tired eyes were anything to judge by, he’d fallen victim to the grasp of accidental napping as well. You’d never associated travelling by road to be particularly sleep-inducing, but with mega comfort of that motor coach, it was no wonder you’d all passed out.

Once again deciding to take advantage of convenience, you booked a room at the hotel since it was right in front of you. You didn’t miss how star struck the Winchesters were upon first entering the building, unaccustomed to the fancy, clean style of hotel you’d grown up staying in. The floor and walls were made of pristine white tile, every lavish decoration nearly too clean. This was a branded hotel, a branch of a business spread out across the country for occasional vacationers and travelers. It was near the opposite end of the spectrum from where the brothers normally stayed; dingy, roadside motels were ordinarily the only things they could afford on their near constant nationwide travels.

You did have to admit, this particular hotel was one rung higher on the ladder of luxurious than you were used to. A gimmicky gift shop full of plush bears and shirts of the aurora borealis sat in one corner of the lobby across from an upscale restaurant promising “all-you-can-eat fried sole” and blueberry cobbler. You made a mental note to bring up the idea of getting dinner there later; you were getting a hankering for some more good ol’ seafood.

Once you’d checked in at the counter and been assigned a room, you took an elevator to the fourth floor. The familiar sight of a hallway of doors greeted you, reminiscent of the residence hallways on the Noordam minus the motion of the ocean.

With your minimal luggage in tow, you entered your room with a single swipe of your keycard, revealing a freshly-cleaned generic hotel room the likes of which you must’ve stayed in a hundred times before. There were two double beds, a large cabinet with a television, a large and extremely comfy-looking armchair in the corner, a bathroom, and a window that offered a view of the plain, flat rooftops of neighboring establishments. Aside from that, there was open space, and lots of it. Maybe you’d just grown adjusted to the cramped nature of your room on the Noordam and the minimal style
of your cabin in the resort, but it was a little off-putting to suddenly have all this unoccupied air in your living quarters; you understood the Winchesters’ reaction much better upon noticing that.

The bed situation in this room was unlike any you’d faced yet, but you decided to make it a little easier on everyone by putting your bag down on the super plush armchair. Upon taking a seat beside your bag, you knew you could sleep there. You’d managed to make do with a sofa, and an armchair was just a narrower version of that, right?

Sam took the left bed without bothering to consult anyone else, everyone silently aware that Dean and Castiel would want to share a bed for themselves. Dean didn’t say anything about it, placing his own bag on the right bed seemingly without a thought.

Right about then your stomach decided that it was getting impatient with the proceedings and gurgled indignantly, drawing all eyes towards you.

Sheepishly laughing, you pulled yourself to your feet. “I, uh…saw a restaurant downstairs.”

“We are overdue for a meal,” Sam observed.

“Grub time it is, then,” Dean chipped in his thoughts and gathered himself in preparation to leave.

You trotted after Sam and Dean as they made for the door, but just as Dean was about to turn the handle, he paused. He looked back and noticed a distinct lack of imposing angelic presence in your group.

“Cas?” Dean called back into the room at the angel. “You comin’?”

“I was actually planning to remain here,” Castiel answered, standing firmly in the center of the room. “My wings require stretching. Although I was able to spread them out somewhat in the bus, its limited space was not ideal.” He nodded approvingly at the pocket of empty space in the middle of the room. “This area should suit my needs.”

“Oh, o…kay,” Dean replied uncertainly. He looked almost disappointed at not having the angel along. “You want us to bring something back for you?”

“I do not require sustenance, Dean,” Castiel reminded him for what must have been the bajillioninth time. “But I appreciate the consideration.”

Turning away before his faint blush could be seen, Dean muttered an “alright” and pushed down on the handle, leading you out into the hallway.

Several of your fellow bus riders were out and about in the hotel that evening, a particularly large cluster huddled around and inside the gift shop in the lobby. Not wanting to risk your slowly-depleting funds, you hurried past the gimmicky temptations of the store and went straight for the restaurant.

It was simply called “Northern Latitudes,” and it looked to be a hole-in-the-wall sort of place masquerading as a fancy sit-down eatery, but upon being seated in a booth you began to understand the class of the place. Aquatic decorations ranging from whitened coral to impossibly huge mounted fish were littered throughout the interior. The main defining feature of the décor were numerous paintings and photographs of the aurora borealis hanging on the walls.

Remembering the sign you’d seen out front earlier, you asked your waitress for an order of the fried sole, while Sam ordered a soup and Dean decided on “the simplest, meatiest sandwich on the menu.” You three passed the time trying to figure out which, if any, of the large taxidermized fish were
actually real. Your mind was so pre-occupied with thoughts of giant fish, you thought for sure that you were imagining the size of the plate of sole your waitress eventually placed in front of you.

Two filets of crispy, breaded sole fish each literally the length of your forearm sat before you, waiting to be devoured. Your mouth was agape at the sheer size of the meal, and you could see Sam and Dean staring wide-eyed at the monster of a fish.

“Forget the taxidermy,” Dean remarked. “That’s the one that can’t possibly be real.”

But, one bite proved that it was in fact real and tasty to boot. It also proved how impossible it would be for you consume all or even most of it.

“Hope you guys have a big appetite,” you gestured to your plate. “Because if I try to eat all of this on my own, it will literally kill me.”

Thank goodness for Winchesters and their huge food capacity. Between the three of you, you managed to finish off three-quarters of the insurmountable sole, the Winchesters splitting one of the filets alongside their own food and yourself taking about half of the other. By the time you were done, you were so stuffed that the delectable blueberry cobbler you’d been looking forward to was out of the question.

Though a bit disappointed by the lack of dessert, you were still satisfied with dinner by the time you left. The transition from Northern Latitudes to the generic, crisp hotel lobby was jarring, but you adjusted quickly.

On your way back towards the elevators, Sam noticed a folding table set just outside the lobby. A hotel staff member sat there behind a sign that read “Travelling Info,” smiling politely at passerby. Sam came to a near immediate halt in front of the table.

“Hey, you think I should check there so we plan our next move?” Sam asked, glancing at the table.

“Sure,” you decided. “Since you’ve pretty much become our unofficial trip planner.”

Sam nodded in affirmation. “Alright. I’ll see you guys upstairs later.” Vaguely waving once in your direction, he proceeded towards the table and struck up a friendly conversation with the lady behind the table.

As you and Dean continued towards the elevators, you glanced back at Sam and had a minor epiphany: with Sam occupied, Dean could go back to the room with Castiel. Alone. This was the perfect opportunity for the thing. Cogs and gears turned in your head as you stepped inside the elevator.

The very second the doors slid shut, you cleared your throat. “You know, when you get back to the room, it’ll just be you. And Cas.” Dean didn’t seem to be paying attention, so you faked a cough. “Just the two of you. In a room together. For a while.”

Dean finally acknowledged the conversation you were attempting to instigate. “You’re forgetting about yourself.”

He had a point. “Well, yeah, but…I can leave, if you want. No problem at all.” You snapped your fingers as an even better idea occurred to you. “Or better yet, I can keep watch for any stray moose that decide to come back to the room too early!”

“I’m not worried about Sam. If I know him, he’ll probably spend twenty minutes talking that poor woman’s ear off about every little detail of whatever plan he’s cooking up.”
“Well then, I don’t see anything stopping you from getting in there and being gay for that adorable, innocent angel.”

Now that the topic at hand had actually been verbally acknowledged, Dean gave himself permission to be flustered. “I-I dunno if now’s really the right time to—” The elevator let out a shrill ding as its doors slid open, having reached its destination. Dean hurriedly stepped out into the hallway, and you followed closely behind.

“If not now, when?” you asked, matching Dean’s stride down the carpeted corridor. “You gotta follow through with the dare.”

That made Dean slow down. Sighing shakily, he clutched at his stomach. “I…think I ate too much to do the dare right now.”

Though obviously an excuse that held hardly any weight, you went with it. “Got butterflies in your stomach, huh?”

“Can…can we call them something less dainty than ‘butterflies?’”

You thought for a moment for the sake of Dean’s manly sensibilities. “How about wasps in your stomach? Those are like the opposite of dainty.”

Dean grimaced. “Nah, let’s just stick to butterflies.”

By then you’d reached your room’s door, neither of you making a move to use either of your keycards. Several moments of uncertain silence passed before Dean quietly coughed into his fist.

“You, uh…you gonna keep watch out here?” Dean tried to maintain a casual tone that conflicted with the immense waves of nervous energy he was emanating.

You glanced down the hallway. A pair of other guests was walking from the elevators towards your end of the hall, lazily glancing around the hall’s mostly plain contents and making quiet conversation. Anxiety peaked in your gut as a scenario played out in your head: those two people would walk by, see you standing outside the room, and think you were spying or creeping. For every counterargument you thought up to challenge that idea, another illogical rebuttal resulted, thus engaging the endless cycle of overthinking that came with your anxious nature.

“Could I maybe stay in the room?” you carefully asked, knowing fully well that Dean would probably object.

“…Why?” Dean drew out the single word, calmly challenging you.

You tried not to sound pathetic. “What if people see me standing out here and think I’m weird? Like, that I’m creeping or stalking or something?”

“…I thought the point of this was for me to be…uh, alone…with Cas.”

“And you would be! I’d stay right by the door, I promise! You won’t even know I’m there.”

Staring you down harmlessly for a few moments, Dean caved. “Alright, fine.” He pointed an authoritative finger at you. “But you stay put.”

You nodded obediently as Dean fished his keycard out of his pocket and slid it through the reader on the door. Only then did you realize that this was really happening. You didn’t even have to particularly encourage Dean, he was just…doing it. Your pep talk from before the bus ride really
must have worked.

Dean quietly swung open the large door, hesitating in the entranceway. You could see subtle signs of all-consuming worry in him, from his restrained expression to the tense way he held himself. You knew he was absolutely a brave person, having faced monsters, unspeakable trauma, and even Hell itself, but just the anticipation of a love confession had him quaking.

Hoping to ease his nerves a bit, you patted Dean’s arm and whispered, “Remember the plan, and make like Shia LaBeouf.”

Though he sent you an unamused look, your memeing appeared to ever so slightly lessen his nervous energy. Turning back to the doorway, Dean took a long, deep breath and whistled it out, steeling himself and striding into the room with as much confidence as he could manage. You tiptoed behind him, closing the door and huddling down in a corner right in front of it like you’d promised.

Truly, you did have every intention of giving Dean and Castiel their privacy, but it just so happened that the angle at which you were sitting not only ensured you were out of sight, but also gave you a near perfect view of the center of the room. If you just happened to witness the thing in action because of where you were sitting, well, that would be A-Okay with you; provided nothing escalated too far, but since Dean knew you were in the room, you doubted it would.

Speaking of Dean, you watched as he stepped right into the room’s main area. You picked up the sound of the television quietly playing a commercial, something about a tool for repairing a car’s AC. The very moment Dean crossed the threshold into the main room, he stopped, all poise leaving his body as he stared at something on his bed, something you assumed to be Castiel.

Releasing a wavering breath, Dean greeted Castiel. “Hey Cas.”

“Hello, Dean,” came the familiar response.

Worrying his bottom lip for a few seconds, Dean turned his attention towards the TV, able to relax more effectively when Castiel wasn’t in his immediate line of vision. “Whatcha doin’?”

“I am attempting to glean some understanding of television advertisements,” Castiel replied, sounding focused. “So far my attempts to understand them have not been successful. Most of their claims sound like exaggerations or outright fabrications.” You heard him shifting on the bed. “I find commercial industry’s lack of transparency disturbing.”

“You and me both…” Dean agreed, hopefully working to become more transparent himself to get this shindig started. “You…find any ads that you like?”

The angel was silent for a moment as he considered the question. “Well, there was one commercial for small batteries with a little pink rabbit…I enjoyed seeing the rabbit, but I fail to see what it has to do with batteries.”

A smile curled at Dean’s lips, temporarily melting away his fear. You could practically hear him thinking to himself, “What a dork.” This upwelling affection was strong enough that Dean tore his eyes away from the flickering television screen and back towards his bed. His nervousness noticeably surged up again once his eyes fell on Castiel, but he balled his fists to keep it at bay. Not really sure what to do with himself, his feet carried him farther into the room, absently looking around at its contents but pointedly avoiding the angel.

Apparently, you weren’t the only one who noticed Dean’s blatant jumpiness, because Castiel asked with concern, “Dean? Are you alright?”
“Me? I’m fine,” Dean scoffed despite sounding anything but fine.

“Did something happen at dinner?”

“Other than a buncha giant fish staring at us while we ate, no. Oh, and we were served the largest plate of seafood I’ve ever seen. I should’ve brought the rest of it up here for you; I know you don’t need sustenance or whatever, but it was some damn good fish…”

It was a battle to stay where you were, itchy and restless. Dean was stalling, and if he kept it up for too long, you feared the thing would be unnecessarily delayed again.

“If you say so…’” Castiel didn’t sound like he believed Dean at all. “Though my grace is picking up large amounts of uncharacteristic nervous energy emanating from you. If there’s anything you wish to talk about, I can listen…but I’m not sure I’d understand whatever is troubling you if it is particularly human in nature.”

Did a love confession count as “particularly human?” Great, now you were getting nervous. Still, whatever you felt was surely nothing compared to Dean in that moment.

Straightening out his posture, Dean huffed and forced himself to spin around. “Actually, Cas, there is…something I need to tell you…”

“Oh?” You heard the soft sound of someone standing up from the bed and padding forwards. Castiel at last came into your line of sight, his trench coat swaying and his wings jerking hard a single time to adjust to movement. “What is it?”

“It’s, uh…” Dean forcefully carded a hand through his hair as he averted his gaze from Castiel’s. “It’s something important. Like, really big.”

That gave Castiel pause. He tilted his head curiously at Dean, starting a bit as the TV abruptly blasted a loud advertisement with an overly-expressive man spouting the praises of a local furniture store. Frowning at the man and the refurbished sofa he was excitedly gesturing to, Castiel retrieved the remote from the television’s cabinet and shut the device off, replacing the remote and giving Dean his full attention.

Dean clearly did not like being the sole focus of Castiel’s attention in that moment, shifting and rocking slightly on his heels. Even though Castiel waited with unending patience, he took a few steps forward until he was directly facing Dean, giving you a perfect sideline view of them both.

Tension descended like a slow-motion avalanche onto the room as the two faced each other, crushing each of them with its exponentially growing weight. Dean in particular appeared weighed down, preferring to stare into Castiel’s shoes rather than the angel’s intense, curious eyes.

Eventually, even Castiel’s incredibly flexible patience wore out. “Whatever it is that’s on your mind,” Castiel assured with a softness rarely heard in his voice, “I will gladly listen.” “I don’t…know if I can say it,” Dean managed.

Castiel appeared greatly confused. “I can’t imagine what would lay so heavily on you that you couldn’t vocalize it.”

Action, Dean, action! you thought in the vain hope that he would hear you.

Puffing out his chest, Dean finally pulled his gaze upwards and faced Castiel properly. “You know I’m no good at talking about…things…”
“You mean discussing ’stuff that matters?’” Castiel repeated that same phrase Dean had used during their last night aboard the Noordam.

“Right, yeah, exactly,” Dean hastily confirmed. “But…I-I could show you what I’m trying to tell you instead, if that’s okay…”

A bit apprehensive but interested all the same, Castiel slowly nodded. “Alright.”

You could hear Dean’s anxious swallow all the way from your hiding spot. “Okay.”

A few seconds characterized by a distinct lack of action passed, the love-struck pair’s eyes locked on each other. Something in Dean snapped and he began to slowly lean forward, still holding a steady gaze. Castiel stood rigidly, not shying away in the slightest, but you could tell that he didn’t have a clue what was coming.

Mere inches away from Castiel’s face, Dean stopped. This would be his last chance to back out of this; yet he simply didn’t have the choice to back out, not after all that had transpired in these past ten days. Evidently aware of this, Dean finally freed his eyes and allowed them to dart towards the angel’s mouth. Then, shutting his eyes and swiftly leaning in further before his doubts could overcome him, Dean pressed his lips to Castiel’s.

Castiel let out a muffled noise of surprise, his eyes widening as he realized just what was happening. His features softened within a second though, and he allowed himself to be taken by the kiss. He was utterly swept up in it, still so shocked that he couldn’t move but losing all rigidity in his stance. All of that tension he normally held in his vessel transferred to his wings, which ruffled up to a larger size than you’d ever seen before, every last one of his feathers standing on end and puffing out.

The kiss was just a simple, light press that lasted five seconds in all, but as an observer, it seemed far longer. Who knows how much time the actual kissers must have felt passing. At the very least, Dean had a sense of time, as he pulled himself away from Castiel with gentle ease. His eyes darted between the angel and any space where the angel was not, torn between wanting to see Castiel’s reaction and fear of what it might be.

As far as you could tell, Castiel’s reaction was a positive one. He looked to be in a bit of a daze, having lost all the stiffness angels usually held themselves with and watching Dean with wonder through hazy eyes.

Once he couldn’t stand the void of dialogue any longer, Dean asked Castiel’s shoes, “Did…that get my point across?”

Still under the kiss’s spell, Castiel dumbly blinked a few times and murmured, “I…believe it did.” Coming back to his senses, he took on a more self-assured tone. “But just in case…you might want to do it again in the event that I missed some of it.”

Astonishment rapidly drew Dean’s gaze upwards. He gaped, “…That was smooth as hell.”

Castiel frowned. “Hell is not smooth, Dean. You know th-”

The angel was cut off by Dean leaning forward a second time and initiating another lip lock. This time, Castiel melted into the kiss almost immediately, his objection turned to dust in the wind. His wings again ruffled briefly, but unlike before they drooped and hung limply from his back, overcome by contentment.

This kiss lasted considerably longer than the first, staying soft and gentle but passionate throughout. It was also much more reciprocal, Castiel having been given just enough of a warning to participate
as best as he could with his limited experience. At some point, the angel’s hands instinctively reached out, one settling on Dean’s cheek to pull him closer and the other clumsily grabbing Dean’s own hand. Dean’s eyes opened for the briefest of seconds to glimpse this, and within that tiny span of time, he gingerly twisted his own hand somewhat to hold Castiel’s in turn.

And just like that, the **thing** was unfolding before your very eyes. At long last, Dean and Castiel had finally done it; they’d simultaneously tumbled head over heels into the precipice, just like that one movie couple Dean had once compared them to. What were their names…Thelma and Louise? Yeah, it was just like that, except unlike good ol’ Thelms and Louie, Dean and Castiel weren’t driving a car through the Grand Canyon to outrun the FBI; but they were “holding hands and sailing off this cliff together” just like Dean had once upon a time said they would.

When the kiss ended, it was hesitantly, with neither party wanting to break apart from this new **thing** they’d discovered. They pulled back to look at each other in one of their infamous staring contests, but this one was perhaps the most tender of any yet recorded, a new spark in place that hadn’t quite been lit any other time prior.

Castiel’s hand slowly fell away from Dean’s face, and Dean sluggishly released Castiel’s other hand. Neither seemed quite sure of what to say, everything about their conversation suddenly in a very different context than before.

Dean was the one who broke the silence, hoarsely asking, “Did you get it all that time?”

Back to being in a bit of a daze, Castiel quietly answered, “I…just have two questions.”

“A-alright,” Dean encouraged, wisps of his earlier nervousness returning with a vengeance at the prospect of talking about this unnamable matter.

“Firstly…what exactly was that intended to convey?”

The remainder of Dean’s decomposed nervousness surged back into existence at that question, his face tightening and voice wavering. “Wha- the whole point of this was me not having to say anything! ‘Cause I suck with words, remember? I think the meaning is pretty obvious!”

“I have a good idea of what you mean, but…” Castiel openly blushed, for once not bothering to hide it behind his grace. “I want to be sure. I can’t afford to be mistaken in this instance.”

Dean was a squirrel caught right in the headlights of an eighteen-wheeler on a busy highway. You found yourself silently cheering him on. **Go on, use your words, Dean, use your words! Improvise like we talked about!**

Taking a few moments to anxiously ruffle his own hair, Dean opted to let the words flow naturally rather than forcing them, which was probably for the best. “It meant…I…really like you, a hell of a lot, and I have for a long time, and we’ve been doing this weird dance around each other for years now and…” Dean caught himself rambling and tried to compose himself. “I just finally decided to do something about it, because…”

Castiel’s attention was peaked, trembling hope practically shining off him like a beacon.

“I…” Dean swallowed and blinked harshly. “I l…lo…” Gritting his teeth, he settled on with all of the sincerity in his being, “I need you.”

**Close enough**, you thought as you leaned forward, on the very edge of your nonexistent seat. **I’ll count that as completing the dare.**
Both you and Dean were dying to hear Castiel’s response, to at last see any remaining qualms or uncertainties on this matter be put to rest. Some small part of you worried whether Castiel would understand what Dean meant, but your concern was misplaced. In all the years he’d spent with the Winchesters, Castiel must have picked up some of the enigmatic “Deanish” language, because he replied in a calm, gentle voice, “I love you as well, Dean.”

Dean looked about ready to cry from joy and relief at that finally being out in the open. With the many years it had taken for it to be aired, you couldn’t blame him.

Regarding Dean shyly, Castiel asked, “Does this mean we can officially become romantic partners?” The angel was buzzing with delight beneath his outer layer of angelic seriousness, a sight that immediately found a home on your list of the most adorable things to ever happen ever.

“If you want to…” Dean sounded somewhat worried, as if Castiel would reject him even after all of this. Yeah, as if, Dean. Seriously, if he still couldn’t see how madly in love with him this angel was, you were going to take him to an optometrist to get him some glasses because he would have to be blind to miss that.

“I would enjoy that exceedingly,” Castiel answered without so much as a hint of hesitation, putting Dean’s lingering, unreasonable fear to rest. “So long as that is acceptable to you.”

Unable to hide his smile, Dean affirmed, “Hell yeah it is.”

Donning his own puppy dog grin, Castiel blushed a bit more intensely. His lovable smile faltered somewhat as something occurred to him. He looked away from Dean for the first time since their kiss and timidly admitted, “I must profess…I know next to nothing on the subject of romantic endeavors, so I am not sure how good of a partner I will be.”

Even Castiel doubted himself and his worthiness; whenever these two doofuses both realized they were fully deserving of love, one more injustice in the universe would be undone.

As Dean’s nervous energy finally dissipated, replaced by his usual charismatic boldness, he regarded Castiel with amusement. “Aw c’mon, surely you’re not completely clueless! Otherwise, what have you been doing this whole time with the cuddling requests and wing hugs, then?”

The mention of his fluffy activities with Dean brought another blush to Castiel’s face, leaving the angel exposed without his stoic wall to hide behind. “I was merely following my instincts as guided by my feelings,” he explained tersely.

Regarding Castiel with open curiosity, Dean briefly hummed to himself. “Okay then, in that case, pop quiz to find out how much you do know…” He trailed off as he considered what to ask, eventually quizzing, “What’s a hickey?”

That put Castiel right on the spot. “Um…an alternative variety of the human sport of hockey?”

Dean gave the angel a blank stare. “…Not even close.”

The poor angel looked somewhat ashamed. “Clearly I have much to learn.”

“Oh, you have no friggin’ idea…” Around then, Dean noticed Castiel’s embarrassment and decided to remedy it. “But, luckily, you’ve got me to teach you now. I am a certified expert on ‘romantic endeavors.’”

Castiel looked genuinely curious. “One can be certified for that?”
“Self-certified,” Dean clarified.

Vaguely nodding, Castiel muttered, “I see…” Brightening somewhat, he proclaimed, “At the very least, I can say that what little I understand about romance with some degree of confidence is what I learned from the pizzaman.”

Dean couldn’t hold back his laughter at that, a snort escaping his throat. “Okay, w-we can work with that.”

The angel regained some of his poise. “In the interest of curiosity and furthering my foray into learning about matters of romance, what is a hickory?”

“Hickey, Cas,” Dean corrected, holding back another laugh only for the angel’s sake. “It’s a mark someone makes on another person’s skin by kissing them really hard.”

“A mark…as in, staking a claim as animals would mark their territory?”

Though a bit put off by that description, Dean nodded in confirmation. “That’s…a pretty animalistic way of putting it, but kind of, yeah.”

“Am…I allowed to do that now?”

Startled by the angel’s question, Dean turned into a tomato for the umpteenth time this trip. “Uh, y-yeah, I suppose…” He snuck a glance towards the compartment of the room by the door, and even though he couldn’t see you, he knew you were there. “But not right now, not here!” he hurriedly added as he turned back to Castiel. “This is not the time or the place, trust me.”

Nodding in understanding, Castiel took a tiny step back to assure Dean of his respect for his personal space.

“Besides, I’d have to show you the technique, and…” Realizing he was accidentally thinking aloud, Dean noisily cleared his throat. “Anyways…” Grappling for a change of topic, he settled on, “What was your other question?”

Castiel hummed inquisitively, initiating a questioning head tilt as he often did.

“You said you had two questions earlier. I only heard one of them.”

“Ah, my second question…I had forgotten about it in the midst of…all this,” Castiel trailed off weakly. “My second question was, where is Kay?”

Taking a few seconds to try and decipher that without success, Dean feebly asked, “Uh…what?”

“Where is Kay,” Castiel repeated as though it made perfect sense. “While I was watching advertisements on the television earlier, I saw one that stated very plainly, and I quote, ‘Every kiss begins with Kay.’ I did not see Kay during either of our kisses.”

Amusement and realization crinkled Dean’s features into an extremely entertained expression. “You…are a dork,” he stated, shaking with a string of chuckles. Those chuckles turned into laughter, which resulted in more laughter, and even more laughter for no particular reason.

Perplexed and mildly concerned, Castiel questioned, “What’s so funny, Dean?”

“Nothin’, Cas,” Dean assured him, catching his breath. “I just…can’t believe…we’re actually…” He shook his head with a sweet smile and pulled Castiel in for a hug. “C’mere.”
As Dean rested his head in the crook of Castiel’s neck, the angel slowly returned the hug, still somewhat concerned. “Dean, are you—”

“I’m fine, Cas. Just wanna hold you for a while.”

Affection lifting his voice, Castiel whispered as he leaned closer, “Of course, Dean.”

That was your cue to leave them be while they held onto each other and what they’d been lucky enough to just obtain. After days of planning and offering ideas and advice and attending to general winggirl duties, your work here was done. At long last, the cuddly otters were together, officially speaking.

Glowing with triumph, you quietly rose to your feet and snuck towards the bathroom to retrieve your phone from where you’d left it charging. But before you could even set one foot on the cold tile floor, you heard the mechanical whir of the door unlocking followed by it hurriedly opening and slamming shut behind you.

Spinning on your heels to see what was happening, you saw Sam standing just in front of the door, a panicked look on his face. This look was swiftly replaced by one of confusion when he peered further into the room, taking in the sight of Dean and Castiel holding each other tight in an amorous embrace.

The pair simply looked back at Sam, Castiel just barely tilting his head and Dean breaking out in a nervous sweat. Slowly, Dean separated himself from the angel, and you couldn’t help but notice how difficult it was for him to do so.

“Hey, Sammy,” Dean’s attempt to sound casual was buried under his fearful tone. “This isn’t—”

“Save the denial, Dean,” Sam cut him off, refocusing and striding into the main room. “We’ve got bigger things to worry about.”

Sam’s serious tone must have been enough to make Dean forget what he’d been caught doing. “What’s up?”

Equal amounts curious and afraid, you trailed into the main room behind Sam, silently slipping into place among the group just in time to hear what was unfolding.

Looking around at the three of you, Sam ensured you were paying attention before announcing, “Guys, we’ve got a big problem.” Turning the focus to you, he allowed a few seconds to compose himself. “I…saw your genie in the lobby.”

Panic clutched at your chest in an instant.

Oh no.

You could barely form a single word. “Wh- h-how did he- no, there’s no way—” You inhaled and exhaled one long gulp of air to keep your breathing under control and to stop the meaningless jumble of unfinished sentences from streaming out of your mouth. “Are you sure?”

“Almost positive,” Sam grimly confirmed. “The guy I saw looked exactly like him, sunglasses and all. I don’t think I could forget his face, and he was wearing the same suit from the last time we saw him.”

This could not be happening. You’d been off his radar for so long, and yet somehow, he’d caught up to you. After all that effort of staying on the move, staying one step ahead, he’d still tracked you
down. What were you supposed to do? You were running out of money, and you couldn’t keep
running forever. The high you’d been riding basically this entire trip crashed faster than every video
game vehicle you’ve ever tried driving.

All eyes were on you, which only made your anxiety grow. Everyone was looking to you for an
answer, for a course of action. The added pressure only made it worse.

“Did he see you?” you managed with what little mental capacity you could devote to speaking.

“I don’t think so,” Sam replied, which provided at least a small glimmer or relief. “I was talking with
that woman at the travelling table when I saw him enter the lobby from the front door, so I just
excused myself and got here as fast as I could.”

“But if he’s here…” Cold fear gripped you again. “That means he knows we’re here too.”

Whether seconds or minutes of silence followed your observation, you had no idea; anxiety had an
odd tendency to distort time and suck out all of the meaning it held. However long you stood there,
you were petrified as you wrangled with your frantic thoughts.

“What do we do, then?” Dean broke the unmeasurable silence, watching you expectantly as if you
had all the answers.

Without time to plot a proper course of action, or even to calm yourself down enough to just think in
the first place, you offered up the first thing that came to mind: “We have to get out of here. Now.”

Your body twitched into instinctive action, restless and driven by fear. You gathered your bag from
the cozy armchair you’d never get to sleep in, and everyone else followed your lead, packing up
what little they had and preparing to make a hasty exit.

Wordlessly, your group congregated in the small entranceway of the room. Sam’s hand hovered
uncertainly over the door handle, staring through the peephole. You kept expecting him to jump
back, or for a man in a familiar blue business suit to pop out, but thankfully for the sake of your
nerves, nothing of the sort happened.

“The coast looks clear,” Sam announced as he pulled back, finally turning the handle and inching the
door open.

You hid behind everyone else as they cautiously stepped into the hallway, meticulously closing the
door after you so that it didn’t make a peep. Once out of your room, none of you seemed to have a
clue as to where to go. Your only three options of escape were the elevators, the staircase, or if you
got desperate, jumping out a window, though that one was ideally a last resort.

“We can’t stand here forever,” Dean pointed out, clearly restless. “If he’s looking for us, we’re sitting
ducks.”

“Stairs or elevator, then?” Sam asked tensely.

“Which one would a genie be more likely to take?”

“I don’t know!” Sam was growing exasperated as he tried to concoct a plan.

“Is teleportation still not an option?” Castiel piped up.

“That’d just bring him to us sooner,” you told him, glancing nervously down the hallway and
expecting the dreaded genie to round the corner any second.
“[Y/N]?” Sam addressed you out of the blue. “Stairs or elevator?”

Startled by the question being handed to you, it took you a few seconds to form words. “Wh-why are you asking me?”

“’Cause you’ve had more experience with this genie than any of us!” Dean interjected, also growing agitated by the stressful situation. Calming just long enough to grin at you, he added, “Besides, you are ‘miss intuitive,’ right?”

Oddly enough, the use of that nickname instilled some degree of confidence in you, and you managed to nod your head as you considered the situation. “I…I get the feeling he’d take the elevator. He has to blend in with other people, and that’d be the most normal thing to do…” You perked up as another nugget of intuited information popped up. “And the stairs might have a door that leads right outside. We could get out that way.”

“That’s a plan, then,” Sam hurriedly affirmed, not wasting any more time and setting off down the hallway.

Using the posted signs with arrows pointing to the stairwell as a guide, you hastily navigated past the rows of identical doors, not daring to glance back. You reached the stairway in under a minute, an industrial door labelled “EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY” in red letters greeting you on arrival.

This most certainly was an emergency exit, albeit certainly not an ordinary one, and as such nobody even considered what safety violations you were committing as you entered the musty, metallic staircase. No longer bothering to be quiet, everyone thumped down the stairs as quickly as was safely possible, descending the four levels as though a fire was right behind you. Luckily for all of you, you’d been right about the door that would take you right outside. Only when you were officially out under the waning Alaskan sky did you feel like you could breathe properly.

“Okay, we’re out of the building.” Dean caught his breath. “Now what?”

“We need to get farther away,” you panted out, regretting your lack of stamina. “As far as possible.”

Grappling with a pocket on his duffel bag, Sam pulled out a notebook and flipped to a page with neat, inked notes. “The lady at the travel table gave me a number for a local cab service, and she said there’s an airport near here…”

That was some good news. “Let’s take a cab to the airport then,” you decided. “I dunno where we’ll go, but…” You shook your head to stave off resurging anxiety. “As long as it’s away from here.”

Nodding, Sam efficiently set to pulling out his phone and dialing the number. Dean twitched somewhere off to your right, nervously fidgeting with his duffel bag.

“So, we’re flying again,” he observed. “Great.”

Feeling genuinely sorry for him, you offered, “Well, at least you’re a bit more used to it by now, right?”

Dean gave you a blank, unamused stare. “I don’t even fully remember the flights over here, so no, I’m not.”

Not sure what else to say, you shrugged apologetically. “I know it sucks, but-”

“But it’s our best shot at getting away from this crazed genie or whatever,” Dean interrupted. “I get
it. I’ll keep the whining to a minimum.”

Right about then, Castiel resolved to reach out and place a reassuring hand on Dean’s shoulder. “If I may… I am more than willing to ease you through the process of facing your fear of flying.”

Relaxing under the touch of his recently-acquired romantic partner, Dean sighed out, “Yeah, Cas, I’d…I’d appreciate that.”

One electronic click later, Sam lowered his phone from the side of his head, informing you, “A cab should be here in five minutes.” He turned to you. “That’s not too long, is it?”

Truly, you didn’t know, so you honestly replied, “I hope so.”

Five minutes passed with excruciating slowness, with more unease piling on top of you for each second that ticked by. Your group stood together on the sidewalk bordering the parking lot, trying to appear discreet. By the time the small yellow car labelled “Taxi” pulled in from the road, you were almost certain the genie would be on you any second.

The taxi driver was a local man, quiet but disarming. He briefly exited his vehicle to help you fit your bags in his trunk, the rest of you all but leaping into the car to get going as soon as possible. Sam took the front seat, needing considerable leg room for his gigantic moose body, and the rest of you piled into the back seat. You voluntarily took the middle, being the smallest, and ended up a bit squished between Dean and Castiel. You really started to envy Sam’s leg room right about then.

After Sam let the driver know where you were headed, you were off. Fairbanks had a much different vibe to it at that time of day compared to your afternoon bus ride, the sky turning overcast and cloudy, hiding the ever-present sun from sight to create the illusion of descending dusk. You checked your phone’s lock screen and nearly gasped out loud when you saw the time: it was already past nine o’clock. Just how long had you been in that hotel? Somewhere between dinner and settling into the room you barely got to stay in, the hours had passed you by.

You took to nervously watching all the buildings that zoomed past outside the windows, nearly jumping at the sight of anything even remotely blue in appearance. You were jumpy, outright terrified at the prospect of the genie showing up and undoing everything. Even so, somewhere in the logical side of your brain, it felt good to be putting some distance between you and him, even if it was only a little bit.

The taxi driver dropped you off at the terminal of the Fairbanks International Airport after an unexpectedly long drive, the four of you scurrying inside the building after paying him. The next matter of business was where you’d be taking this spontaneous flight to, a question that should have been easy to answer with the monitors in the terminal lobby, except that there was one problem...

Whereas your first frenzied flight at the start of this journey had been characterized by limitless possibilities, there was one constricting factor this time: money. Your funds were nothing like they’d been at the trip’s onset, and that greatly narrowed your options for where you could flee to.

After collectively pooling what was left of your funds, you determined that there was only one flight reasonably within your price and time range: a midnight flight to Seattle. It wouldn’t cover much distance, but it would be just enough to get you safely out of the genie’s reach for a while to plan your next move.

The wait in the line for the ticket counter was brief but agonizing. You couldn’t keep yourself from sending hurried glances towards the various doors leading outside, fearing the worst each time you saw a new person enter the building. At one point, a man in a light blue striped t-shirt entered your
line of sight and nearly gave you a heart attack until you realized he was most certainly not the mythical being you feared.

Security was over in a rush for once, which was good because all of you were in a rightful hurry to get it over with. Only after you’d been through the metal detector and been permitted to leave the security station did some semblance of calm emerge in your frenzied mind. Behind the line of TSA officers and x-ray machines, you were in theory safe from the genie’s reach. Magic or not, you knew he greatly valued keeping up his cover, and as such was unlikely to attempt to breach airport security to find you at the risk of raising suspicion, and that was even if he knew you were at the airport at all.

Though you were now able to walk at a more casual pace, your group still radiated unease as you navigated the humble Fairbanks airport to find your gate, settling into four seats bunched together in a corner and trying to stay hidden from sight.

No one had said much of anything since you’d decided on Seattle as your destination, all four of you on edge. Unnerved even further by the silence, you took a proper look at your boarding pass for the first time since it had been handed to you at the ticket counter. Ordinarily, the first thing you’d do upon receiving your ticket was check to see what seat you’d been assigned, but with the threat of a magical genie out for your memories and/or lives looming, that hadn’t exactly been foremost in your mind.

It looked like you’d been given seats in the very back of plane yet again due to how late you bought your spots. That was fine with you, so long as you were out of there as soon as possible.

You kept glancing at the digital clock mounted to a wall in the corridor outside your gate, watching its pixelated red numbers as they changed far too sluggishly for your racing heart’s tastes. It was 10:20 PM when you first arrived at your gate, and with just under two hours of waiting ahead, you couldn’t shake the uncomfortable itch under your skin as time dragged on and on.

At precisely eleven o’clock, you ripped your eyes away from the clock for the millionth time, opting to instead focus on something less nerve-wracking. To your right, Sam had out his phone and was
browsing some webpage; the poor guy was using research as method of coping with the stress of your predicament. Meanwhile, off to your left, Castiel was sitting calmly with his hands folded neatly in his lap, observing his fellow passengers in the seats surrounding him. Beside him Dean was laying back, his head resting against the plaster wall of your corner and his eyes closed in concentration. If you didn’t know him, you’d think he was meditating, but since you did, you were fully aware that the focus of his intense concentration was attempting to fall asleep.

_You know, that’s actually not a bad idea_, you thought. Though you weren’t sure how successful an endeavor to slumber would be with the accidental nap you’d taken earlier that day and your overly-active brain, it was worth a shot. If nothing else, it would be better than trying to sit still and wait out the hour until your plane arrived.

Assuming a similar position to Dean, you rested your head against the back of your seat’s cushion, shut your eyes, and attempted to slow the stream of thoughts that clogged at the circuits of your brain.

Whether or not you got any sleep by the time the plane arrived, you could at least say that you tried. Though the mere thought of being face-to-face with your own personal genie again sent spikes of fear stabbing through your gut, at least you could rest easy knowing that you weren’t alone, your surrogate family on either side of you as your thoughts drifted uneasily through your subconscious.

Chapter End Notes

At last, those two otters finally got it together. UwU If you think that's it for the Destiel moments in this story...well, just be warned that there's a big ol' storm o' fluff comin'. And also a big ol' storm of drama because GENIE.

This chapter is unofficially sponsored by Kay Jewelers except not really because there's no money here and I'm too socially anxious to reach out to a company for sponsorship anyways lol.

Image source for Mount Denali: https://i.ytimg.com/vi/NFhcQzYCEG0/maxresdefault.jpg

Image source for Fairbanks airport: https://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photos/01/63/a4/a5/interior-of-fairbanks.jpg
You can’t really say whether or not you actually slept in the hour that you had to do so. Your brain at least seemed to be in a dream-like state, mish-mashed, illogical notions following a logical pattern in whatever portion of your head was active. You must’ve been at least semi-aware of your surroundings, because flashes of images of your gate and sleepy passengers waiting to board kept popping up in your vague recollections.

All you can say with certainty is that your slumber or lack thereof was cut short by the brash, scratchy voice of the gate attendant announcing your flight’s boarding. Dean awoke shortly after you did, blinking grumpily at the gate’s dim lighting. Sam didn’t look like he’d put his phone down even once, still intent on scrolling through whatever website he had open.

The announcer said something about premium airline club members getting priority and being allowed to board first, so you sank back into your seat to wait your turn. You were familiar with the groggy, surreal state of being that came with staying awake past midnight, and though your loopy state of mind it came with often provided for some laughs in a more laidback setting, the strain of this situation just made you miserable. Nothing around you felt real, and yet the chilling reality that there was a dangerous genie out to get you kept nagging at your brain and pulling you back and forth between being high on sleep deprivation and exhausted by stress. If only you hadn’t fallen victim to that nap on the motor coach, then maybe you would be in a purely silly state without a care in the world…that would be infinitely preferable.

Some amount of time passed as you tried and failed to let go of the feeling that you were caught in a fever dream. While you waited for your boarding zone to be called, you all sat still and tried not to look like you were being hunted by a magical businessman out for your blood. Somewhere in the middle of that, just as your mind was beginning to drift into the blissful state of spacing out, Sam groaned in frustration and at last put down his phone, staring hopelessly at the ceiling.

Without warning, Sam looked over at you and complained, “Your world’s resources on supernatural beings are not very helpful.”

Without the mental faculties to immediately reply, you blinked slowly a few times to bring yourself back to the present moment. “What are you looking for?”

“Something to stop the genie,” he sighed out, tiredness beginning to take its toll on him. “All I know is how to stop a djinn from our world.”

Forcing a tone of patience over your sleep-worn voice, you observed, “Well, djinn and genies are like, from the same family, right? Maybe that can help us.”

“I doubt it. Your genie and my world’s djinn seem like polar opposites. If they’re related, it’s distantly.”

In a moment of failing to focus on the main point at hand and forgetting basic facts about the supernatural, you wondered, “What are djinn like?”
“They hide out in ruins and lure people in. They get into their heads and make them hallucinate that they’re living the life of their dreams.”

You grinned sleepily. “That doesn’t sound too bad.”

“And while their victims are trapped in that world, the djinn feeds off their blood until they’re sucked dry and die.”

Your sleepy grin slipped away in an instant when you remembered that was true. “Never mind then.”

“Your genie is nothing like that. Doesn’t look like a djinn either…” He trailed off as he pondered something as best as he could through his haze of descending exhaustion. “You didn’t see any tattoos on him, did you?”

“I dunno,” you slurred out, rubbing at your forehead as a random wave of drowsiness hit you. “I don’t think so.” Once your alertness had returned somewhat, you blurted, “How do you stop a djinn? I can’t remember.”

“A silver knife coated in lamb’s blood is the only way I know of. Why, do you think that would work?”

“I’m not really in any state to be answering questions,” you admitted, rubbing stray sleep from your eye. You shrugged and let out a groggy chuckle. “Besides, I don’t freakin’ know.”

“Well, what does your intuition say?”

Even in your barely-conscious state, your intuition basically shouted its uncertainty regarding the question at hand. “It says…probably not. I don’t know where we’d get lamb’s blood around here anyways.”

Holding his hands out helplessly, Sam just sank further into his seat. “In that case, I don’t have a clue. If this genie’s reality-bending abilities are anything like you’ve described, there’s nothing we can do without knowing his weakness.”

Before you could join Sam in resigned brooding, the gate attendant announced your zone’s boarding. The four of you wobbled to your feet, Castiel being the only one who was able to hold himself with some sense of dignity as you took your spots in line to have your tickets scanned. Right about then you were really beginning to envy the angel’s no-sleep-required ability.

Your plane was fairly large, but you barely had the appropriate mental faculties to care enough to get a good look at it through the jet bridge’s windows. The longer you spent standing up, the more you realized how badly you wanted to sit back down, overcome by that discomforting dizziness that buzzes in your head immediately after getting out of bed in the morning.

The Winchesters didn’t appear to be faring much better in their battle against post-midnight exhaustion, Dean in particular looking ready to pass out. Some part of you hoped that for his sake, his tiredness would outweigh or at least dull his phobia of flying, but that optimism was dashed the second Dean’s lazy eyes drifted towards the window and got a glimpse of the airplane. You could pinpoint the exact second he remembered what he was up against, suddenly snapping to wakefulness as he regarded the plane with wide eyes.

You must have not been the only one who noticed, because Castiel’s gaze twitched in Dean’s direction. “Dean?” he gently called. “I can still attempt to ease you through this, if you would like.”
Pulling his stare away from the window, Dean quietly replied, “I’m probably gonna need that. If you’ve got anything that’ll get me to chill out, I’ll gladly take it.”

“I do have something that has proven to help, but I must ask you first…would you permit me to use my grace again to calm you?”

Taking the briefest of moments to consider it as best as he could in his weary state, Dean assuredly decided, “Alright, as long as you stop me from doing anything stupid.” He abruptly faced you and Sam. “That goes for all of you. Don’t let me do anything stupid.”

Sam vaguely nodded and you offered a loose thumbs-up with a shaky hand.

“I will do my best to control the dosage of grace I apply,” Castiel assured Dean. “I understand that my grace has an effect on your mental state that often leads to…embarrassing results for you.”

“I ’preciate it, Cas,” Dean managed, reverting back to tiredness now that he’d found a way to stow away his fear. “But I wouldn’t really call all that stuff embarrassing, not anymore. Just inconvenient…” He smirked at Castiel. “But enjoyable.”

Castiel flushed a bit at that, no doubt recalling the various incidents he’d had with Dean under the influence of his grace from the recent past, but before he could attempt to respond the line moved up and brought you face-to-face with the entrance door of your plane.

The line proceeded in single file down the plane’s aisle, occasionally halting when one of the people ahead of you reached their seat and slid into their respective rows. You had to wait through every single pause and stop of the line until you reached the very back of the plane. Sam ended up the odd man out, being assigned an aisle seat in the second to last row. Meanwhile, you, Dean, and Castiel were destined to spend the flight in the row behind Sam’s, pressed to the plane’s backmost wall.

You took the window seat without asking since you were aware that Dean would want to be as far away from the exterior of the plane as possible. True to his nature, Dean stepped aside in what looked like a gentlemanly gesture and allowed Castiel to slip into the middle seat, taking the third seat for himself.

Once you’d settled in as best as you could, you let yourself depress into the cushions of your seat and were overcome by your need for rest. Though you usually preferred to observe the proceedings leading up to and following takeoff, you figured your sheer exhaustion would allow an exception this time.

Though you feared that any attempts to sleep for all of you would be fruitless thanks to the deafening noise of engines you associated with backrow seats, it was strikingly quiet. Only then did you remember that due to the plane’s size, the engines were located on the wings and not at the rear. You didn’t dwell on it, accepting this as one positive twist of fate in this hectic evening, and let your eyes close as your mind drifted.

Somewhere in the middle of your mind’s aimless wanderings, the engines revved and the plane began moving, bouncing along the taxiway. You spared a thought for Dean and his rampant aviophobia, but one peek at him revealed that Castiel was taking good care of him. The angel was covering Dean’s hand with his own atop the armrest that separated their seats. A faint blue shimmer of grace could be seen emanating from Castiel’s thumb where it rubbed over the back of Dean’s hand in soothing motions. Even with the brief exposure, Dean appeared far more relaxed than anyone afraid of flying should be on a plane, and that was enough to satisfy your concerns and let you drift off without care.
At some point you must have taken off, since the engines started roaring and the plane’s movements turned more turbulent. You allowed yourself one more look out the window to bid the retreating landmass of Alaska farewell, watching as the clouds consumed your view and spread out in an unbroken expanse of snowy, mountainous cotton.

Some part of you was comforted once you were in the air. Every increment of distance you could put between yourselves and that persistent genie would put your mind more and more at ease. With that predicament contemplated and promptly stored away for later, your number one priority became sleep and just how you were to obtain it whilst flying through thin air at hundreds of miles per hour. The one time you’d endeavored to sleep on a plane in the past ended quite poorly for you, leaving you with little more than a stiff neck and salty attitude.

The roar of the engines was distant and you could train your brain to ignore it, whereas the roar of the wind just outside the fuselage was all-encompassing and unavoidable. Loud noise never made for ideal sleeping conditions, and as such, you resigned yourself to the fact that any sleep you did get would not be of good quality.

You must’ve spent nearly the entire first hour of the three and half hour flight forcing yourself to lay still and resist every urge to open your eyes. Finally, with a quiet groan of frustration, you allowed yourself to open one eye once you couldn’t stand the bland view of the insides of your eyelids any longer. The view outside your eyelids was much preferable, if only because it gave you assurance that at least one of your convoy would be able to sleep well on this voyage.

To your right, Dean was basically using Castiel as a pillow, the armrest between them having been lifted out of the way to make room for their humble “cuddle pile.” Thankfully for Dean’s sake, Castiel hadn’t cut off the connection to his grace, one of the angel’s arms gingerly holding onto Dean and his hand glowing blue where it rested on Dean’s shoulder.

You’ll admit, you put off trying to refocus on falling asleep for a while after you saw that. Can anyone blame a winggirl for reveling in the fruits of the labor she and her friend put into their task? Dean seemed determined to enjoy it to the fullest extent as well. “Cas,” he mumbled as he buried himself deeper into the trench coat he was laying on. “Lemme tell ya, you are a miracle worker with this grace of yours.”

Ever humble, Castiel warmly replied, “I’m just an angel, Dean.”

“There’s no ‘just’ bein’ an angel,” Dean argued. “Angels are all…mighty, and powerful, and honestly pretty badass. But most of ‘em are dicks, present company excluded.”

Smiling with distant amusement, Castiel rephrased, “Well, I’m just me, then.”

“You are not ‘just’ you,” Dean countered adamantly. “Don’t undersell yourself like that. You’re freaking awesome.” He took a moment to let out a deeply calmed sigh and wriggled deeper into the trench coat. “You keep this up and I’ll give you all the wing pets you want.”

Castiel appeared much more than okay with this proposition, his wings ruffling momentarily where they fazed through his seat. “That certainly sounds agreeable,” he quickly confirmed. “So long as you are certain that is a fair trade.” When Dean only offered a muffled, affirmative hum in response, Castiel continued, “You’re not being particularly deeply affected by my grace at present, are you?”

Dean twisted his head around so that he was looking right up at Castiel. “Not really, why?”
“I simply don’t want you to commit to another promise while your mental state is hampered. I’ve been told that drunk Dean makes promises that sober Dean cannot keep.”

“Well, I’m not drunk right now,” Dean assured him, holding his head up a bit higher. “Just buzzed; pleasantly, perfectly buzzed…” He stared into space for a few moments before commenting, “Remind me later that a grace buzz is way better than an alcohol buzz.”

“Alright…” Castiel still didn’t sound certain. “I just want to ensure that this is truly an equal exchange.”

“You’re overthinking it, Cas. Relax a little.”

_Easy for you to say_, you thought drearily. _You’re the one who’s got an angel’s grace to help you fall asleep while the rest of us just have nothing._

You didn’t even notice that you’d let your eyes close in the middle of that exchange, tiredness still fighting against your boisterous surroundings to drag you down into the pit of inconsistent napping. You allowed one of your eyes to crack open again, still undeniably curious about the proceedings.

Everything appeared just as you’d left it: Dean was still leaning comfortably into Castiel’s side, his chin resting on the angel’s chest and his face tilted upwards to look at him. Castiel stared down at him with bemusement, his arm wrapped protectively around Dean’s shoulder and continuing to apply steady grace.

“Besides,” Dean mused, “it’s not like I have wings of my own for you to return the favor with.”

“That’s true,” Castiel acknowledged, his hand absentmindedly moving between Dean’s shoulder blades where wings would be. As he contemplated their lack of feathery appendages, he began moving his hand around Dean’s back, jolting in surprise when Dean leaned into his featherlight touch. For a few still moments, Castiel skittishly regarded the human clinging to him.

“Dude, don’t stop that now,” Dean eventually complained, trying to arch his back into Castiel’s hand. “You just started.”

“I…r-right, of course,” Castiel pretended he understood what the heck was going on, returning to gently tracing circles into Dean’s upper back. “Um…what exactly am I…?”

“S’called a backrub,” Dean explained, letting his head sink back into the trench coat as he relaxed under the movement. “It’s kinda like the human version of wing petting; close as we can get to it, anyway…”

A weight was lifted off Castiel’s shoulders. “Oh…well, in that case, this will surely make an equal exchange.”

“Sure will, Cas,” Dean murmured with a peaceful hum as Castiel experimented with a different pattern of motion. “Sure will…”

Having had your fill, you allowed the curtain to fall over your eyes as you returned to chasing after sleep. This chase continued to prove that no, it was not just a simple goose chase, but that it was the equivalent of every single Loony Tunes cartoon featuring the Roadrunner that’d ever been made. Never in your life had you related to Wile E. Coyote’s eternal struggle so much.

Even if your own sleepless plight was a burden, at least grace-pampered Dean would be able to get in some of his four hours. You would have felt that your jealousy was more justified in that matter if Dean didn’t continually sabotage the sleeping opportunity being served to him a golden platter.
Rather than accept that gift, he preferred to squander it in favor of keeping up the cutesy pillow talk with his new boyfriend.

At some point when you were lucid enough to mentally process words, you heard Dean whisper, "Hey Cas, what do you think my wings would be like?"

"You don’t have wings, Dean," Castiel patiently reminded him. "You’re a human."

"I know, I know," Dean dismissed. "I mean, if I did have wings like an angel, what would they look like?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I dunno. Talkin’ about me not havin’ wings earlier made me curious."

Castiel didn’t seem to have an immediate answer. "You should understand, an angel’s wings are considered a representation of their true selves, an expression of who they truly are beyond their vessel. They are seen as very personally meaningful."

"I get that. All the more reason for me to be curious."

"What I’m saying is…designing an angel’s wings is an intricate process, and trying to summarize an individual in their wings, hypothetical or not, is a task best left to my father. As it is, he would be the expert."

"Well, I want know what you think. I want your opinion."

Silent for a few moments, Castiel started out, "If I were to speculate…I would picture them as being green, seeing as you have an affinity for that color-"

"Wings can be green?" Dean interjected, genuinely curious.

"Yes, Dean. Wings can be many colors. Gabriel’s wings were yellow, Anna’s wings were red, Uriel’s wings were purple-"

"Purple?" Dean interrupted incredulously before Castiel could list any other examples. "S-sorry, continue with the analysis."

Castiel calmly and coolly complied. "If you truly seek my unprofessional opinion regarding your wings’ form, based on what I’ve gathered of your character in the years I’ve known you…" He must have reached an “ah-ha!” moment, because once he began describing Dean’s imaginary wings, he couldn’t stop, practically engaging in a monologue. "Your wings would be indicative of great strength; not necessarily in the physical sense, though they wouldn’t be fully lacking in that department…but I mean spiritual strength, and certainly they would display immense strength of will as well.

"They would likely be sleek and long to match your cunning and charisma, which would make them built for speed…quite fitting, seeing as you often disregard speed limits when travelling in your beloved vehicle. I’m certain that agility would also serve you well in your noble endeavors to save people.

"And though you have suffered many hardships in your short human existence, you have admirably endured every last one of them, which would make your wings rough around the edges but still very appealing. On that note, the inner kindhearted purity you hide behind your gruff exterior and your genuine, heroic care for others would evidence itself in soft, bushy down feathers that I would
imagine you trying to hide due to your nature, but that I believe should be worn proudly. And as for the outer beauty of your soul, that would be reflected in your wings to make them, in my opinion, quite handsome just as the rest of you is.”

Your eyes opened all on their own somewhere in the middle of that spiel, and for once you didn’t bother to stop them. Dang. Looks like you had a rising competitor for the title of “master of overanalyzing” to contend with.

Only when he’d finished did Castiel realize how deeply he’d delved into his speculations, blushing as turned his gaze towards the empty aisle beside him. “Sorry, I…got a bit carried away.”

Not that Dean seemed to mind. He’d been drinking in each of Castiel’s descriptions with rapt attention, having returned to propping his head up on his chin. He briefly hummed with affectionate, drowsy laughter, asking out of the blue, “Do you know what you are?”

Not sure how to address the random question, Castiel guessed, “An…angel?”

“In more ways than one, yes,” Dean confirmed. “But I mean, do you know what I think you are?”

Right about then, Castiel caught on to Dean’s thought process. “Judging by how you’ve consistently referred to me in the past, I would guess that you think I’m a ‘dork.’”

“Thaaaaat’s what I was getting at. ‘Cause you are dork. A sweet, adorable, sweet dork.”

“You said sweet twice, Dean.”

“Yeah, because once wasn’t enough to sum up all your ridiculous sweetness.”

Suddenly a bit unsure of himself, Castiel checked, “From my vague understanding of relationships and what I’ve felt from my instincts, romantic partners are supposed to be rather sweet to each other, correct?”

Dean smirked. “With you? Damn straight.” He faltered slightly as his buzzed brain pieced something together. “Actually, I can’t say that. This is the least straight relationship I’ve ever been in. But the thing about bein’ sweet, that’s true.”

Your heart swelled with pride. He made a not straight joke all on his own. I’m so, so proud. You imagined all winggirls felt this as some point.

Once again your eyes involuntarily fell shut, and you let them stay. You weren’t going to get any amount of sleep if you kept allowing yourself to be distracted by your favorite otters and their fluffy antics.

The next hour or so was an absolute blur. You may have slept, but it was impossible to tell. At the very least you fell out of consciousness a few times, your sheer exhaustion overpowering the chaotic, boisterous noise of your environment. If you did sleep, there’s no telling for how long; all you can recall with certainty is that it was dreamless and sporadic, your mind meandering through various canals of thoughts as you forgot where you were.

Somewhere in the middle of that muddled kind-of-sleeping, the plane’s pilot came over the intercom and announced something to the effect of, “expect light turbulence during our descent into Seattle at five A.M., which by the way is in like thirty minutes lol k bye now.”

Grumbling at the interruption, you turned around in your seat until you were leaning against the window, not even caring that its surface was freezing cold and chilling you through your skull on
contact.

If it really was thirty minutes to five like your pilot had said, it was no wonder that your brain was running on fumes. Spiteful towards the circumstances, you firmly decided to devote what little time remained in the flight to milking every last second of sleep you could possibly obtain out of the next half hour, if only to ensure that you would be able to survive whatever awaited you after you landed.

Miraculously, whether through sheer determination or the fact that it was an unholy hour of the morning, sleep seemed more in your reach than you’d ever hoped it to be. Not so miraculously, just as you were starting to be carried off by the merciful cradle of sleep, a single sound shattered your near-unconscious state. It sounded exactly like the overly-pampered lovechild of a yawn and a pleased sigh coming from off to your right. You didn’t think much of it, well aware of the snuggling otters on that side of you, but you will admit that it stoked faint contempt in you for interfering with your rest; at least, until the sound that followed it broke through your haze of sleepy annoyance.

The momentary sound of shifting cloth from that side of the row wasn’t what worried you, but rather the sound that immediately followed it. At first, you thought it was the distinct noise of a dewdrop landing in a shallow pool of water, something you’d committed to memory after spending a large portion of your life in an aquatic setting. Then you remembered that you were thousands of feet in the air above any bodies of water for drops to land in, and then you heard the wet smack a second time and recalled exactly who it was that was sitting beside you.

Your eyes squinted open all on their own, your attempts to fall asleep forgotten for the moment. Though it took a moment to re-adjust to the plane’s inner lighting, there was no mistaking the scene you saw.

Dean and Castiel’s faces were inches apart, Dean pulling away to regard the angel with a playful, devious smile. Poor Castiel appeared rather caught off guard, his face flushed and lips parting uncertainly. A wavering, sheepish smile broke out on his face and he made a noise that might have been a restrained, nervous chuckle; it was hard to tell for sure since sleep still had a firm hold on you and was endeavoring to drag you off to dreamland.

Even in your exhausted state, there was no mistaking what the subtleties of this snapshot moment pointed to: they’d just kissed, twice in a row judging by what you’d heard. Too bad you’d been out like a flickering lightbulb and missed it.

But lo and behold, there was more to be seen. Dean leaned in and planted another brief smack of a kiss to a bewildered but amused angel’s lips. He seemed a little too pleased with himself when he retreated and saw the flustered smile his kiss brought to Castiel’s face.

Composing himself enough to speak, Castiel inquired, “Dean, what are-”

“Shh, Cas. M’tired of talkin’.” Was it just you or did Dean sound kind of…out of it?

Any further comments from Castiel were silenced when Dean dove in for another short, surprise smooch. Castiel didn’t seem at all bothered by this, happy to accept Dean’s kiss, which was then followed by another, and then another. By the fourth separate little kiss, Castiel got with the program and let his eyes flutter closed, anticipating and returning each quick press of lips to his own.

Around then you realized that you were staring, which was probably a bit weird, but in your defense you were still enormously off kilter from trying to sleep and basically spacing out by then. Besides, your eyes weren’t the only pair taking in the scene.

A certain moose was peeking through the seats of the row in front of you, observing the spectacle...
with clinical fascination. It seemed that this was something he’d been expecting to see at some point; just not this particular point. He and you exchanged a brief look that was worth an entire conversation and simultaneously decided to look away and leave the loverboys be.

It was a good thing you’d been seated in the back corner of the plane, otherwise who knows what attention the otters would have drawn from the other passengers with their kissing escapades. Though some small, half-formed thought nagged at the back of your brain, the need to sleep took priority, so that fledgling thought died as you turned back towards the window and settled into your seat to yet again seek the relief of actual rest.

Or at least, you would have sought sleep if that wasn’t made utterly impossible by the imposing sounds of the kissing party mere feet away from you. Under normal circumstances you would have thought, Aww, what a couple o’ cuties, but with sleep deprivation keeping your mood down in the grumpy zone, all that crossed your mind was, Ugh, can they keep down the lip smacking? I’m trying to sleep.

Within a few minutes, the discordant smacking sounds slowed and stopped, much to your liberation. Before you could even begin to think about resuming your elusive hunt for a nap, more sounds filled your ears, these thankfully quieter in volume.

That same shifting of cloth from earlier returned, followed by Castiel inquiring in a husky voice, “Dean, are you-”

The angel abruptly cut himself off with an uncontrolled, startled inhale. Even with your eyes closed, you could feel the waves of shock radiating off him as a tense air settled over your row.

“I…Dean, I don’t think this is-” Castiel yet again couldn’t get out a full sentence without being startled into inhaling another good lungful of air. By then, that nagging thought had resurfaced in your brain alongside your growing concern, prompting you to set aside your sleepiness and check back in to reality.

You cracked open one eye, and…oh. Well, you hadn’t really known what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t what was actually unfolding. In fact, the sheer surprise the sight instilled in you was enough to make both your eyes shoot open at full attention.

For whatever reason, Dean’s face was buried in Castiel’s neck, the angel rigid as a statue as he eyed Dean warily. A few seconds into trying to process what you were beholding, you noticed that Dean was sloppily kissing at Castiel’s neck. This was not something meant to be seen by pretty much anyone, least of all you, but for some bizarre reason your instinctive reaction was to laugh at it. Neither this nor Castiel’s labored breathing seemed to deter Dean from his task.

Sending you a panicked look, Castiel silently pleaded for guidance, or assistance, or any kind of help with this startling new situation he was hardly equipped to handle. As it set in that this was most certainly not suitable behavior for passengers on an airplane, your laughter was quickly forgotten in favor of figuring out what the heck to do.

One glance at Castiel’s hand where it steadily rested on Dean’s shoulder confirmed that it was still supplying grace. Ahhh, that explained it: looks like Dean had bitten off more than he could chew of Castiel’s grace once again and ascended into another high. No wonder he’d discarded any semblance of inhibitions. If you’d been more awake earlier, you’d have likely made the connection of Dean’s loopy-sounding voice to his uninhibited mental state much sooner and you would have taken that nagging thought more seriously.

Though your response time was inconveniently sluggish, you called out, “Whoa, Dean, calm down,”
in a fruitless attempt to slow down the proceedings. You held out your hands but weren’t really sure what you could do with them to put a stop to this, not wanting to get physically involved in any way, shape, or form.

Growing desperate, Castiel twisted his neck around, but Dean followed him every step of the way using his best imitation of a leech. Castiel managed, “Dean, your judgement and behavior are impaired by my grace, you mustn’t…”

“Cassie, I said I’d teach ya the hickory technique,” Dean slurred out between kisses. “Y’wanted to try it out, riiiiight?”

Swallowing a massive lump in his throat, Castiel advised as evenly as he could, “Y-yes, but… judging by what you told me earlier, I don’t believe this is the time or place for that.”

Thankfully, the use of Dean’s own words got through to him, and he stopped. Pulling back just long enough to give Castiel a dopey grin, he conceded, “Alllrriiiiight. I’ll save it for later, then.”

With a wink, Dean relaxed himself back into Castiel’s side and shifted until he was comfortable. Castiel himself had gone an unprecedented shade of crimson at Dean’s comment, but noticeably tightened his hold on the hunter once he’d settled. Briefly glancing your way, you shrugged and sent a helpless, toothy grin at him until he reverted back to running his hand up and down Dean’s spine.

After that matter was resolved, you pretty much passed out. Only later did you realize that it was a shame that your eyes weren’t open to take in the overhead view of Seattle, but you were still determined to get in every wink of rest you could manage during your descent. Surprisingly enough, this worked to a degree and ended up paying off handsomely.

Well, except for the fact that you were treated to the most terrifying awakening of your life. Whatever peaceful thing you’d been dreaming about was obliterated the second the plane made contact with the ground. Your seatbelt choked you so bad that you nearly regurgitated your stomach.

Immediately after the plane had jolted to a halt, Castiel removed his hand from Dean’s shoulder. Dean didn’t even seem to notice, still happily curled up around his angel and looking much like a sweet sleeping angel himself.

Much patience as required to exit the plane, as you were literally dead last in line to file outside. When it finally was your turn, Dean had to be gently but forcibly helped to his feet by both Sam and Castiel. Thankfully, he got the hang of walking again real quick and was able to half-shuffle half-stumble down the aisle and into the jetway.

Your immediate first stop once inside the Seattle airport was the bathrooms. Your immediate second stop was a bench right outside the bathrooms where you could catch your breath for a while and regroup.

One of the first things you noticed upon sitting down was that you were startlingly awake for it being just past five AM in the morning, something you figured you owed to your dutiful efforts to get in actual sleep during the flight. Those last thirty minutes really had counted for something.

Sam must have slept well too judging by how alert he seemed, Castiel still didn’t require any sleep, and Dean…well, there wasn’t really any way to accurately measure his wakefulness. If drunkenly giggling whilst repeatedly booping Castiel’s nose was a sign of being awake, Dean was thoroughly well-rested, if a bit out of his mind.

Seeing as no one else was keen to start moving again anytime soon, Sam was the one who posed the
inevitable question: “So, what now?”

Dean’s only reply was uttering a quiet “boop” and poking Castiel’s nose again, which although not useful was very entertaining.

“We gotta keep running,” you answered, bringing your mind back into the physical world. “Unless you figured out how to stop the genie?”

“I’ve still got nothing,” Sam lamented, gracing his unhelpful phone with one of his patented bitchfaces. “Cas? You know anything about genies?”

“Not of his sort, no,” Castiel replied, not taking his eyes off the finger still firmly pressed to his nose. “But from what I have come to understand about this particular genie, he is an immensely powerful force capable of utilizing otherworldly magic. Were he from our world, I would have little doubt that he would succumb to my powers, but as it is, there’s no way to know for certain if I am capable of overpowering him. After what he did to my wing…”

Since they both seemed to be waiting for your input, you speculated, “I’m not sure if angel beats genie or the other way around, but it’ll be good to have Cas on our side if things get bad.”

Castiel stood proudly at attention. “I will do whatever I can to ensure our protection from this genie.” That proclamation probably would have put you more at ease if not for the fact that Dean retracted and reapplied his finger to Castiel’s nose right in the middle of it.

Speaking of Dean, he surprised all of you by speaking coherently for the first time since leaving the plane. “Wow, Cassie, you’re sooooo friggin’…brave-o,” he praised. “Can…can you…promise you’ll protect my moose bro?”

Despite Sam’s indignant, “Hey!” at yet again being referred to as a moose, Castiel nodded, and Dean continued.

“And…an’ my lil’ sis, too?”

Though you were distracted by the sudden sensation of your heart melting at being called “lil’ sis,” you did notice Castiel’s solemn nod. “I have sworn to protect and guard the Winchester family, both blood-related and honorary members. So yes, Dean, I promise.”

Satisfied by that pledge, Dean lazily grinned, pecked Castiel on the very tip of his nose, and proclaimed, “boop,” before faceplanting right into Castiel’s shoulder.

Sam and you were both uncontrollably snickering together by the time Castiel recollected himself and fought down the blush threatening to overtake his cheeks. “I-I don’t know why he’s acting like this,” Castiel got a bit defensive with you. “I believe I accidentally applied too much grace during our flight.”

“No kidding,” Sam laughed. “Is he gonna be back to normal anytime soon?”

“I would estimate that within the hour, most traces of my grace will have left his system and he will be back to his usual demeanor.”

Looking at Dean as he appeared in that moment, it was honestly hard to believe that he’d be back to his old self anytime soon. “Until then, I wish you good luck with handling him,” you said sincerely.

“Forgetting my brother’s antics for the time being,” Sam toned down his laughter, “where exactly are we gonna run away to?”
You blanked. “I dunno.”

“What does your intuition say?”

It felt good to have someone actually actively consult your intuition for answers. Though you naturally employed it in practically all your decision-making, it helped to have a reminder to focus it with. All the same, in this instance, you didn’t really have an answer, the stress of your situation falling back onto your shoulders all at once.

“I…I don’t know,” you admitted. “We’ve been travelling for so long. More than anything, I just… wanna go home. I think that’s clouding my judgement.”

“If nothing else, that’s a place to start,” Sam mused.

“Seriously?”

“I mean, I don’t think your genie would suspect us going back there after the chase we’ve sent him on. We don’t have to stick around there for long.”

He had a point. “If you think that’d be okay…”

“Unless you think it would be a good idea to stay here in Seattle for a while.”

That idea had barely crossed your mind before your paranoia shot it down in cold blood. “No, we’re still too close to the genie. I won’t feel safe until we’ve put more distance between us and him.”

Sam nodded in understanding. “Alright. Let’s see what flights we can find near your hometown, then.”

Castiel ended up staying behind on the bench, as it turned out that Dean had apparently not gotten enough rest and was sleeping soundly on the angel’s shoulder. That left you and Sam to navigate the airport and find a digital screen of the day’s incoming and outgoing flights. The one you did eventually find was just outside the gate you’d originally walked through to exit the plane, a series of monitors mounted on the wall listing every single upcoming flight and its status.

While Sam scrutinized the rows of abbreviations and arrival times, your eyes drifted towards a ledge carved into the wall just beside the monitors. Though you had gotten sufficient enough sleep to stay awake, you were still exhausted, and even the most basic of places to sit tempted you. It was the prospect of sitting down that enticed you, but what drew you in even more was the lone, abandoned penny sitting on the ledge’s surface.

Operating more on immediate instinct than anything else, you reached for the penny and lifted it up to examine it. Then you noticed that you were looking at the Lincoln memorial rather than ol’ Abe’s actual head.

“Heads-down,” you hissed out as you carefully but hastily put the penny back exactly as you’d found it. “Nuh-uh, we’ve already had enough bad luck lately.”

Regarding you with faint amusement, Sam assured, “I don’t think a heads-down penny is going to bring you bad luck. Take it from someone who’s dealt with cursed objects, the superstition about pennies is not true.”

“That’s just it!” you exclaimed. “You guys have made me paranoid about cursed objects with all the ones you deal with!” You eyed the penny warily. “Are there no take-backsies with upside down coins?”
“You want me to burn the penny just in case?”

Even with your paranoid thoughts on the matter, that seemed a step too far, as well as an action that was just about guaranteed to have airport security on top of you in seconds. “N-no, that’s okay. I’m just gonna say take-backsies are allowed.”

“Oh! Here.” Sam pointed to one of the items on the monitor, forgetting about the questionable change. “There’s a flight to Atlanta that leaves in an hour. Is that far enough?”

You joined him back in front of the monitors. “Yeah…that’ll get us back to where we started. And we’ll be there by two o’clock, so we’ll have time to keep moving!”

Having settled on the next leg of your journey, you navigated back to the bench where Dean and Castiel sat, neither having moved at all since you’d left. After informing Castiel of your plans, he tried to gently nudge Dean to wakefulness. When that didn’t work, Sam dared to intervene.

“Let’s go!” he called, loudly clapping his hands right beside Dean’s exposed ear. Dean started and snapped up, blinking at his surroundings as he tried to figure out what had just happened.

Once his eyes had settled on his brother, Dean simply stated, “Rude,” but then got to his feet. Still a little off balance, he swayed as he walked. Sam and Castiel both swooped in to remedy that, steadying Dean by each holding onto one of his shoulders and steering him in the right direction.

The process of locating the ticket counter, purchasing your tickets with just barely enough leftover money to spare, and painstakingly going back through security was a tiresome but swift one. Few travelers were in the airport at such an early hour, and as such any lines you had to wait in were short and quickly dispersed. The only thing worth mentioning is when Dean went through the metal detector; it took him three tries to assume the pose as instructed by the patient TSA officer, each attempt getting more and more off-track from what the outline in front of him instructed. Finally, the officer ended up stepping into the booth with him and manually posing his arms above his head so that the metal detector could do its job.

Your gate was on the far side of the airport property, so you’d say you had all gotten your fair share of daily exercise by the time you arrived there. You settled into a row of chairs facing one of the gate’s large windows among numerous other passengers.

Dean immediately faceplanted back onto Castiel’s shoulder the second he was seated, mumbling “G’morning,” to you before he let out a single snore and fell unconscious.

Maybe if you hadn’t stayed awake to talk to your boyfriend for so long, you wouldn’t need to be sleeping right now, you smugly thought. But in reality, you were glad to see that he was able to both enjoy being with Castiel and get the rest he so badly needed. It was beyond gratifying to see them getting the chance to enjoy their newfound, long-awaited relationship. With how abruptly their romantic time together had been cut short by the inconvenient appearance of the genie, it was nice to see them slowly settling into their partnership.

And it’ll be even better when Dean comes down from his grace high, you gleefully reminded yourself.

You took to browsing Tumblr on your phone while you waited to board. At some point Sam looked over his shoulder towards a McDonald’s installed in your wing of the airport.

“I’m not much for fast food, but…” he turned back to you. “You want anything to eat?”

Your stomach gave a single nauseous lurch at the thought of being filled with food at such an early
hour. “No, it’s too early for me to eat. You can go ahead, though.”

Sam did just that, striding towards the restaurant and leaving you with a snoring Dean and the angel massaging his back. A plane rumbled by just barely in sight through the window in front of you, which inspired you to spy on the incoming and outbound planes on the visible portion of the runway while you waited. Somewhere in the middle of that Sam returned with a bag of steaming, cheap breakfast that he forced himself to wolf down. The smell of food made your stomach turn, but you distracted yourself as best as you could with the vibrations of the planes that roared past.

Aside from that, all was generally peaceful at your gate as the minutes wore on.

And on. And on. And on.

On a restless whim, you checked the time on your phone and discovered that it was 6:20 AM. Your flight was supposed to board five minutes ago and yet not a single mention of boarding had been announced.

Right on cue, an airport employee stationed at your gate spoke up over the intercom. “Ladies and gentlemen, your flight is running just a little bit late. Your plane is flying in from Maui and is experiencing some slight delays.” Before you could fully process the flashbacks to Moana that name instilled in you, he continued. “We’ll do everything we can to get the plane ready for you as quickly as possible once it does arrive. Thank you for your patience.”

Though you normally weren’t too bothered by delays, this one was making you antsy. Even though you’d managed to get away from the genie for the time being, there was still the daunting possibility that he could catch up to you if you waited around too long. You wouldn’t feel comfortable until you were aboard the plane and on your way out of there.

The delay proved to be a brief one, much to the relief of everyone in your gate. You had a firsthand view of your plane landing and eventually taxiing towards your jetway to let off its passengers. Newly-arrived people began streaming out of the jetway after a second assurance from the gate attendant that staff were working their butts off to get it ready for everyone as soon as possible (not an exact quote). This time his voice was noticeably louder and more official, so much so that it woke up Dean.

Blinking to clear the sleep from his squinting eyes, Dean greeted everyone with a grumbled, “Mornin’,” and began staring out the window. He seemed lost in some deep pondering, confusion arising on his face. You all left him to it, glad that he had evidently caught up on sleep like the rest of you and tranquilly come down from his grace high in the process.

Then, approximately two minutes later, Dean had an epiphany. Eyes widening, he hurriedly turned to Castiel beside him and choked out, “Dude, d-did your grace…?” He didn’t even bother to wait for an answer before barraging Castiel with something else. “Please tell me I didn’t do anything stupid.”

Put on the spot, Castiel wasn’t entirely sure how to answer. “Ah, well, the definition of ‘stupid’ as I understand it has a rather broad meaning, but…”

“I did something stupid,” Dean deduced in resignation. “At least tell me you tried to stop me,” he pleaded.

“I did manage to stop you after a while. I assure you, you did no harm.”

Looking the slightest bit relived by that, Dean cautiously questioned, “What…exactly did I do?”

“You were a pleasant traveling companion for the majority of the flight,” Castiel recalled. “But near
the end of our journey, you…”

The angel’s line of sight drifted towards Sam, who had put down his breakfast sandwich for the time being to openly eavesdrop on the conversation at hand.

“You…” Castiel thought for a moment about how to say it. “Although you were not terribly successful in your attempt as you were rather heavily affected by my grace, I believe you were trying to give me a ‘hickory.’”

Embarrassment swiftly overtook Dean’s features as he recognized Castiel’s usage of the codeword. Thankfully, he was spared from any teasing comments from his brother; all Sam was likely concerned about was how the topic of discussion had turned to tree species.

Blushing from shame and probably a bit of something else, Dean managed, “Wow, I’m so sorry, Cas. That…that was not the right time or place for that.” He managed a nervous grin.

“Those are the exact words I used to make you stop. But it’s fine, Dean, we handled it.” Castiel’s curiosity drove him towards a different route of discussion. “What exactly would the right time and place be, then?”

Taken aback by Castiel’s question, Dean answered as best as he could, “W-well, not a public setting like an airplane, that’s for sure!” Regaining some of his prowess, he added, “But, when the right time and place do present themselves, I’ll see what I can do to make it up to you.”

“You don’t have to make anything up to me,” Castiel calmly assured. “But, I certainly won’t refuse your offer.”

Something charismatic gleamed in Dean’s eye. “Great. It’s a date, then.”

Recognition shone in Castiel’s eyes. “Dating is a part of romance, correct? As I understand it, it’s a human courting ritual for amorous partnerships.”

Faintly surprised, Dean clarified, “That’s…not really what I meant, but…if you wanna have a date sometime, we could…”

Castiel smiled appreciatively. “I would enjoy that very much.”

“G-great! That’s another date, then! Man, you are gonna fill up my calendar at this rate.”

As priceless as this entire conversation was, what was even more priceless was Sam’s reaction to it. He stared dumbfounded at the pair as they prattled on, hardly able to believe what he was hearing. He gave you a look that said, “Is this really happening?” To which you replied with a silent eyebrow raise that meant, “Heck yeah it is.”

“Now would probably be a good time to ask,” Castiel opened a new topic, “would it be permissible for me to use my grace to soothe you for this flight as well, or would you rather not risk taking a ‘stupid’ action again?”

“Normally I’d say yes, but…” Dean looked troubled. “After what happened, I’m not sure. Besides, I think I can get by alright just having you with me.” He smirked and slung an arm around the back of Castiel’s seat to emphasize his point. “If we need it, it’s there, but let’s just save it for any freak emergencies.”

“That is probably for the best,” Castiel agreed. “I tried to the best of my ability to restrain myself when applying grace to you, but…”
“Just couldn’t help yourself, huh?”

Castiel’s wings ruffled defensively. “Actually, it was your soul that continuously tugged on my grace in an attempt to draw in more of it. Resisting the pull of a soul on grace that it has previously contacted is no easy task.” Castiel paused. “But yes, I will admit that I allotted more grace from the beginning than I probably should have.”

Dean whistled. “We are gonna have to get better at this, then. ‘Cause I’m hoping this isn’t the last time we get to do that.”

“Under better circumstances, I’m sure we can learn restraint. In the meantime, I’ll do what I can to calm you without the direct use of my grace.” Castiel turned towards the window as he thought over something. “That reminds me; you wanted me to convey to you that a grace buzz is superior to an alcohol buzz.”

“It totally is,” Dean agreed without hesitation. “Feels better all around, and on top of that, it apparently doesn’t come with a hangover.” He gestured to his noggin to indicate his lack of hangover symptoms. He stopped in the middle of the motion as something resurfaced in his mind. “I really am sorry about the whole ‘hickory’ thing, though. Seriously, I’m gonna make it up to you.”

Castiel just smiled. “It’s alright, Dean. As you put it, the circumstances made it inconvenient, but otherwise it was enjoyable.”

“If you think that was enjoyable, just wait.” He winked and prepared to continue with the flirtatious banter but was cut off by another announcement from the gate attendant.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen,” he started out in a hesitant tone that made you suspicious. “Your plane is here and almost ready, except we do have a bit of a problem. The plane’s come in with a hydraulic leak.” The passengers uttered a collective groan of tired frustration. “A maintenance crew is down there right now working on fixing it, but we’re not sure how much of a delay this will cause…”

You didn’t get to hear the rest of that announcement, because Dean frantically whispered, “Hydraulic leak? What does that mean? Hydraulics sound like an important part of a plane. We can’t fly on one with a leak!”

“We won’t,” Sam assured him. “Plane parts break all the time, they can fix it. And if for some reason they can’t, we’ll get on a different plane.”

Though not entirely placated, Dean did pipe down after that, leaving you to sit in silence as the maintenance was carried out. Every few minutes or so, the dutiful gate attendant would give you an update on the progress, but after thirty minutes had passed, everyone seated in the gate was getting visibly restless. Dean was no exception to this.

“Why can’t they just put us on another plane?” he fretted. “We can’t fly on a broken plane!”

“They’re fixing it right now, Dean,” Sam calmly reassured his brother.

“Okay then, so say they fix it, but it breaks again in the middle of flying, as machinery tends to do. What then?”

Sam tried to say something to that, but Dean wasn’t finished with his paranoid ranting.

“See, in a car on nice, solid ground, if something breaks, you can just pull over and fix it. But in a plane?” Dean choked out a strangled, desperate laugh. “You’re thousands of feet in the air! How do you pull over a plane?!”
People were beginning to stare by that point. “Dean, you need to calm down,” Sam spoke in a quiet but firm voice. “We’re not even on the plane yet.”

“And we’re not going to get on it. I am not getting on a broken plane and that is final.”

Exasperated, Sam turned to Castiel for help. “Cas? Calm your boyfriend.”

Dean sputtered momentarily at that, his concerns about the broken plane temporarily forgotten. “H-his, uh-”

“That’s what you are now, right?” Sam glanced between the couple. “Unless I greatly misinterpreted what’s been going on with you guys lately…?”

Mouth drawn into a thin line as he realized Sam knew the truth, Dean eventually divulged, “No, you…got it right. Cas is my…” He paused, interrupted by another train of thought. “I have a…” his mouth twitched as he voiced the new word as it applied to him, “…boyfriend.”

Dean seemed to have checked out of reality and into his own little world, so Sam waved a hand in front of his face. “You alright?”

“Yes, fine,” Dean snapped back to reality like a slingshot. “Just gotta used to that new word.”

Sam huffed a laugh and loosened up. “By the way, I always knew you were bi.”

“Oh shut it, bitch.”

“Jerk.”

Castiel tilted his head as he observed the exchange. “I fail to understand why you use such harsh names as endearing titles for each other.”

“It’s a Winchester thing,” you explained offhandedly. “We’re not meant to understand.”

Left without much of a choice but to accept that, Castiel went back to watching the flow of airplane traffic outside the window. You joined him, pointedly avoiding looking at your own plane and the work taking place on its hydraulics. Even if you weren’t particularly afraid of flying, you were wary about flying in a broken plane. You had your paranoia to blame for that one.

Hope prevailed above all else though, as after an entire hour of lazing around and waiting for progress to be made, the gate attendant finally announced, “Alright ladies and gentlemen, I’ve just received news that the maintenance crew is going to test out their work to see if the plane is fit for flying. Just hang tight, and I’ll let you know the results.”

Five minutes later, every passenger was on the edge of their seat, excluding Dean, who was grumpily sulking and glaring daggers at the airplane through the window.

Any traces of optimism you had about this venture evaporated into thin air when the gate attendant then announced, “Okay ladies and gentlemen, ah…the test…didn’t…we’re going to have to put you folks on another plane out of here. Your new gate is D4. We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience.”

Dean fist bumped the air. “Yes! No broken plane for us!”

No other passenger shared Dean’s enthusiasm, many of them angrily grumbling and complaining to each other as they gathered their carry-on and sleepily shuffled towards the new gate. Though one
half of your brain was psyched that you wouldn’t have to harbor any more paranoia about your plane breaking down, the other half lamented the long walking distance you were sure this gate transfer would involve.

Sure enough, you had to walk all the way from one end of the airport to the other in order to reach your new plane. It was times like these when you truly missed Castiel’s teleportation ability.

Even after you’d reached your new gate in a secluded corner of the airport, you had to stand around outside the ticket-scanning counter to be attended to. You understood fully well that the airport’s employees were only human, but you couldn’t help but bounce impatiently from one foot to the other as you waited for one to arrive. You just wanted to make more progress in getting away from that genie; if you didn’t, this could turn into a life-or-death situation.

Once some employees had arrived to scan your boarding passes, everyone formed a line without bothering to wait for zones to be called. You couldn’t blame them, seeing as they’d waited much longer than they thought they’d have to just to board their plane.

You each handed your respective tickets to the scanner and followed other passengers into the jetway. Everyone else seemed to be in a hurry after all the untimely delays, and for possibly the first and only time, you were thankful to be surrounded by impatient people. The faster you got on that plane, the better.

Your seats weren’t too bad this time around. You’d been lucky enough to be assigned over-the-wing seats this time rather than seats in the back. Castiel, Dean and you took three seats directly overlooking the wing while Sam took the window seat of the row in front of you. Though he was always the odd moose out, he didn’t seem to particularly mind, if only because his seat assured him relative distance from his brother’s PDA with Castiel.

The window seat called your name as it always did, beckoning you with its view and light. You were a bit bummed out about the giant freakin’ wing completely blocking that view, but you figured it was better for Dean’s sake. After confidently establishing that he could in fact not see the ground over the smooth white expanse of the wing, Dean willingly slipped into the middle seat of your row with Castiel following and taking the last available seat.

Phew. Despite an hour and a half of delays, you were finally seated and poised for takeoff. Once more you felt that you could relax, though you didn’t wish to sleep this time. Your phone revealed that it was 7:30 AM, just early enough that drowsiness still clung to your consciousness but just late enough that you wouldn’t be able to sleep it off. It was a miracle you’d gotten just enough sleep on the previous flight to function.

Off to your left, an engine under the wing revved, and Dean squirmed slightly in his seat.

“You’re, uh…still gonna keep me calm, right?” he nervously asked Castiel.

“That is my intention,” Castiel assured him. “Without my grace, of course. Unless at any point you believe you require it.”

Dean’s eyes drifted to the spot on Castiel’s neck where he’d failed to leave a “hickory.” “N-no, I’ll be fine without it. We’ll just have it as a backup.”

Growing dubious, Castiel pressed, “You’re not just saying that for the sake of appearing resilient, right?”

Managing a smile, Dean let himself look right into the blue blackhole that was his angel’s eyes. “No,
I’m not,” he firmly decided. “You’re more than enough even without your grace.”

Uncertain how to respond, Castiel just smiled back and let his cheeks pinken.

Their tender staring contest was rudely interrupted by the plane jolting as it disconnected from the gate, slowly rolling backwards. That startled you pretty bad, and that was to say nothing of poor Dean. The normally confident and at times ferocious hunter actually let out the tiniest of whimpers as he froze in fear.

Seeing as his dignity was on the line, he abruptly turned to you and shout-whispered “You didn’t hear that!”

You resisted the urge to comment and just nodded dismissively with a knowing smile.

Thankfully for the sake of both Dean’s dignity and surging fear, Castiel drew him back by covering the hunter’s hand with his own. The angel copied his actions from the previous flight, rubbing his thumb over the back of Dean’s hand; this time without grace, of course. Briefly glancing down at their joined hands, Dean grinned appreciatively.

Castiel’s movements faltered when Dean spread out his fingers under Castiel’s hand. The angel caught on after a few moments though, maneuvering his own fingers and lacing them through Dean’s. As his thumb resumed its stroking, Dean closed his fingers around Castiel’s and gave them a light squeeze.

_That should be enough to keep him calm for now_, you thought, hiding an out-of-control smile. You reclined back into your own seat, fully intending to enjoy this flight since you were awake enough for it.

The plane bumped along the ground as it taxied through the airport. You occupied yourself by watching the backdrop of the airfield pass by your window. There were few other planes out and about as early as yours was, which promised a speedy takeoff. That was good for your plans to outrun the genie; not so good for Dean’s fragile state of mind while in an airplane.

You could hear him gasp the moment the engines revved and didn’t stop revving, signaling you were about to take to the air. He could’ve been mistaken for a statue with how rigidly he was sitting in his seat. By the time the plane was actually moving down the runway, you could hear his breathing even over the roar of wind outside.

You felt genuinely bad for him, you really did. But…at least he had Castiel there with him.

The angel wordlessly maneuvered his free arm around Dean’s shoulders, this time not applying any grace as he’d requested. Taking the opportunity, Dean closed his eyes and leaned closer, shrinking as far away from the window as he could possibly get. Castiel held his hand a little bit tighter as the plane officially left the ground behind.

Knowing Dean was in good hands, you allowed yourself to look out the window again. There really wasn’t much to see with the wing in the way, although you did catch a glimpse of the ocean as the plane dipped and turned to orient itself towards Atlanta. Even as you were climbing from hundreds to thousands of feet above it, you could physically feel the pull of that glittering blue mass.

Once the blue depths of the water were out of sight, you took to staring into the blue depths of the sky instead. The sun had risen by that time, revealing thick clouds broken by pockets of sunlit ozone. It was nice to be awake enough that you could appreciate the sights a flight offered rather than squander them chasing a nap that would never come. You could already tell that this flight was going
to be much more enjoyable than the last.

The plane levelled off sometime after piercing the cloud layer. You’d nearly forgotten about Dean’s predicament until you tired of staring at endless, monotonous sky. He still had his eyes shut tight, frowning with the effort of keeping a neutral, tough-guy expression.

It took some major coaxing from you and Castiel to convince Dean to assume an upright sitting position. Even Sam peered back from his own row to offer Dean his reassurances. Several minutes of smooth flying finally convinced Dean that there would be no turbulence now that you were properly underway, and only after that did he let go of some of his stress. Castiel’s hand, which still rubbed soothing patterns over Dean’s own, proved to be instrumental in this.

What Dean really needed was a clear distraction, to make him at least temporarily forget where he was. Castiel certainly qualified as a… “distraction,” but Dean seemed less willing to take advantage of this with way more people around to witness his PDA. Surely it wouldn’t hurt if you tried to help distract him…

With all the excitement of takeoff, you’d nearly missed the fact that your plane was one that had those monitors installed on the backs of everyone’s seats. Normally you only used them for their map feature to see where you were in the world and keep track of the flight’s progress, but you knew from previously exploring the menu many, many times on many, many bored flights that the device was rife with distracting material.

You spent a few minutes browsing through the entertainment options available on your seatback screen. You found one in particular that caught your eye: The Lego Batman Movie. Seeing as this was one of your all-time favorite movies from this year, you all but forced Dean to watch it with you, sharing his own seatback monitor and your earbuds between you. Castiel, who wouldn’t have had the cultural context or sense of humor to enjoy the movie anyways, took to silently meditating while still keeping his hand securely over Dean’s like a lifeline.

As it would turn out, ridiculous Lego humor and Batman in-jokes were all it took to get Dean to loosen up. You spent pretty much the entirety of the runtime laughing together, probably earning you more than a few weird looks from other passengers; but you don’t think either of you cared. By the time the credits had finished, Dean was lighthearted and remarkably at ease compared to how he’d been earlier. In fact, he was so calmed that he’d unconsciously moved his hand from underneath Castiel’s, thoroughly distracted enough that he didn’t need it for the time being.

“So wait, wait,” Dean interrupted a brief chuckle-fest that had ensued between you in your discussion of the film’s aftermath. “What was up with Batman and the Joker in that movie?”

“Dunno,” you shrugged. “All I know is, it was a genius plot device. I mean, when you think about how they’ve been portrayed in movies up to this point, it’s just about perfect comedically and plot-wise.” You paused. “And it’s super gay, so there’s that too.”

Dean barked another laugh. “Uh, yeah, no kidding! That ending with them really caught me off-guard. It was a better movie than I was expecting, it totally messed with my expectations. Pretty well-executed, definitely a fresh take on Batman-”

“And you guys call me a nerd,” Sam scoffed, sparing you a humored glance around his seat.

“Hey, I know I’m a nerd and proud of it!” you defended. “But yeah, Dean, you really did sound like a nerd back there.”

Still chuckling and thankfully calm, Dean just muttered, “Shut up, you two.”
Around then, you peered over the tops of the rows of blue seats and into the aisle. A stewardess and steward were slowly making their way down the walkway with a snack cart, handing out things for the passengers to drink and munch on.

Your stomach gurgled as you heard the fizzling of soda being poured into a cup and the tearing of cookie package’s wrapping. It was late enough by then that you could eat without fearing nausea, and you found yourself lowering the table in front of you in anticipation of getting to eat for the first time in hours.

As the snack trolley approached, however, something horrific occurred to you.

“Dean,” you addressed the hunter, who had been absently scrolling through his seatback monitor’s games. “You don’t go flying often, right?”

“Hell no,” Dean immediately answered. “I don’t unless I have to.”

“And I bet you usually get nauseous whenever you do fly, right?”

“Sicker than Sammy during this first hangover,” Dean quipped. “Although, I gotta say, I’m doin’ pretty good this time.”

“So that means…” You gasped in astonishment as the injustice of what you’d just realized hit you head-on. “You’ve never had…”

You had an obligation to remedy this. “Dean, I think it’s time I introduce you to one of the good things about flying in an airplane.”

Quirking an uncertain eyebrow, Dean cautiously asked, “And that would be…?”

You smirked as the snack cart rolled up to your row. “Biscoff airline cookies.”

When the steward turned to your row and asked you what you’d like, you wasted no time in replying, “Could I get a Sprite and Biscoff cookies?”

“Certainly,” the polite steward answered. He turned to Dean while the stewardess prepared your order. “And for you, sir?”

“I’ll, uh…have what she’s having, I guess,” Dean decided.

The steward didn’t bother to ask Castiel if he would like anything; the angel was still deep in meditation, and to anyone who didn’t know any better, he would appear to be asleep. The stewardess handed you each your drinks and packets of cookies, Dean lowering his own table to make room.

You eyed the plastic-clad cookies expectantly. This was easily one of the best parts of flying for you. These cookies held a flavor of deep nostalgia for you in their sweet crumbs, painting vivid memories of past cross-country travels you’d taken with your family. Though those memories now stung with a bittersweet edge, that didn’t stop you from all but devouring the first of your two cookies. Guess you really were hungry.

Dean, on the other hand, was eyeing his cookies with suspicion. He’d only peeled back part of the flimsy packaging, holding up the ovular baked treats as though trying to decipher what was so special about them.

“Just try one!” you encouraged, making him jump a little. “They don’t look like much, but I promise,
they’re delicious.”

Still uncertain, Dean pulled one cookie out of its wrapping and brought it to his mouth, nibbling a tiny piece off. His eyes widened in surprise as he chewed, leaning back in to take a more substantial bite.

“Good, huh?” you smirked as Dean, unable to speak through his mouthful of cookie, nodded his head.

Swallowing his first glorious taste of Biscoff, Dean reached towards Castiel and poked him in the shoulder. The angel’s eyes opened in alarm, shaken from his meditative trance. He turned to Dean with concern.

“Dean?” he worriedly asked. “Are you doing okay? Do you require any grace?”

“Calm down, I’m actually doing pretty good,” Dean assured him. “But listen, you gotta try this cookie.”

Dean practically shoved his half-eaten cookie right into Castiel’s face. The angel went nearly cross-eyed staring at it, tilting his head in confusion.

“You know I don’t require sustenance,” Castiel started. “But over the course of this trip you have shown me many desirable tastes, so…I will try it.”

Failing to hide a giddy smile, Dean handed the cookie over to Castiel. The angel took an experimental bite, chewing slowly.

“This is…” Castiel mumbled through a partially-full mouth, “actually quite delectable for a cheap, mass-produced airline snack.”

“Isn’t it?” Dean enthusiastically agreed. “C’mon, I want another bite.”

Although Dean began reaching out to take back the cookie, Castiel beat him to it. The angel put the cookie right against Dean’s mouth, waiting patiently for him to catch a clue.

“Um, Cas…” Dean spoke in a muffled voice. “I can feed myself.”

Castiel still kept the cookie against Dean’s lips. “I’m aware. But I’m also aware that couples feed each other as a bonding activity. I was hoping we could…”

Going a bit red, Dean smiled. “…Yeah, okay. We can…we can do that.”

Dean took a bite of the cookie then, and Castiel passed it to him so he could in turn be fed. This went on until there was no cookie left…and then they moved on to the second cookie and started over, exchanging shy smiles along with each bite.

It was a sickeningly adorable couply activity, and you could not believe you were lucky enough to be a witness to it.

The next hour or so of flight passed without much incident. You occupied yourself by downing your cup of soda and trying to make your second cookie last for as long as you could. Dean and Castiel eventually finished their own remaining cookie, Dean deciding to pass the time by pulling up a trivia game on his monitor and enlisting Castiel’s help in answering the questions.

“Cas, what country is Maputo the capital of?”
“Mozambique.”

“Awesome, got that one…what are the names of the Canadian territories?”

“All of them?”

“Yeah! Hurry, we’ve only got ten seconds to select answers!”

“Dencho, North Slave, Sahtu, South Slave, Inuvik.”

“Dang it, never mind. We’re already out of time.”

You leaned over just to comment, “You know, we were in Canada just a week ago. I feel like we should be able to answer that question.”

“To be fair, we were only in Vancouver for the duration of our stay,” Castiel pointed out.

Shaking your head, you flopped back into your seat and left them to it.

One hour and several games of trivia later, Dean was beat. Flopping back into his seat, he shut his eyes and let calm wash over him. You were honestly impressed by how much he’d managed to chill out. Clearly these distraction tactics really were helping him…

You half-expected Dean to take a nap and Castiel to follow suit and resume meditating. Yet, as you glanced towards Castiel, he appeared somewhat restless. His wings, which were incorporeal in the cramped space of the airplane, were flexing around somewhat. The wing nearest to Dean, which was fazing through his seat, kept getting closer and closer to the hunter before pulling away uncertainly.

Oop. Looks like someone wants some wing cuddles.

Eventually, Castiel’s movements became so obvious that even Dean noticed, his eyes fluttering open and glancing behind him. He fixed Castiel with a questioning stare.

Caught on the spot, Castiel asked, “Dean, is there any chance I could-”

“You don’t have to ask anymore, you know,” Dean interjected. “More than likely, I’m not gonna say no.”

Hopeful but unsure, Castiel double-checked, “Are you certain?”

“Yeah. What, do you want an official document or declaration or somethin’?”

When Castiel didn’t know how to answer that, his wing still hovering uncertainly, Dean went ahead with, “Okay then, I hereby decree that cuddles can be freely and openly given whenever the hell. As long as we’re not in the middle of a really inconvenient situation, of course, but other than that.”

“With such loose terms, that doesn’t sound like a very solid official declaration.” Regardless, Castiel still pulled his wing forward the rest of the way so that it was behind Dean and made it corporeal. He held his second wing close to his body so that it didn’t obstruct the middle aisle.

Dean mindlessly reclined back into the wing, which curled around him once he was in place. “Fine, I’ll try for more casual: your cuddles are awesome, so I’ll gladly take ‘em whenever you can give ‘em. And vice versa, if that’s what you’d like.”

Pleasantly surprised, Castiel absently wondered, “You like cuddling that much?”
“What can I say? You’ve turned me into a cuddly sap.” Dean donned a borderline devious grin as he recalled one of their earlier conversations. “In fact, I really like it, but I think I like it… much, you know?”

Even with his general struggle to handle social interactions, Castiel caught on in seconds as the familiar words registered. You could’ve sworn you saw a smirk ghosting over his face, no doubt an expression he’d learned from Dean. “That is very flattering, Dean. Sometimes I think the same thing about you.”

You had to give that round to Mr. Dorky Angel, because if the way Dean’s grin turned silly and his face went pink was an accurate measure, he hadn’t been expecting the angel to come up with that response.

“Well played, angel,” Dean conceded, sinking further into the embrace of Castiel’s feathers.

Familiar confusion colored Castiel’s features as he abruptly fell out of his temporary suave state and back into his socially awkward one. “Well played…human,” he tried, sounding as unsure about the attempted quip as he looked.

“Eh, the affectionate species nickname works on my end, not so sure about yours,” Dean reflected. “I could get used to it, though. In any case, you already won, so don’t worry about it.”

“I…wasn’t aware we were playing a game,” Castiel had by then fully reverted back to his usual awkward self.

“That was what we call ‘the flirting game,’” Dean jokingly explained. “Usually, I’m a champion at that, but you managed to out-romance me this time. Not many people can make that claim.”

“Oh…okay then,” Castiel delved into deep thought, overcome by a sheepish curiosity. “As I understand it, the victor in a game is often the recipient of a prize or reward for their triumph. Do I get any-”

“’Course ya do, Casanova.” Dean didn’t waste any time, leaning over to give Castiel’s cheek a long, adoring smooch. By the time he pulled away, Castiel was bright red, signaling that Dean had reclaimed his title of flirting game champion. “Keep that one nice and polished in your trophy case,” he smoothly tacked on, idly laying back and snuggling into his feathery blanket.

By the time all that had transpired, you were sitting in your seat with a hand covering your mouth to hold back various fangirl noises. It was nothing short of amazing that no sound escaped you.

Yet there was even more fluff to be witness to.

Shifting his wing around Dean, Castiel wondered, “Is there any possibility that I could redeem your promise for ‘all the wing pets I want’ right now?”

Recognition flickered over Dean’s slack face. “Oh right, I remember sayin’ something about that…a deal’s a deal,” he affirmed without a fight. “Lemme know when or if you’ve had enough.”

Squeezing Dean tighter in his wing as thanks, Castiel smiled warmly as the hunter languidly ran his hand through the feathers encircling him, adding a few scritches every once in a while. Castiel appeared more than pleased with this, leaning closer to Dean and letting his eyes fall closed as a peace of his own overtook him.

Your silence could only last so long with that much pure cute in such close proximity. A tiny squeak escaped your throat, but thankfully it didn’t disturb Dean or Castiel; they were much too caught up in
each other.

Your embarrassing squeak did, however, catch the attention of a certain moose one row ahead. Sam peeked back at you, a concerned expression on his face. You just smiled sheepishly and glanced towards the two otters beside you.

Sheer bewilderment overtook Sam’s features as he watched the two. It only then occurred to you that, oh yeah, Sam was the only one among you who couldn’t see Castiel’s wings. To him, it probably looked like Dean was just dragging his hand through empty air, his fingers twitching at random intervals.

Looking to you for an explanation, Sam mouthed, “What?”

You mouthed two words as clearly as you could: “Wing. Petting.”

Opening his mouth on a silent, understanding “Oh…” Sam slowly nodded his head, turning back to Dean and Castiel with new recognition. Shaking himself, he swiveled back around into his own seat.

Bless poor Sam. He was gonna have to get used to seeing Dean and Castiel actually acting on their feelings for each other rather than just letting them simmer and bring tension to a boil wherever they went.

The last few hours of the flight were the quietest. The otters remained snuggled up next to each other and you occupied yourself with another movie on your monitor: Get Out, or as you liked to call it, Crazy White People the Movie™. The snack cart made a second round right around the time you’d reached the first hypnosis scene, and of course you snagged another cup of Sprite and more cookies. This time, both Dean and Castiel asked for a pair of cookies each. Looks like you’d successfully gotten both of them hooked.

You got a little distracted when you noticed Sam ordering an actual menu item in the row ahead, pulling out his wallet and exchanging a few of his remaining bills for a small plate of cheese. When you reached through the seats to get his attention and ask what he was doing, he just innocently shrugged and replied that he was hungry and that cookies, pretzels, or peanuts wouldn’t cut it. That was fair, so you left him be; but only after mooching a slice of brie from his meal.

Upon leaning back into your seat, you overheard Dean muttering a frantic apology to Castiel, something about making a mess of his wing. Alarmed, you looked over to see what had happened… and realized that Dean had just accidentally gotten some of his cookie crumbs on the angel’s feathers since they were still wrapped around him. Castiel just calmly smiled and swatted the offending crumbs from his feathers with the napkin the steward had given him. They went back to quietly enjoying their food and each other’s presence after that, Dean eating his cookie with more care.

Shaking your head and inwardly laughing, you put your earbuds back in and resumed the movie. Though Castiel was a particular outlier, every one of your travelling companions was a dork.

By the time Get Out was wrapping up its final act, you felt the sensation of the plane’s slow descent. Peering out the window, you could see the cloud cover rising incrementally closer as the first stages of landing began.

Sure enough, when you pulled up the navigational map on your seatback monitor, it showed the plane hovering just outside of Atlanta. One of the map’s informational boxes alerted you that Charlotte was just 272 miles away; you nearly had a heart attack before you remembered that there was a city named Charlotte far, far away from a certain Mrs. Perkins.
Evidently Dean had also noticed you were starting to descend, but it didn’t appear to bother him too badly. Castiel still had him securely wrapped up in feathers, providing comfort invisible to the other passengers.

You followed the usual protocol of staring out the window for the duration of the descent, taking in the spires and skyscrapers of Atlanta as they came into view. True peace settled over you for the first time since your genie’s surprise reappearance. Sure, there had been a few mishaps, but you’d still made it this far. What else could possibly stand in your way?

You just had to open your big fat mental mouth and wonder that.

As you were soaring towards the ground, the runway nearly in view, the plane very abruptly pulled up. The engines whirred loudly as you suddenly changed from descending to ascending, the tarmac getting smaller and smaller beneath you.

Your first thoughts went something like,

If those sorts of unlikely thoughts were running through your head, you couldn’t imagine what poor Dean was going through.

And yup, when you turned your head to check on him, Dean was frozen stock-still and resolutely not looking out the window. When the engines picked up even more, propelling you higher towards the thick cloud cover, he made a sound that must have been a whimper and gave into his fearful instincts, burying his face in Castiel’s trench coat.

Castiel enclosed Dean further in the blanket of his wing, pulling the spooked hunter against him and resting his chin atop his head. You could just barely see him murmuring reassurances; “It’s okay, Dean, I’m right here. You know I wouldn’t let any harm befall you.”

Pretty spooked yourself, you turned back to the window and waited to hear an explanation for the aborted landing over the intercom. No explanation came, and the plane instead circled around and began another descent. Must have just been some minor mishap if it was going for it again so soon.

Sam had the mind to lean back and check on his brother once things had settled. “Dean? You good?”

Dean just took a heaving breath and pulled himself free of the trench coat. He was wearing the best version of a toughened face that he could manage in that moment, replying curtly, “Yeah, m’fine, Sammy.”

Though he didn’t look like he fully believed that, Sam slowly nodded his head and turned back into his own seat. The second his brother wasn’t looking anymore, Dean leaned back into the curve of Castiel’s wing, closing his eyes and tapping his fingers on the leathery material of his seat.

“Dean?” Castiel ventured. “Are you really fine?”

“Yeah Cas,” Dean opened his eyes, keeping his sole focus on the angel next to him. “Just didn’t expect that. I’ll be fine.”

You better be, you thought to yourself as you watched the approaching ground through the window. ‘Cause we’re about to land for real.

Except, again, you never made it that far. Just as the plane was angling itself towards the runway and the landing gear noisily clunked into place, it pulled out of the dive and immediately accelerated back up into the air.
Your chest tightened in uncertain fear at the surprise sensation, and this time you were sure that you heard Dean whimper beside you. You looked over just in time to see him flip out and embed himself back in the folds of Castiel’s coat.

“Never mind!” Dean said in a muffled, panicked voice. “Not okay, not okay!”

On that cue, Castiel’s arm came up to reach around Dean’s shoulders, pulling him even closer. His hand glowed with a familiar blue light that seeped into Dean’s skin through his shoulder. Almost immediately, Dean visibly untensed.

Yeah, two aborted landings in a row definitely warranted the application of grace. Speaking of which…what the heck was going on with your plane? You’d never experienced a botched landing attempt before, let alone two in a row.

The intercom crackled to life above you, hushing some of the muttered conversations that had sprung up between the confused passengers. “Folks, we’re sorry about that. There’s some bad weather sweeping into Atlanta which is making it difficult to land…we’ve made two attempts now, but the ground crew has recommended that we wait until it’s completely safe. We’ve been rerouted to the Huntsville Airport—”

Many displeased groans followed that revelation. Great, so you were being delayed again? What kind of rotten luck was following you?

The pilot continued with the announcement. “We should only be grounded there for an hour at the most while we refuel. As soon as this weather clears, we’ll get you to where you need to go. We apologize for the inconvenience.”

Chatter had erupted in the cabin, people quietly complaining about missing connecting flights or wasted time. Normally you’d go with the flow of whatever was happening and not concern yourself too badly with any delays, but too much time spent in one spot could bring the genie right to you…

You tried your utmost not to think about it as you left Atlanta behind. Staring numbly out the window at the passing clouds and cityscape, you kept your mind as blank as you could up until the plane descended again towards a much smaller runway. You half-expected it to pull out of this landing as well, but it went without a hitch.

Your plane taxied until it was parked off to the side on a wide-open section of concrete airfield. Several other similarly rerouted planes lined up beside yours in a neat row, awaiting refueling trucks.

The hour that followed felt like one of the longest you’d ever experienced. Passengers called on flight attendants, toting often unfair complaints that no one could do anything to resolve. Flight attendants scurried up and down the aisles, rationing out cups of water and what few snacks remained onboard.

Early on, Dean had untangled himself from Castiel’s protective hold, gently nudging away the hand supplying grace. “I’m…I’m good for now. Don’t wanna overdo it, huh?” He managed a half-smile, still shaken by the failed landings.

Your mood was dampened by the complaints being carelessly tossed about and thoughts of the genie finding you. You stayed in your seat and silently pouted to yourself. “This is all that stupid penny’s fault, I just know it,” you grumbled under your breath.

Only a few things of note occurred in the time you spent trapped on the ground. For one, a steward offered you each some of the rationed Biscoff cookies. You and Castiel split a pack, but Dean turned
them down, citing nausea from the troubled flight. Your pilot got on the intercom to give you periodic updates, and once even recommended that you take the chance to use the inflight restrooms while you were grounded.

“He’s got the right idea,” Dean agreed, unbuckling himself and standing up to shuffle to the back of the plane.

“Uh, here, I may as well…” you too left your seat and shuffled into the aisle behind Dean. You hadn’t been given the chance to use a restroom since you were in Seattle, and you weren’t about to risk holding it in for another flight, however short it may be.

Turns out a lot of people had the same idea you did, because the line for the lavatories stretched fifteen rows. Sam had thought ahead and already gone earlier in the flight before the landing debacle, so it was just you and Dean standing in line. Since you were going to be waiting a while, you figured you may as well keep yourself and Dean distracted with a friendly conversation.

“You know, you’ve surprised me,” you started out. “You’ve been more overly-romantic with Cas than…pretty much anyone else you’ve been with.”

“Just making up for lost time,” Dean replied, hardly missing a beat. “Besides, Cas is different. He’s…special.” Dean paused for a few moments, staring off into empty space. “I didn’t realize how sappy that sounded ‘til I’d already said it.”

“Well I’m sure he’d think it was very sweet,” you assured him, repressing a laugh.

Storing away that tidbit for the future, you kept the conversation going. You chatted about meaningless things for the rest of your stint in line, basically discussing anything that wasn’t related to planes or the threat of your genie.

By the time you’d wrapped up in the bathroom, Dean was already back in his seat, relaxing against the surface of the angel wing blanketing his chair cushion. Smirking as an idea popped into your head, you slid past the other passengers in the walkway and into your window seat.

Grinning innocently, you leaned conspiratorially towards the pair of otters and told Castiel, “Hey Cas, a little bird told me that Dean thinks you’re real special. Just…thought I’d let you know.”

Dean’s face turned a bright shade of pink and he sent a semi-murderous glare your way.

“Is that so?” Castiel replied playfully. “Is there any chance you could pass it along that I feel much the same about him?”

“Most certainly.” You angled your head more towards Dean. “Hey Dean, a little bird told me-”

“Alright, I get it, you’re both saps,” Dean dismissed, but the tiny grin on his face betrayed that he was enjoying the banter.

Once the mood was brightened by all that, your hour spent on the ground was easier to weather. You occupied yourself by taking advantage of having wi-fi again, and that also made it go much faster. Finally, your pilot alerted you that the plane had a full tank of gas and the radar was clear for both takeoff and landing. You would still have to wait behind many of the other planes, but you would be taking off shortly, which was certainly better than nothing. You were itching to get out of there and leave the risk of encountering the genie behind for a while.

After that particular announcement was made, Dean fidgeted in his seat and quietly asked, “Uh, Cas…I’m not really feelin’ stable enough to fly right now, so…any chance you could…?”
“Are you asking for me to use my grace on you?” Castiel guessed. When Dean just nodded, the angel affirmed, “I wouldn’t mind that at all, if that’s what you’d like.”

“Y-yeah, this whole thing kinda counts as ‘freak emergency,’ so…”

“You needn’t worry about it,” Castiel promised. “I’ll ensure that you don’t feel an ounce of fear.”

Castiel stayed true to that promise. The very instant the plane’s engines shuddered to life and it started creeping across the ground, he placed a glowing hand on Dean’s shoulder and let him lay back against his wing.

The takeoff was uneventful. The passengers had finally quieted down now that they were underway, and you were feeling much more secure now that you were on the move. You entered Atlanta airspace before long, and you watched in anticipation as your plane approached the runway. This time, it went smoothly and it made contact with the ground in one try.

The pilot offered more apologies for the delays over the intercom as you taxied into the massive airport. You were back where you’d started, but you’d managed to put a lot of distance between you and the genie’s last known location, and that was what counted.

One thing you hadn’t thought to account for, however, was just how much of Castiel’s grace was required for Dean to feel not “an ounce of fear” throughout the flight. You only noticed what was up when you turned away from the view of the airfield to check on him. One glance at his slack, drowsily grinning face told you everything you needed to know.

Looked like grace high Dean was back. At least things wouldn’t be dull with him around.

First, he reverted back to his old habit of repeatedly booping Castiel on the nose and giggling about it like a delighted five-year-old. Sam happened to overhear this and swiveled in his seat to see what was going on. He exchanged glances with both you and Castiel, and that was when he figured out for certain what was going on.

Thinking back all the way to the start of our trip, Sam cooed, “Well hey, Dean, aren’t you doin’ just dandy? Looks like Cas has been taking pretty good care of you, huh?” Dean smiled wide and fervently nodded his head in agreement. “Yeah, I bet he has. Hey listen, uh, you wanna give him a thank you kiss, just like old times?”

“Now that, Sammert,” Dean pointed a finger at him, “is a genious idea.”

Sluggishly turning around in the loose grasp of Castiel’s wing, Dean grinned at him dopily. “You heard ‘im, Cas. Gimme a smooch?”

Castiel glanced uncertainly between Dean’s overly-puckered lips and the rows upon rows of bystanders. “I’m…not certain if that is the best idea. Were my grace not affecting you, I doubt you would be entirely comfortable kissing me in public.”

“Troo, yur grace is afflecking me. An…and it pulled the stick outta my butt.” He tittered with momentary laughter. “So I dun mind.”

Castiel’s face scrunched in confusion. “I…wasn’t aware there was a…stick in your…” He shook his head, promptly deciding to move on. “A kiss isn’t that big of a deal, but all the same…”

“Yee, well…” Dean’s train of thought momentarily derailed. “Yo…you’re ma boo. My boof- my…boofriend…o.” Scrunching up his face in immense concentration while you and Sam watched with unfettered amusement, Dean tried again. “Boyf…b…boyfriend. Hee, I like that word…but yeah
you’re ma boyfrien’ an’ I wanna kiss.”

Even though Dean was clearly trying his patience a bit, Castiel couldn’t help the sentimental grin that crept onto his face. “I suppose…that’s a simple enough request. But nothing more than a kiss.”

Dean nodded in agreement, sitting with his hands in his lap like an expectant puppy. Smiling warmly, Castiel brought up a hand to hold the side of Dean’s face and leaned in for a simple but sweet smooch.

“Mmm,” Dean hummed dreamily as Castiel lazily broke the kiss. “Thaaaaank you Cassie,” he said in a sing-song voice. He leaned way over into Castiel’s space, poking him repeatedly in the chest as he tried to articulate. “Ya know, ya know, ya know…your kissies are like, da best. Ever.”

“Really?” Castiel seemed genuinely surprised. “I’m sure you’re just saying that because of my grace’s influence; there are far more experienced and better kissers out there than I. All I’d hoped for was to be better that Meg.”

Dean looked affronted at the mention of that name. “Dude nooooooo, don’t even mention that biich or her gassy, hellish peanut breath.” He leaned in even closer. “I mean it, sear…seriously. Yer the best. I dun care if yer not expedia- I mean, experienced, yer just, yer just…” Fidgeting in place and unsure what to with himself, Dean settled on reaching up to hold Castiel’s face in his hands. “Yer just…so…friggin’ sweet.”

A touched smile broke out on Castiel’s face. “I suppose I’ll just have to take your word for it, then.”

Satisfied with that, Dean nodded his head once and pulled back, reclining in his seat. “Never doubt yer kisses, Cassie Lassie. Take it from the kissu champion, if I hadta rate all the kisses I’ve ever had, ever, yers would be the very bestest. That is sayin’ truckloads, heh.”

God, you missed seeing Dean high on grace.

What you didn’t miss, however, were the weird glances people sent your way when you helped wrestle him out of his seat and towards the plane’s exit. The steward and stewardess on staff were waiting in front of the cockpit to bid their passengers farewell, smiling with overly-whitened teeth and waving. They just so happened to make eye contact with Castiel, who was guiding Dean along with hands on his shoulder blades.

The pair of flight attendants noticed Dean’s state as he approached and smiled understandingly at the angel behind him. Dean immediately took notice of their extra-friendly demeanor and stopped right in front of them.

Squinting and looking them over with judgmental eyes, Dean asserted, “Hey now, lissssen here, you two. Dis…” Dean wrapped an arm around Castiel’s shoulders, trapping them in an awkward, bendy position in the plane’s cramped hallway. “Dis awesome fella right here, is my boyfrien’. So…I dun wanna see any of yas makin’ any moves on ‘im, unnerstand?

The pair of attendants looked to be at a loss. Exchanging a glance with each other, they both pulled out the best trained smiles they could manage and nodded at Dean. Satisfied with that, Dean continued on, pulling Castiel with him as he stumbled out of the plane on loose footing.

“You’re so sorry,” you whispered to the attendants as you passed them. You reassured yourself with the assumption that surely they’d seen far weirder on the job.

You regrouped once you’d progressed through the jetway, emerging into the usual bustle that characterized the Atlanta airport. The first thing Sam did was send his brother a disapproving
bitchface; apparently he’d overheard what had happened with the flight attendants, but didn’t bother saying anything since he knew it wouldn’t get through to Dean in his current state.

“Okay, we’re in Atlanta…finally,” Sam said. “What now? We keep moving?”

“That’d be our best bet,” you agreed. “But…I know we don’t have enough money left for more plane tickets.”

“Air travel is hardly the only form of transportation available,” Castiel pointed out. “And besides that, maybe it would be better for all of us to stay on the ground for a while.” He gave Dean a sympathetic glance; he still could barely stand up on his own and had moved his arm to Castiel’s waist for balance.

“You’re right,” Sam acknowledged. “I don’t think Dean could take another plane trip anyways.”

Though he may have not been on a plane trip anymore, Dean was certainly on a hell of a grace trip. He kept looking between the crowds of people hurrying to and fro and the passengers waiting in the gate where we stood. None of them seemed to notice that he was intermittently glaring at them for evidently no good reason at all.

“Dean, seriously,” Sam scolded. “I know you’re…drunk on grace, or whatever, but what’s your deal? I don’t remember you being this rude last time.”

Dean turned to Sam with a genuinely distressed face. “Sam…Sammy, I’m scurred.”

“Scur…” Sam thought to himself as he tried to decipher that word. “You mean ‘scared?’”

“Yeah, that!” Dean weakly pointed a finger. “I’m scurred, ‘cause I dun want anyone ta take Cas away from me. I jus’ got ‘im, and he’s really purty, so, so…what if someone sees ‘im, sweeps in and swoops ‘im off his feets?”

Glancing around to ensure no one had overheard the weird dialogue, Sam whispered back, “No one’s going to steal your boyfriend, Dean. He wouldn’t even let that happen, you know that!” He turned to Castiel. “Cas, back me up on this.”

“Dean, you know I would never-” Castiel started, but Dean was too absorbed in his mini-tirade.

“How do ya know?” Dean demanded of his brother. “It could be anyone!” He pointed an accusatory finger at him. “Ev…even you!” He spared you a glance and shrugged. “Probly not you, tho.”

You nodded in confirmation, watching the whole exchange with more amusement than you probably should have.

Sam had to laugh at Dean’s unfounded claim. “Yeah…no. You’ve just got a case of the early relationship jitters, Dean. Let’s get you out of here.”

Quietly grumbling and tightening his hold on Castiel, Dean reluctantly followed Sam’s lead into the stream of travelers and airport staff in the central walkway. You made sure to keep your eyes on Castiel’s distinctive wings the entire time so you wouldn’t get lost or separated.

It really was a nice change of pace to walk around freely and stretch your legs after being cooped up for so long. Between your first plane’s mechanical failures and the weather delays, the entire ordeal had stretched out over several hours. So much for getting to Atlanta before rush hour; upon checking your phone, you saw it was nearly 5:00 already.
Nearly a full day wasted, and for what? Because of some dumb cursed penny? You knew it was silly to blame the coin, but really, what else could have caused such a string of bad luck? If you were going to spend hours suffering because of fate, you may as well make an inside joke out of it.

Just as you were fixing to share the joke with the others, you noticed they were heading towards a pair of sliding glass doors. Beyond those was a massive parking complex with a steady flow of people walking in and out.

You stumbled to a halt. “Uh…guys?”

Sam and Castiel stopped, Dean jerking forwards in his angel’s hold at the unexpected change in pace. They all turned back to look at you.

“What?” Sam asked, stepping a bit closer so he could hear better over the airport’s cacophony.

“Anyone wanna tell me what exactly we’re doing?” you hesitantly asked.

“Uh…going by car?” Sam replied like it was completely obvious. “I think we can all agree that’s our best chance of transportation. Our only other option would be to take an airport shuttle, and that won’t take us far.”

“Yeah, but…we don’t have a car,” you weakly pointed out.

“Well…” Sam glanced through the sliding glass doors. “That’s why we’re gonna get one.”

Dean gasped. “Are we gonna steal a car?” he shouted, sounding excited and scandalized by the prospect.

“Shh, shh!” Sam ran to his inebriated brother’s side, clamping a hand over his mouth and nervously looking around to see if anyone heard. A few people did, but they just kept walking after only a moment’s contemplation.

So much for all those announcements encouraging people to report suspicious activity in the airport. It wasn’t particularly comforting to see firsthand that people didn’t heed them.

“Could, we, um…not?” you nervously asked once Dean settled down. “I know this is like a normal gig for you guys, but…I’ve already been involved in a bank robbery, I really don’t want anything to do with a car theft, too.”

Sam’s face softened. “I…yeah, I get it. Okay, we can look for a car rental place, no problem. We have at least enough money left for that.”

“Thanks,” you breathed out a sigh of relief.

“So, we’re not stealin’ a car?” Dean asked, sounding genuinely disappointed.

Putting on his best version of a patient voice, Sam placated Dean as one might a toddler. “How about this: next time we’re on a case, and it absolutely requires stealing a car, you’ll get to be the one do it. Fair?”

Donning a blinding smile, Dean chirped, “Fairy! N-no, wait, I meant fair. No fairies.” He stared off into space and muttered, “Fight the fairies…”

Rolling his eyes and ignoring your laughter, Sam led you away from the doors and towards the airport’s first floor. Mercifully, it took only fifteen or so minutes to locate a host of hole-in-the-wall
rental services clustered together. They all had queues that extended past the confines of their stores. Figures that they would be packed at peak rush hour…

You gravitated to the one with the shortest line, which wasn’t really saying much as there had to have been at least ten other people waiting in front of you. Dean passed the time by reverting back to booping Castiel, and Sam got busy heeding the sign placed at the entrance of the store.

*Please have driver’s license of intended driver(s) ready when you reach the counter,* it read. That was just typical protocol, and you hardly thought anything of it. But…

As he reached into his jeans’ pocket, Sam froze. He reached into his other pocket, then his back pockets, and even the pockets on his outer jacket. As he frantically patted them down to no avail, he moved to his duffel, letting it fall from his shoulder. Even after jostling about its contents and zipping and unzipping every pocket he could reach, Sam didn’t come up with anything. Defeated, he looked up at you in desperation.

“My wallet,” he groaned. “I took it out to buy something from the food cart, and- I left it on the plane.”

That was just great. Now you were short another bunch of cash and who knows how many fake IDs. Worse still for your current predicament, there was no way you were going to be able to get a car; unless you could find a rental company that didn’t require a driver’s license to be presented, and you were pretty sure that didn’t exist. You knew from experience that to rent a car, you’d have to show the license of whoever was going to drive it. Dean driving was absolutely out of the question, and as for you-

“You’re eighteen,” Sam gave you a hopeful look. “You have a license, right?”

“Yes,” you replied. “A boating license. I never needed to learn how to drive, I just walked everywhere in my hometown.”

“And Dean would be worse than a drunk driver behind the wheel in his current state…” Sam contemplated.

All eyes on fell on Castiel. The angel shifted uncertainly, well aware of what you were considering.

“I…do not have near as much experience with driving,” Castiel fretted. “But even with my limited experience, I consider myself to be a relatively safe driver.”

You couldn’t deny you were surprised. “You actually know how to drive?”

“Dean attempted to teach me some years ago,” Castiel explained. “I learned all the basic mechanics.”

Hearing his name, Dean leaned over and deposited his head on Castiel’s shoulder. “Yesss siiiiiree, that was me. Cassie did preety good afta the first coupla tries.”

Curious, Sam asked, “Did…you let him drive the Impala?”

“Hell no!” Dean snapped. “Hotwired some sucker’s car. Taught Cassie how ta to do that, too.” Catching Sam’s disapproving glance, Dean added, “I gave it baaaaaaack. Only had, maybe threes scrapes on it, or somethin’… ’sides, you were ’bout to steal a car few minutes ago.”

“Because we needed it. Giving Cas driving lessons was not a high enough priority for you to take a car.”
Dean just stuck his tongue out like a lil’ stinker and buried his face in Castiel’s shoulder.

That settled it. Castiel was your only hope of getting out of there. At least he was finally getting a chance to help with transportation without having to teleport.

Things got a little out of hand when he reached the counter. Sam had briefly coached Castiel on what to do when he reached the front of the line, showing him which fake ID to pull out and making sure he knew to sign all the right documents. Dean had regained enough of his sense of balance that he didn’t have to lean on Castiel to stay upright…but he kept doing it anyways.

Dean relented and allowed Castiel to gently shrug him off when you finally made it to the front of the line. You were directed to one of a few people standing behind a counter. He was a polished man in a hyper-professional suit, wearing a plastered-on smile and waiting patiently.

“I would like to rent a vehicle,” Castiel stated.

“You’re in the right place,” the man cheekily replied, pulling a few forms out from under his side of the counter. “Are you the intended driver, sir?”

“Yes, I am.” Castiel presented his fake license, one the Winchesters had made for him a long time ago in case they ever needed it.

Flashing a polite smile, the man reached out to take the card from Castiel. The angel apparently hadn’t realized he would have to give the card up, because he held onto it for a few awkward seconds. The man tugged on it and he relented, their fingers happening to just barely graze each other in the process.

A sharp, inhaled breath sounded from right beside you. You looked over and saw that Dean was staring wide-eyed at the man following the brief, accidental contact.

“Sam,” Dean hissed, not quite quiet enough to be a whisper. “Lookit, that guy’s makin’ a move on him like I’ve been ‘fraid of.”

“Are you seriously still on that?” Sam impatiently whispered back, more aware of his own volume. “What are the odds that this random guy would-”

“Sliminny, I-I mean…slim. The odds are slim, but still!”

“You’re not thinking straight, Dean.”

“Yeah, you’re right, I’m not!”

Though he was a little surprised at Dean agreeing with him, Sam was quick to catch the double meaning. “Okay, not what I meant. Just…calm down and think about it. How do you even know he likes guys, or would like Cas for that matter?”

“You can’t assume everyone’s straight, Sam!”

“I know, but-”

“Lookit me, I pretended to be straight fer…I dunno, mosta my life? So you never know!”

“Not that you hid that as well as you think you did…” Sam muttered to himself, utterly done with the conversation. “Doesn’t matter, I’m telling you, even if he is, he wouldn’t-”

“Ahem.”
The Winchesters stopped their quiet disagreement to sheepishly look back at the rental man. He’d been filling out one of the forms but had stopped to raise a concerned eyebrow at the bickering brothers. Turns out they hadn’t been anywhere near as quiet as they’d thought.

“Excuse me, gentlemen,” the rental man politely greeted, “but it’s rather difficult to fill out these forms with all that angry chatter.” He folded up and set aside one of the papers, calmly turning back to them. “And if it would help settle your dispute, I actually am gay.”

Dean gave Sam the biggest “I friggin’ told you so” look in the world.

“But, Mr….” He picked up Castiel’s license from the counter and squinted at it. “…Rogers here isn’t my type, so you have nothing to worry about. Not that I would go after a taken man, anyways.”

Sam then gave Dean an even bigger “I friggin’ told you so” look.

Social train wrecks usually made your skin crawl, but this particular one actually made you want to laugh. As long as you weren’t actively involved in any of it, you could just pretend you were watching a Supernatural episode and detach yourself from the reality of it.

“Say…” the rental guy wondered, abandoning the paperwork again. “I’m sorry, but I’m sure I’ve seen you guys before.”

You tensed up. Please, please, please don’t let this go where you thought it was going.

“Yeah!” he snapped his fingers a few times in succession. “I’ve seen you on TV!”

Yup, it was going there. Over a week of sneaking around with these three, and this guy, of all people, was the one who recognized them. You’d thought it was nothing short of a miracle that you’d managed to get this far without anyone noticing them or at least saying anything about them, and you’d completely forgotten it could be an issue.

On cue, Sam and Dean sent you a questioning look. You sent them a helpless one in return, unable to think of anything to say. You may have neglected to mention to them that they were the main characters of a cult TV show in your world…

“Um…” Castiel seemed incredibly bewildered by the man’s claim. “I don’t believe I’ve ever been televised. I can’t speak for my companions, but…”

“No, no, no, I totally know you guys!” the man insisted. “At least… I think. You’re from that one TV show, what’s it called? The one with monsters and butchered Christian mythology?”

_They most certainly did not butcher the mythology_, you defensively thought, but that was the least of your concerns. You waited on what felt like actual prickling pins and needles for him to say the name, but he didn’t.

“Ahh, I can’t remember,” he gave up. “I never watch much TV anyways. Never seen the show myself, but I have this teenage cousin who goes on and on about it. Has all the posters and merchandise in her room. She’s a big fan of you guys.”

So he wasn’t actually a Supernatural fan; just someone who knew a Supernatural fan. There might still be a way to salvage this.

“They’re not from TV!” you blurted a little too loudly. “Uh…they get that a lot, heh. Got that kind of macho, TV star look to them, don’t they? These are my dads,” you pointed between Dean and Castiel, “and this is my uncle,” you gestured to Sam.
“Oh…” The man didn’t look entirely convinced, but he shook his head. “I could’ve sworn…you look just like ‘em.”

“We…do get that a lot,” Dean added uncertainly, looking at you with equal parts curiosity and sternness. You couldn’t meet his gaze.

“In any case,” the rental man picked up the papers and stacked them loudly against the counter. “You’ve got all the right paperwork. Now all you need is the payment.”

“…Right, of course,” Castiel snapped to attention, still extremely confused by the preceding events. He reached into the inner pocket of his trench coat and pulled out wads of crumpled bills, which he deposited on the counter.

The rental guy was a little startled by the state of the cash, but he took it anyways. Each bill had to be straightened out for him to count it, but by the time he’d finished and created a neat stack on the countertop, he shook his head.

“This isn’t near enough for any of our rates,” he apologized, pointing to a board behind him with various prices.

“Thas fine,” Dean interjected, fumbling in his pocket for his wallet. “I got cash too.”

Dean extracted his share of your money from his wallet, slamming it all down on the counter. He nearly lost his balance attempting the maneuver, but Castiel caught him by the waist before he could topple over.

A laugh broke the rental man’s professional demeanor. “Had a little too much fun with the in-flight alcohol selections?” he teased. “Happens to the best of us, don’t worry. At least you have a guy like this to look after you.”

Apparently not embarrassed in the least about his near fall, Dean enthusiastically agreed, “Hells yeah, he looks after me! I dunno what I would do without ‘im, he’s awesome.” He schooled his face into a more authoritative one. “And taken. Dun forget that.”

“I haven’t,” the rental guy replied disarmingly. “He’s still not my type.”

“Good,” Dean relented, stepping back from the counter and nodding in approval.

This time when the man counted, your money stack had almost doubled. Still, it was only enough to meet the minimum down payment.

“Sorry guys, but this still isn’t enough if you wanna keep the car for any longer than one day,” the man apologized again.

Although you hated to do it with how badly your funds were dwindling, you pulled your own wallet out of your bag and slid all your remaining money out. “Here, this…this is all we have.”

Brightening somewhat, the man counted and added the money to the stack. His face fell when he reached the final bill. “You’re just five dollars short.”

You just could not catch a single break today, could you? If Sam still had his wallet, you’d have more than enough money to pay for this!

“I’m really, really sorry guys, but I can’t make an exception,” the rental guy truly sounded deeply apologetic. Then, something devious glinted in his eyes as he examined the three men before him
again. “Although… I suppose if you really were those guys from the TV show, and you let me take a picture with you for my cousin… I could make up the difference for you.”

Dang it. This guy was good. You didn’t have much of another choice but to go along with it.

“Fine,” you sighed out, praying that you wouldn’t regret this. “They’re… they’re the guys.”

“I knew it!” He clenched his fists and nearly jumped in excitement. “Oh, my cousin’s not gonna believe this…”

Yeah… yeah, she really won’t, you thought to yourself.

“I’m sorry guys, I uh…” The rental guy looked between them nervously. “Don’t actually know your names. Oh, except for you!” He perked up when his gaze fell on Castiel. “My cousin says your name all the time. Misha, right?”

Sam and Dean’s eyebrows had officially migrated into the depths of their hairlines. Of course they’d recognize that name from The French Mistake…

“Um…” Castiel glanced at you out of the corner of his eye, seeking guidance. You nodded your head as subtly as you could, and thankfully he got the message. “Yes, that would be me,” he confirmed to the man.

“Right, that is such a fun name. I don’t think I could forget it even if…” He trailed off, an undiscernible look befalling his face. “Say… wait, if you’re Misha, why does your ID say…” He picked up the license for reference again. “…Steve Rogers?”

Really, guys? You made Cas’s alias Captain America?

Right, more important matters at hand.

“Misha’s just a nickname!” you explained before Castiel could try to come up with his own improbable explanation. “That’s what everyone calls him, but his real name… is… Steve Rogers.”

“Huh… go figure.” The man dropped the ID back on the counter without another qualm, then turned his questioning gaze to you. “And uh, speaking of which… what’re you doing with these guys?”

Now that was a question you didn’t know how to answer. You’d already told him the lie about your “dads” and “uncle;” how were you supposed to back that up now?

“Didn’t you say Misha and… and…” the rental guy clicked his fingers as he struggled to remember the name of Dean’s actor.

Going out on a trembly limb, Dean recalled the name first. “J… Ackles?”

“Yes, Mr. Ackles!” The man grinned appreciatively before turning his attention back to you. “Didn’t you say they were your dads? I… thought they had wives?”

Well, Dean did say you needed to practice on-the-spot improvisation. What better time to flex your improvising muscles than now?

“That’s, uh…” You nearly worked yourself into a headache trying to come up with an answer, but you managed it. “The dad thing’s an inside joke! Yeah, it’s a-a ruse they pull out when they don’t wanna be recognized. All three of them act really, really… really… in-character.”

Thankfully, he bought it. “Huh… kinda weird, but hey, I’m no actor, so what do I know? Who are
you really then? ‘Cause if you’re on the show, I know my cousin would want you in the picture, too."

“I-I’m not on the show!” you hurriedly denied. “I, uh…I’m a…a fan. Yeah, I’m a fan who won a contest and got to take a trip with the actors!”

“That sounds awesome! How’s it been?”

“It has been…one heck of a wild ride up to this point, that’s for sure.”

“I bet. You, uh…don’t have to get in the picture if you don’t want to, since my cousin probably wouldn’t know who you are-”

“Y-yeah, that’s fine! I’m…camera shy, heh.”

He shrugged. “Fair enough. Now, how about that picture, guys?”

Sam, Dean, and Castiel looked akin to a moose, squirrel, and bird caught in the headlights respectively. They’d mostly been staying quiet and letting you take the lead of the conversation, and for that you didn’t blame them one bit. If you’d walked into somewhere in a different world and been identified as a famous actor, you wouldn’t know what to do or say either.

Sam was the first to gather himself. “Yeah, uh…sure, the picture.”

The rental man abandoned any of his attempts to appear professional as he eagerly fumbled through the pockets of his suit pants and procured his phone. Sam guided a hesitant Castiel and dubious Dean towards the counter, crowding together as the man held up his iPhone in a selfie position.

All three of them glanced at you, and all you could think of to do was gesture to the sides of your lips and mouth the word “smile!” at them. They complied, managing semi-natural grins as they stared into the phone’s camera. One click and a flash later, the man brought his phone back down to his face.

“Looks good!” he announced, admiring the fresh picture on his phone screen. “Thanks so much for this, guys. This is gonna mean the world to my cousin.”

“No…problem,” Sam said hesitantly. “We really do need to get a move on now, so…”

The man nodded in understanding. “Gotcha. Here, tell you what: go to our company’s section of the garage and pick out any car you want. Normally there are some price restrictions, but like I said, I’ll make up the difference.”

“That is incredibly generous of you,” Castiel acknowledged, though he was still uncomfortable.

“No worries! And…here, I feel bad about taking all your money, so…” He grabbed the topmost bill out of the stack on the counter and extended it to you. “Take this, kid. Get yourself a snack for the road.”

You weren’t about to turn down money when you had none, so you took it and flipped it over. It was…a five-dollar bill.

Well, being five dollars shy of broke still beat being broke outright.

“It was nice to meet all of you,” the man addressed your group, handing Castiel his ID and a slip of paperwork for him to keep. “And safe travels!”
“Thank you as well,” Castiel curtly but politely replied, taking the card and paper and turning to leave. You were in a bit of a hurry to follow him, and you really hoped that your haste didn’t show.

Your group made a beeline for the sliding doors that led into the parking garage. Once outside, you were hit with a blast of concentrated warm air from the Atlantan summer. It was certainly a change in climate compared to Alaska, but a welcome one.

You progressed through the rows upon rows of parked vehicles in silence for a while, which Sam eventually broke by turning to you and asking, “So…any chance you wanna explain what all that ‘TV show’ talk in there was?”

“Not particularly,” you mumbled tensely. “Get back to me on that when we’re not being chased by a murderous genie.”

Sam let it drop after that. You located the corresponding section of rental cars after walking past what felt like dozens of rows. Castiel presented his license and paperwork to a man in the rental company’s uniform nearby, and he in turn waved you towards a section of organized, color-coded cars. There was a lot to choose from: trucks, SUVs, sedans, all the usual suspects.

“What kind of car do we want?” Sam asked as you surveyed your options.

You thought for a moment, scanning over the rows of varied vehicles until one caught your eye. “How about a Prius?”

Three pairs of eyes turned back to stare blankly at you.

Shrinking under their gazes, you shrugged. “Gets good gas mileage. We’re gonna need that if we’re driving for a while.”

“You have a point,” Sam acknowledged, walking towards one of the Priuses in the nearest row.

“Wait wait wait,” Dean babbled. “We’re not…takin’ a Priestess, of all cars?”

“Yeah Dean, I think we are,” Sam said, ignoring his brother’s butchering of the word.

“I refuse to drive a Price!”

“You’re aren’t driving anything in your current state,” Sam sighed, opening one of the Prius’ back doors and loading his bag inside. “Until you’re lucid enough to pronounce Prius correctly, you’re a passenger.”

“Can I at least sit in the front?” Dean asked, donning his own attempt at puppy dog eyes.

“…Fine,” Sam conceded, slipping into the back seat. “But keep your hands off Cas, he’s our driver.”

“No prooomiiises,” Dean sang as he trotted up to the passenger side door.

Sam rolled his eyes as he closed his own door.

The guy in the rental company’s uniform swung by to give Castiel the key to the car once he’d confirmed you had chosen it. You took your spot in the backseat just in time to catch Dean glaring daggers out the car window as the guy double-checked Castiel’s paperwork.

“You really have some possessiveness issues,” Sam nonchalantly commented.

“Do not,” Dean childishy retorted. “M’just…paranoid, for some reason.”
“It’s an effect of my grace,” Castiel joined the conversation as he took his place in the driver’s seat, key in hand. “It must be amplifying what would otherwise be minor feelings of jealously and uncertainty from the newness of our relationship.”

Dean stared at Castiel as he settled into his seat. “I…didn’ know you were listenin’.”

“I have quite good hearing,” Castiel reminded him. “I am a celestial being.”

“Well it’s just- we haven’t had time to ourselves since I went and told ya how I feel, and-” Dean rambled as he tried to explain himself, but Castiel silenced him by raising a calm hand.

“I’m not sure that you’re in the right state of mind to fully explain yourself,” Castiel said gently. “Perhaps this would be a matter better addressed once most traces of my grace have left your body. But for now, I think you have enough of your wits to understand this: know that you should never fear anyone taking me from you, even if they try. Long ago, you already won my sole affections without even trying.”

Blushing and fiddling with his thumbs, Dean stared into his lap. He wore an unhidden smile as Castiel’s words got through to him. “Alright then. Good t’know.”

Once that matter had been settled, Castiel took a minute to examine the Prius’ controls. The car was on the move shortly, slowly turning through the tight space of the parking garage. Sam took the initiative to open Google Maps on his phone so that Castiel would have at least some idea of where he was going. The angel found the robotic voice of “the Google” to be quite novel and was happy to follow every direction it gave him.

With the parking garage behind you, Castiel drove out into the horrors of Atlanta traffic. Thankfully Castiel was an extremely patient driver, and even though Dean grunted in annoyance every time you had to stop behind a line of other cars, you made it onto the interstate quicker than you could have hoped for.

From there on out, it was just a whole lot of driving. Your vague plan was to head in the general direction of your hometown, and from there…you weren’t entirely sure. Maybe you could just keep heading south, then follow the coastline? You had the whole of the United States spread out before you, limited only by gas money and your rental car’s parameters.

Come to think of it, gas money was actually going to become a huge problem, seeing as you only had five freaking dollars on hand. You might actually have to steal a car at some point, ideally one with a full tank of gas that no one would miss.

To say you were exhausted by the day’s events was an understatement. You came close to falling asleep in the car several times in the hours of your journey, but you managed to stay alert enough to take in the repeating pattern of trees and farmland you passed through. You’d gotten so used to the excitement of flying in an airplane that a car ride was mundane in comparison.

The fact that Castiel had tuned the car’s radio to a classical music station wasn’t helping your drowsiness. When Sam questioned why Dean hadn’t even attempted to change the station to classic rock, he simply fired back the “driver picks the music shotgun shuts his cakehole” rule. Sam couldn’t possibly argue with that.

Dean was also kind enough to provide some entertainment. He commented on most everything that passed by his side of the car, resting his head against the window and mindlessly naming every other thing that came into his sight.
He leaned away from the window at that last one. “Hey, Cas, better watch yer speedometer!”

“I only go as fast as the posted speed limit,” Castiel coolly replied. “Perhaps you should try it sometime when you’re well enough to drive.”


“Dean, I swear to god if you name one more thing out that window~” Sam threatened.

“Yer a spoilsport too, Samantha,” Dean interrupted with a cheeky grin at the backseat. “I’m still kinda buzzed, lemme have my fun.”

Even so, Dean didn’t resume his commentary. The sun was starting to dip below the horizon, taking with it any decent view of your surroundings. You drove in silence as the world dimmed around you, the quiet classical music providing a moody backdrop.

Out of curiosity, you checked your phone to see what the time was: 7:30. You’d been driving for about two hours; amazing how time can fly when someone is narrating everything they see outside the window of a moving car.

“What does this light indicate?” Castiel abruptly broke the silence, squinting at a glowing yellow icon that had appeared on the car’s dashboard.

Dean was the first to catch on, lolling his head forward and staring at the yellow symbol with immense concentration. He let out a little gasp and laughed out, “Oooooooh no-ho-ho-ho-ho…”

That did not ease Castiel’s concern. “What? Is it a bad sign? Should I pull over?”

“Nah, it just…” Dean giggled momentarily. “It just means you’re low.”

“Low? As in low on gasoline? Or motor lubricant? What?”

“Low on tire pressure,” Sam piped up, sighing when he recognized the icon. “If we keep driving like this, we’re gonna get a flat. Let’s take the next exit.”

And thus yet another setback was tossed into your laps. Maybe the Winchester’s infamous bad luck was contagious?

Worse still, there wasn’t an exit for several miles. It was pitch black by the time a reflective green sign flared under the car’s headlights, pointing you towards an ominously empty stretch only labelled “Exit 4.”

Personally, you weren’t particularly fond of Exit 4. It was practically in the middle of nowhere and led onto an unlit country backroad. The car bumped along the cracked asphalt, dead fields and sparse greenery passing on either side of it. Aside from the light cast ahead by the car, everything was cloaked in encroaching shadows.

If you didn’t know any better, you’d have thought you were in the first five minutes of a Supernatural episode.

Thank god a dingy little gas station appeared on your right within only a few minutes of driving on that totally haunted road. It had maybe only two or three overhead lights, one of which was sporadically flickering. There didn’t appear to be any signs of life outside of that; no people, no cars, nothing.
You didn’t have high hopes that this place would even have an air pump, but miraculously it did. It looked outdated and was tucked away on the far side of the property, but it would do.

“I’ll do it,” Dean volunteered to fill up the tire before anyone else could.

“You…sure you’re up for that yet?” you checked.

“Don’t feel all that buzzed anymore. What, you wanna do a sobriety check?”

“He’s good,” Sam piped up. “That is definitely sober Dean backtalk, I’d know it anywhere.”

The air pump cost one dollar to use, so you exited the car alongside Dean and handed over your cash. You were surprised the machine had a built-in system for returning change, but it was a good thing it did. Four dollars shy of broke was still better than being totally broke.

“Tell ya what,” Dean said as he handed the leftover money to you. “How about you go in there and get some snacks for the road, kiddo?” He pointed towards the lit store attached to the gas station.

One look at the store made you realize how badly you did not want to go into it. The windows were so dusty that you could barely see inside, and what you could see of the interior screamed “health violation.” Maybe this was the kind of thing Dean got used to seeing during his life on the road, but you were uncomfortable being near it, let alone inside of it.

“See if they’ve got any Moonpies,” Dean requested, setting up the air pump. “We’re in the south, I’m sure they’ve got some.”

Trying to think of an excuse, you feebly held up your measly cash. “We’ve…only got four dollars.”

“That’s enough. Just only go for the cheap stuff.”

Dean was already hooking the pump up to the afflicted tire, so you just tucked the money in your pocket, gathered your courage, and faced the store. Your eyes hurt as you stepped towards the flickering light at the front of the building, and you had to squint them so hard that you almost didn’t see the other person outside the store’s front doors.

Your first instinct was to shout in surprise, but it only came out as a momentary gasp. It was a youngish man, around college age, sweeping the sidewalk winding around the building. He inclined his head when you saw him, pausing in his sweeping.

“You here to buy somethin’?” he gruffly asked. When you managed a nod, he sighed out, “I’ll be
inside in a while. Have to finish this first or my boss’ll chew me out tomorrow morning.”

Not sure what to say, you stiffly nodded your head again and made for the front door. It opened with an off-key chime, revealing a measly three shelves of snacks spread ridiculously wide to fill the floorspace and a wall of coolers stocked with drinks.

Swallowing down your unease, you set about browsing the shelves. Most of the chips and crackers were well past their expiration dates, but you didn’t expect any less. One of the shelves was packed with colorful candies and desserts; that was where you managed to locate a box of individual Moonpies.

They were just cheap enough for you to afford, so you grabbed a chocolate one, a vanilla one, a banana one, and a strawberry one. You were in a bit of a rush to get out of the store; the longer you remained inside, the more grimy little details you noticed. The floor was in desperate need of a good sweeping, the walls had more than a few odd stains, and the interior lighting was uncomfortably white.

Right as you’d gathered your Moonpie stash into the cradle of your arms, another shrill chime rang through the store. At least that employee hadn’t taken too long to finish up his sweeping job. The sooner you bought the snacks and got back on the road, the sooner you could keep moving and put more distance between you and-

Your genie.

The Moonpies slipped out of your arms and landed on the filthy tiled floor, the sound of their crinkling plastic echoing in the dead air. You stood frozen, mouth agape as you stared at the man who had just entered the store.

“You put up a good chase, kid,” your genie commented, wearing a self-satisfied grin. “But the game ends here.”

Lightheadedness made you sway on the spot. You had truly thought that you’d gotten away from him, but here he was out of absolutely nowhere, ugly pinstripe suit and all. He held himself with casual confidence as he took a few leisurely steps towards you, keeping the exit blocked. You backed away on instinct but every other part of you was frozen in shock.

“Disappearing back into your own world to disorient me was a smart tactic,” he continued on, taking his sweet time to approach you. “But you should’ve known that would hardly be a permanent solution. The instant I figured out what you were up to, I nullified your contract and trapped you here.” He sneered slightly. “Surely you knew it would only be a matter of time before I caught up?”

Your teeth were chattering, forming an ominous rumble in your skull. That was just enough to get your mouth working again. “How- how’d you-”

“Finding you was the tricky part. I’d operated under the assumption that you’d stuck to the continental United States. But going to Alaska?” He barked a laugh. “Never would’ve seen that coming if your friend hadn’t happened to tip me off.”

“Who-”

“Oh, you know,” he interrupted you. “The little emo girl? The one who wanted away from her foster family?”

“Chloe…” you uttered under your breath.
“I only happened to catch a whiff of your trail through her by complete accident. Normally I wouldn’t spare a second thought for someone who just asks for a wish, but when someone specifically asks for a genie like your friend did…that’s when I ask questions, and the answers I got led me right to you.”

You had to defend yourself. “I-I only told her about you! Not about my contract, or what power you granted me, I promise!”

“I know that,” the genie coolly replied. “Otherwise you’d have a third strike on your contract and I’d have known where you were immediately.”

Anxiety welled under your skin. If it kept building, you were going to collapse.

But no, you couldn’t let that happen. What about the Winchesters and Castiel? The thought of them still waiting by the car, oblivious to what was going on, empowered you. You were not going to let your genie get to them.

“You should really be thanking me,” you said, forcing your voice to stay low and steady. “I got you a business opportunity. Consider it free advertising.”

“That’s nowhere near enough to even out the debt you owe me,” he growled out, gritting his teeth. “You have caused me more trouble than any single client I’ve ever had in my business’s long history, and that is saying a lot. I have managed to keep my nose clean this whole time-”

“By tricking your clients?” you challenged, thinking of Team Free Will’s bravery to bolster you.
“‘And attacking, brainwashing, or even killing them when they don’t comply? That makes for one filthy nose, if you ask me.’

“It’s not filthy if no one finds out about it,” he threatened. “Just like no one’s going to find out about you, or your headstrong hunter friends once I’m done with you.” He harshly shook his head. “I don’t start out meaning to hurt people, you know; I meant it when I said I’m not some psychopath. I only do what I have to in order to keep my business alive.”

“Well you sure didn’t seem to hesitate to attack my friends when they resisted you.”

“They attacked me!” he countered vehemently. “I only wanted to alter their memories so they wouldn’t have to get caught up in this mess, but they refused to cooperate.”

“So your first response is to shoot to kill?” Feeling even bolder, you placed your shaking hands on your hips to assume a challenging pose. “If Cas hadn’t been in the way, you would’ve-”

“I know what I did. I did what was best for my business.”

“And you’d put that above human life?”

“I said it before, and I will say it again: you are only specks to me. Getting rid of you hardly creates a blip in existence. Erasing your memories instead of getting rid of you outright is a courtesy.”

That made you stop. Your confidence was beginning to falter. “S-Sam, Dean and Cas…they won’t let you do this. They kill monsters like you every single day.”

“Maybe so,” the genie acknowledged. “But I should doubt that they’ve faced a being like me unprepared and won. I can kill them easy and put an end to this nonsense. The angel may give me some trouble, but if that blow to his wing hurt him as badly as it seemed to, then I can do it again; worse this time. Their world might even be better off without them anyways.”
Your jaw fell open. “How could you say that? If you really know anything about the world of Supernatural, you know that those three boys are the ones who hold it together and keep it from falling to those demons you hate so much.”

“Have you considered that although they’re the ones who stop their world’s numerous apocalypses, they’re also usually the ones who start them in the first place? And besides, it isn’t as if there aren’t hundreds of alternate versions of them spread throughout the multiverse doing the same or near exact same thing. The consequences of their deaths would be contained solely within their own world; worlds don’t bleed into each other, at least not naturally.” He fixed you with a stare, his sunglasses glinting in the awful overhead lighting. “That’s why I should have never granted your wish. I knew it was risky from the start, but I never would’ve foreseen it getting this out of hand…”

Now shaking, your hands slipped off your waist. “I…” you croaked out. “I…won’t let you hurt them. They’re my family. Please…”

Your genie’s features softened somewhat. “You don’t have to get caught up in all this, you know. You’re not a fighter, not like they are. I really meant that you’re a good kid, and if I look at this from a human morality standpoint…you don’t deserve this.” He held out an open hand. “Let me erase your memories. It’ll be like none of this ever happened, and you won’t have to mourn them. You won’t even know that you knew them.”

You stared at his hand. Heat prickled at the corners of your eyes. “So what? Either way, I’d still only have a broken family to crawl back to.”

“Well, you don’t have a choice,” he asserted with more force, extending his hand further.

The damp heat in your eyes grew. This…this wasn’t fair. You’d been happy; you’d all been happy. God knows the Winchesters had their problems, as did Castiel, and as did you. But for a brief time, through the power of a spontaneous Alaskan cruise, you’d been able to forget about those problems and just be. For a brief time, you’d felt…okay.

Yes, you mean that kind of okay. The kind of okay that just was without any terms or conditions such as those on a genie’s contract. You deserved that much, if nothing else.

As you stared at the genie’s outstretched hand, your trembling fingers clenched to form fists at your side. After everything you’d been through, individually and together, you were going to fight for all of it; not with another stupid split-second decision, but rather with precision.

“You can’t erase my memories,” you stated. “And you can’t hurt my friends, not after everything we’ve been through. My wish has been serving its purpose better now than it ever had before, and it wasn’t just helping me; it was helping them too.”

Smirking, the genie smugly asked, “You really think that matters to me? I’m the one with all the cards here, I get to call the shots.”

You continued, refusing to be deterred. “I don’t care if you think we’re just ‘specks,’ we are people. We exist. For god’s sake, that’s all that should matter.”

“You have no bargaining chips!” he insisted. “I’m the one in control here!”

Ignoring him, you plowed on. “If you could look at things from a human standpoint before, then you can do it again when I make this point: Individuals. Freaking. Matter. Without us, you wouldn’t even have a business!”

“Now hold on-”
You had the gall worked up by then to interrupt him. “Let me tell you something about business that you should already know, seeing as you’re an expert. Businesses provide services to people, who in turn pay for those services to keep the business going. You offer wishes to people as a service, and in return they sign ludicrous contracts with you to keep you in good favor with whoever regulates the wish-fulfilling business.

“That’s all well and good, except that when you start using unsavory methods to make it seem like your contracts are going swimmingly when they actually aren’t, you become corrupt. And worse still, to correct that, you hurt people. Trying to make up for things gone awry is fine, but when doing so involves literally ruining or destroying someone’s life, that is when you’ve breached the unspoken contract between business and individual. And the sickening thing is…you’ve apparently managed to rise to huge amounts of wealth and power through this.

“I may have breached your contract, but you breached one too. So you’re going to sit there and hear me out while I fight for my case. Because with everything we’ve been through, I’ll be damned if I let everything get taken away by a corrupt man in a suit.”

Silence reigned for several tense moments. The overhead light hummed continuously, and you could actually feel sweat on your forehead.

Your genie stared at you with a poker face. “I was mistaken,” he finally said. “You are a fighter.”

“Not like my friends are,” you corrected. “I fight with words.”

Absently nodding his head in agreement, your genie reached up to slowly remove his glasses from his face, revealing terrifying blue eyes. “Well, you make some interesting points,” he said, flashing a fake smile and tucking his shades into his suit pocket. “I’ll let you stake your claim and fight for your case. But I highly doubt you will give me even one good reason why I should let you and your friends walk out of here alive.”

You took a deep breath. “You...you can’t even imagine the things we’ve accomplished since we started this trip. My problems were just...gone. Not even like I’d just forgotten them, but...like they’d never existed in the first place. I get the feeling that the same can be said for my friends. They weren’t troubled monster hunters, they were just...guys taking a family cruise.

“The growth that occurred...you can’t even imagine! My wish was doing its job at peak performance the whole time! I even forgot we were running from you for a while...and even though I breached contract, it’s turned out to be for the best, and I’m glad that I did.”

Eyes glowing slightly brighter, the genie took a menacing step forward. “You don’t know how much your actions threatened the sanctity-”

“Of the multiverse,” you finished. “I get it. I understand why you put that condition in the contract. There are people out there who would use the information about other worlds to do bad things. But if you know the Winchesters as well as you claim to, you also know that they are some of the only people who could be trusted with that information. I didn’t mean to tell them, but even when I did, there was no danger...other than the danger you posed.”

He shook his head. “This is ridiculous.”

“You are the only dangerous thing that has gotten involved since I told them. They have done nothing to threaten the sanctity of the multiverse as you keep saying, nor have I. We haven’t threatened anything: you, on the other hand, have threatened our lives. How is that fair?”
“I hope you know that you’re not building a very good case for yourself,” the genie muttered angrily, refusing to look at you.

“Well I’m not done yet!” you proclaimed, really getting into it. “You can’t imagine how much closer this has brought me to them. This has done nothing but fulfill my wish’s purpose, it’s not hurting anybody! If you really cared about my well-being and not just your business, you would see that. I’ve blossomed this past week! I…I have a new family. I feel more empowered and confident now than I may have ever been before!” You huffed a squeaky laugh. “I even managed to get Dean and Castiel together! Do you know how much work that took?”

All of a sudden, the genie’s head snapped up. His blue eyes bore right into yours, and it took every bit of will in you not to look away. Yet, when you looked into his eyes…there was something foreign glimmering in them. Was it…confusion? Surprise?

“Wait…” he whispered, squinting. “Did…did you say…you got Dean Winchester and Castiel the angel…together?”

You blinked. That was…an odd thing for him to fixate on. “Um…yes?”

“As in…together together?”

“After days and days of work, yes, I did.” You couldn’t repress the note of pride that dominated your voice then.

Eyes widening, the genie’s mouth slowly fell open. “…Do you know how long I have been trying to make that happen?”

All you could say was, “Huh?”

Bringing up a hand to rest on his forehead, the genie’s gaze fell away as he spaced out. You could picture the cogs turning in his head. “I have been working for years to make them a couple. And you just…swoop in, and do it in a matter of days?”

“You’ve been trying to get them together?” You had to restrain a laugh as a hilarious thought occurred to you. “Are you a shipper?”

Your genie put an offended hand to his chest. “God, no! I could less about the relationship status of two fictional people. It’s just…” His throat bobbed as he swallowed. “Do you have any inkling of an idea how many clients of mine have wished for those two to confess their love? The multiversal demographic of…‘Deesteel’ fans or whatever is huge, and they are stubborn little wishers, the lot of ‘em.”

Now completely sidetracked by the new topic, you gawked. “How many…?”

“I’ve lost count. I know that is hardly a sound business practice, but honestly I don’t bother to catalogue or formalize those wishes anymore. There are just…too many. I count them all as one.”

Even though you were raring to fixate on that as another faulty business practice, you were still too blindsided by how you’d managed to get on this topic. How was that it that you’d just been bargaining for your friends’ lives and were now discussing your OTP with the guy who wanted to kill them?

By then, the genie had gone off in his own little world, ranting and beginning to pace the cramped store. “I pride myself in being able to fulfill any person’s single wish, so long as it is within the guidelines. But those shippers…” He howled in anger. “I have never, not matter how hard I try, been
able to grant theirs!

“I have made more couples canon for my clients than you could imagine. Korra and Asami from that avatar show? I did that. Hermione and Ronald from that book of wizarding nonsense? All me. Batman and Joker in that bizarre toy brick movie? Riiiiight here. But as for that Winchester and his angel…”

You cleared your throat. “They’re, uh…tough cookies to crack, that’s for sure.”

“You don’t even know the half of it!” he spat at you. “I don’t know what it is about those emotionally-constipated birdbrains that makes them so impossible! I thought, you know, it’d be the angel who would give me trouble, but no, he was already head over wings for Mr. Daddy Issues Pie Eater, who was so deep in denial, might I add, that my magic had to work triple overtime just to get past his defenses, and even when it did, those stupid angel carvings in his ribs made him completely resistant to my powers! No matter how many iterations of them I visited, I couldn’t make it work!”

By then, he was red-faced, panting and ranting endlessly. He turned to you with a blazing ferocity. “How?!” he demanded. “How did you do it?!”

Gathering what you could of your wits after that shouting match, you replied, “It was pretty simple. It took a mix of intuition, patience, and trust. No magic required. Well, except for an angelic perception spell, but that wasn’t all my doing.”

Still drawing in heaving breaths, the genie tried to collect himself. “Well…despite our circumstances, I’m…actually inclined to thank you. That wish was the most troublesome I have ever been issued, a dark stain on my reputation. You’ve saved me an awful lot of work…I’m practically in your debt.”

The word “debt” echoed in your brain. “Wait…debt…earlier you said I was in your debt because of the trouble I’d caused you, but now…”

Huffing a disbelieving chuckle, he dared, “You’re not thinking of trying to use this to bargain, are you?”

“You said it yourself, this was your most troublesome wish. How many wishes did I just grant for you by getting my friends together?” You felt the urge to jump from excitement as your next point came to you. “How much business did I just get done for you?”

“You…” He glared, trying to think of something to refute that, but you knew you had him. “What are you playing at?”

“I’m thinking of making a deal,” you replied honestly. “A business deal.”

Crossing his arms, your genie looked at you with malice, but he didn’t make a move.

“You’re all about proper business procedures and following the guidelines,” you encouraged. “And with the amount of work I just saved you, I’d say that you are now in my debt.”

Though his face was turning beet red again, he didn’t make another move. “What…” He shut his eyes tight. “What are your terms?”

“Leave me and Team Free Will alone. Reinstate my contract as it was, but list Sam, Dean, and Castiel as the exceptions to the rule. In return, I promise that I won’t tell anyone else about my power. We can leave it at that, and…call it fair.”

You stared at each other for a while, just like a standoff scene from a western. For a moment, it
looked like he was about to relent and agree, but his features hardened.

“No,” he muttered darkly. “No, I won’t! I won’t believe you’ve done it unless I see it with my own eyes! There’s no way some floundering teenager pulled off what I’ve been trying to make happen for years!”

“Actually,” you said, glowing with confidence, “I’m an adult.”

Before he could use that as another excuse to shout at you, the door let out its distinctive chime. Peeking his head through the doorway was the gas station employee, his broom dangling from his hand.

“So, are y’all finished?” he ventured. “’Cause I gotta ring up her stuff and start mopping the floors in here-”

“Leave us be, you speck,” my genie demanded.

When the guy didn’t move, the genie raised a hand towards him. Before you could even think to do anything, a pulse of glowing energy blasted from the genie’s palm and crashed into the half-open door. Thousands of tiny glass shards sprayed outwards as it shattered under the blast.

The employee had moved just fast enough to hide behind the door, thank god. He cowered in the broken hole the magic had left behind, visibly shaking and staring at you in horror.

“J-Just take whatever you want!” he shouted, backing away. “Please don’t hurt me!”

He didn’t waste any more time, breaking into a sprint across the parking lot and not daring to look back. It was a totally fair reaction, if you said so yourself.

“This is insane,” the genie mumbled as he swung back around. “There is no way that you, of all people, could have pulled off getting those two repressed idiots together. You’re-you’re…” He was nearly trembling from the effort of getting it out. “Anxious!”

Had you not been building confidence this entire time, you might’ve automatically agreed with him. Instead, you countered, “I may be anxious, but my anxiety does not define me. Nor does it stop me from making my OTP canon.”

Something crunched on the broken glass outside, silencing both of you. Then a second thing crunched, then a third. You already knew who was approaching before they stuck their heads around the jagged edges of the annihilated door.

“…Hey, guys,” you nervously waved at Sam, Dean, and Castiel.

The second you addressed them, the genie heaved a tremendous sigh.

“Well, look what the cat dragged in,” Dean snarked, pushing open what little remained of the door and stepping inside. “If it ain’t the pinstripe douchebag yet again.”

“Pinstripe really isn’t that bad,” the genie murmured to himself, forcing himself to face the encroaching hunters.

Sam trailed closely after Dean, his guard raised to the max. Castiel stayed to the rear, but his wings were raised in a defensive stance as though he was ready to strike at any time.

“Sorry if we’re intruding,” Sam said, not sounding sorry at all. “We heard an explosion and figured it
might have something to do with you. We didn’t think you’d be able to keep up with us, but better safe than sorry, right?”

Wagging a loose finger in the air, the genie admitted, “It was a challenge keeping up with you four. I almost had you back in Fairbanks, but then you took off again. It only took a little investigating to figure out where you were heading, but as long as you were behind airport security, I wouldn’t be able to get in without a ruckus. So I did the next best thing.” He glanced back at you. “Left some cursed objects behind to slow you down.”

Realization dawned on you. “Wait…you mean the penny?”

“One of ‘em was a penny, yeah,” he recalled. “I stuffed as much inconveniencing bad luck into that coin as I possibly could to trip you up until I could catch up to you. Looks like it did its job; wasn’t even sure that plan would work, honestly…”

Jeez. You’d only been joking about the penny being cursed. Right then you made a mental note to never ignore your own intuition again.

“Looks like you’re weaponless, boys,” the genie pointed out, vaguely gesturing to Team Free Will. “Not that you’d have a weapon that could take me out anyways, but it’s the thought that counts.”

Castiel took a step forward, spreading his wings out in front of the Winchesters. An angel blade slid out of his trench coat’s sleeve, landing with practiced precision in the grasp of his hand.

“Attempt another attack,” Castiel threatened, “and I will not hesitate to flay you. I’m prepared for your tricks this time.”

Though the genie held his hands up, he wore an amused grin. “Right. That little pointy piece of metal is gonna hurt me. You may a celestial being, Castiel, but I am a multicelestial being.”

That didn’t deter Castiel in the slightest. “You all should go,” he solemnly told Sam, Dean and you.

“Cas, we’re not-” Sam started, but Castiel barely allowed the words out of his mouth.

“We know his intent. I can hold him off better than any of you. Should I survive, I will regroup with you later-”

“You don’t have to do that!” you interjected, heart twisting in actual pain at the question of Castiel’s survival. “My genie and I were just…making a deal.”

You could see Dean twitch from across the room. “You’re doing what?”

“Not that kind of deal!” you assured him. “I’ve got a great bargaining chip on my side, I’m going to get him to leave us alone.”

“You have yet to prove that your so-called ‘bargaining chip’ is of any worth,” the genie countered, peering at you over his shoulder. Rather than wait for your reply, he took matters into his own hands, narrowing his eyes at Dean and Castiel.

“You two!” he pointed an accusatory finger in their direction, making Dean flinch slightly while Castiel held his ground.

“You will bring no harm to any Winchester,” Castiel warned darkly, his wings spreading wider and angel blade raised.
“Calm down, feathers, I won’t unless I have to,” the genie huffed impatiently.

Not satisfied in the least by his response, Castiel’s wings didn’t waver even slightly.

“As I was saying,” the genie ground out in annoyance. He once again pointed right at Dean and Castiel. “You two. Are you a couple?”

Caught off guard by what they must have thought to be a non-sequitur, Dean and Castiel exchanged a befuddled look.

“Uh…as of recently, y-yeah,” Dean slowly answered. “What of it?”

The genie narrowed his eyes even further. “I’m still not buying it. Prove it!”

Dean sent you an uncertain look, and you jerkily nodded your head, hoping that he could get the idea and comply. Thankfully for everyone’s sake, he did catch on, smirking deviously as he formed a plan that apparently amused him greatly.

“Alright, if you insist,” Dean agreed to the genie’s demands without a fight. “[Y/N], cover your eyes; you’re too innocent to be a witness to this.”

Fearing what images would be burnt into your brain if you didn’t, you cast your gaze downward; though you’d be lying if you said you completely averted your eyes. What little you could see aside from the cheap, disgusting tiles below looked an awful lot like spontaneous, zealous kissing between the two in question. Dean basically crashed into Castiel, who went along with it after a few seconds. Somewhere in the middle of it there was a loud, metallic clang as Castiel’s angel blade clattered to the floor.

Sam hissed something in astonishment and averted his own eyes, holding a hand up to his face to create a wall between him and whatever was happening to his left. What little fuzzy snippets you could see from the edge of your vision combined with the sounds emanating from that side of the room to paint a pretty clear picture for you.

Oh wow. Yep. That sure was some obscene making out going on right there. Once the absurdity of that really set in, you had to stifle hysterical laughter behind your fist.

You could almost feel the fumes radiating off the genie. “Enough!” he bellowed. “I get it!”

The kissing stopped all at once, and knowing it was safe, you lifted your head back up. Poor Sam looked like he was in the middle of a traumatic flashback as he pointedly avoided looking at Dean and Castiel. The pair in question were wearing basically opposite expressions, Dean smirking overly-proudly and Castiel flushed vibrant red as he leaned down to retrieve his angel blade from the floor. The genie didn’t appear the least bit happy about any of this, nearly as red-faced as Castiel and gritting his teeth.

“Alright, so maybe they really are together,” the genie admitted through clenched teeth. “But that doesn’t mean you were the one to make it happen!”

“Actually,” Dean piped up, “she was my winggirl. Helped me through it every step of the way, and probably wouldn’t have happened without her.”

The genie turned on Dean then, raring to object, but he said nothing. By then he’d turned so red with rage that you could see scarlet peeking out along the back of his neck and head.

Unable to keep the smugness out of your voice, you asked, “So how about that deal?”
Slowly, the red stain seeped out of your genie’s skin and he untensed. “Dammit…” he muttered under his breath, turning back to you. “I’ll take your stupid deal.” He pointed a finger right in your face and warned, “But you had better follow your updated contract.”

Pulling away, he addressed the room at large with a scowl. “With this drain on my sanity at an end, I’m done. I’m going. And I pray that I never have to see any of you ever again.”

The instant the last syllable had left his mouth, your genie was gone. Empty air filled the space where he’d just been standing, and everyone in the room stared at it for a few moments before shaking themselves free of shock.

Sam was the first to find his voice. “What…the hell did you do?”

“Like I said, I made a deal,” you said, relief pouring over you in waves. You gestured at Dean and Castiel. “Did you guys know he was trying to get you together, too?”

Dean grimaced. “God, he’d have made an awful wingman.”

“Wasn’t ‘cause he wanted to,” you said, chuckling. “Turns out tons of people were wishing for it. I basically did his job for him without meaning to, and now my debt to him is cleared.”

“Huh,” Dean huffed, faintly smiling. “Who would’ve thought?”

“Everyone thought, Dean,” Sam cut in, still staring into space and refusing to look at his brother and angel friend. “I’ve been wishing for you guys to suck it up and get together for years. I just didn’t think that would be what ended up saving our asses in the end.”

“We’ve had weirder deus ex machina moments,” Dean pointed out, relaxing and popping one of his shoulders. “C’mon, let’s blow this joint.”

Tip-toeing through the minefield of glass, you followed the trio out the doorway. You spared a thought for the employee you’d scared off, but a cursory scan of the parking lot didn’t reveal anyone else present aside from your group. He must’ve really run for the hills, and after what he saw, you didn’t blame him one bit.

You caught up the other three where they’d congregated around the car. Dean stood beside the driver’s side door, and he clearly intended to take control of the car this time around.

“You good to drive?” you asked as you claimed your spot by the left passenger door. “You’re not buzzed at all?”

“Nah, I’m good, kiddo,” Dean offhandedly assured you.

“You sure? ‘Cause the way you, uh…decided to prove you and Cas were together back there seemed a little loopy to me.”

“Nope, that whole idea was cooked up by sober brain. I thought to give you a warning; I guarantee that would not have happened if I’d been drunk.”

Sam peered over the Pirus’ roof at you. “You couldn’t have given me a warning?” he demanded indignantly.

“Hey, you’re an adult,” Dean defended, opening the car door. “I thought you could handle it.”

Gaping, Sam gestured towards you. “She’s an adult too!”
“As of only a week ago,” Dean quipped as he slipped into his seat.

Repressing a snicker, you opened your own door and sat down behind Dean. “Whatever happened to not wanting to drive a Prius?” you asked him.

“It’s not ideal, but I’ve been itchin’ to drive,” he replied, smoothing his hands over the steering wheel. “Besides, I’m just a little too happy to care right now. We won. We just won.” A genuine laugh bubbled from his throat. “We friggin’ won,” he repeated, and that just about summed up the mood of dawning cheeriness that was descending.

“Where to now?” Sam asked when he claimed shotgun.

Castiel slipped into the backseat beside you. “Seeing as we are no longer fleeing from [Y/N]’s genie…anywhere we want.”

That was when it really hit you. It was over. This whole time you’d been on the run, even if it hadn’t always felt like it, and now it was suddenly…over. Through good luck and the power of Destiel, you’d just resolved this whole mess.

You started smiling then and for the life of you couldn’t stop.

“I could even teleport us somewhere,” Castiel offered.

“Nope, we are not just magicking to our next destination,” Dean refuted. “I have been dying to traverse the open road since we got in this thing, and I intend to take all of you on a celebratory road trip!”

“We’ve still got half a tank of gas,” Sam observed. “Which…for a Prius is like, 250 miles.”

An idea formed in your mind immediately. “I know just the place to go, then. I wanna show you guys my home.”

Pulling up Google Maps on your phone, you put in the address you were looking for. The app responded in its typical robotic voice, instructing you to return to the interstate.

“Thank god,” Dean sighed out. “If supernatural beings existed in your world, I guarantee you this road we’re on now would be swarming with ghosts.”

As the car hummed to life, the radio lit up, broadcasting a news station. Dean frowned at the device’s screen and scrolled through a few other channels until one finally offered something other than depressing reports on the state of the world. The first station that played actual music blasted a familiar, happy tune.

*It might seem crazy what I’m ‘bout to say*

*Sunshine she’s here, you can take a break*

Though his fingers momentarily remained on the dial, Dean eventually shrugged and set to backing the car out of its space. In the passenger seat, Sam sent his brother a disbelieving look.

“What?” Dean asked defensively as he straightened out the car and angled it towards the road.

“Happy?” Sam teased. “Didn’t think was your kind of music.”

“It’s a happy occasion!” Dean shot back. “It’s totally appropriate.”
You saw the perfect opportunity to chime in. “Don’t you know the rule, Sam?”

Sam sent you a questioning look.

You smirked. “Driver picks the music, shotgun shuts his cakehole?”

Dean looked back at you with a proud, big brother grin. Holding up his hands in defeat, Sam slumped in his seat and took to looking out the window at what little could be seen through the overbearing night.

As you pulled out of the gas station, leaving in your wake a broken door, a traumatized clerk, and smushed Moonpies, your utterly exhausted group stayed silent and let Pharrell William’s chipper voice fill the interior of the car.

Because I’m happy

Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof

Because I’m happy

Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth

It just didn’t feel right to be sitting still. Perhaps the energetic tunes were to blame, or maybe it was unease at the pitch void outside your car, but you were itching to move. The silence was so ill-fitting with the challenge you’d just overcome fresh in all your minds.

Though hesitant, you quietly hit your hand against your knee several times in succession, slowly picking up the volume as you grew more confident. Beside you, Castiel watched with curiosity. You smiled at him and starting slapping your other hand against its corresponding knee, hoping he would catch on. He did, uncertainly clapping his palms against his own knees and staring at them in concentration.

By then, the Winchesters had taken notice of the noise in the backseat. Sam huffed a chuckle and jokingly rolled his eyes, eventually caving in and clapping one hand on his knee.

That only left Dean. Though he couldn’t very well clap like the rest of you since he was driving, you saw the corner of a smile on his face. Judging by how he was lightly bobbing his head to the beat and drumming his hand on the steering wheel, he was certainly clapping in spirit.

The four of you kept that up for the rest of the song. Without exchanging a word, you had mutually agreed that yes, you were indeed happy again. The experience was so cheesy that you could practically taste the sharp cheddar in the air, but you were too thrilled to care.

The drive was mostly a straight shot down the interstate towards your hometown. It took another couple of hours to get there, and even without drunk Dean’s commentary to make time fly, it hardly felt like it lasted thirty minutes.

Your phone’s synthetic voice guided you off the interstate and onto a backroad surrounded by forest. Even in the darkness you recognized it, and you instructed Dean to park off to the side as soon as you knew for certain where you were. Grabbing your measly luggage, you locked the car behind you and began a trek towards an old dirt path you’d taken many times in your youth.

Hey, you were an adult now, you could rightfully use the phrase “in your youth.”

Your congregation walked with you leading the way for just a few short minutes before the sound of
water fell on your ears. You picked up your pace considerably then, gravitating towards the source. It revealed itself as your favorite cove on the river, lit by moonlight and alive with the sounds of crickets and frogs.

Sitting atop the water’s surface near the cove’s center was your sailboat, untouched from when you’d left it over a week ago. The craft gently bobbed in the cove’s minimal wake, languidly drifting in a circle around the anchor rope extending from its bow.

“So you weren’t lying about living on water,” Sam commented as he walked up behind you.

“Youp,” you confirmed, still mesmerized by the sight of your boat in its natural element. “That’s the exact same boat I lived on, too.”

Sam smiled as he stared out over the water. “It’s a beaut.”

“Not to ruin the mood or anything,” Dean hesitantly cut in. “But how are we gonna get to it? ‘Cause if you say we’re swimming, I might just sleep on the shore tonight.”

“Actually…” You turned to Castiel, who had trailed behind you to admire the foliage and tiny insects of the surrounding forest. “Cas, I was wondering if you could teleport us across the water?”

Smiling now that his teleportation finally had a use, Castiel just nodded and joined you. He extended one arm to wrap around both of the Winchesters and lowered his other so his hand could touch your shoulder.

Teleporting felt kind of like the big drop in a rollercoaster. You were momentarily suspended and on the verge of falling through solid ground, but the very next instant you had new solid ground beneath your feet. You quickly adjusted to your new surroundings, smiling widely on instinct as you felt the sway of the water and took in the sights of your sailboat.

For all the times you’d visited the bunker, you’d never gotten to show the Winchesters your own home. A sense of excitement gripped you as you lowered yourself into the cockpit from the back of the boat where Castiel had teleported you to, and you felt the sudden urge to give them a grand tour.

Except there really wasn’t much to tour in the first place. Your boat was only slightly above average in terms of standard size, but it had seemed so much larger when you were younger and spent nearly every day on it. As you sprouted up, your surroundings grew smaller and smaller. Within this boat, there was just enough space to live comfortably with only a little wiggle room leftover.

But it was home, and that was what mattered.

You guided your friends down the hatch into the inside of the boat. Bursting with enthusiasm, you showed them the largest main room in the sailing vessel’s center: the cabin. It had two scratchy old settees (that’s boater for “sofas”) on either wall with foldout tables between them. At the bow was your bedroom, a cramped compartment with only enough room for an elevated mattress and single closet.

Two hallways led into the back of the boat; the one on the left was the galley (aka kitchen) and the one on the right was the head (aka the little sailor’s room). Each of them was a pathway to the larger bedroom at the aft, which consisted of a bed, small settee, and actual godforsaken leg room. That was the room you always went into when you wanted to stretch your legs out.

By the time you’d reached the aft bedroom, everyone’s tiredness was extremely apparent, especially Sam’s. “I can tell you’re really excited about this, [Y/N], but…” Sam yawned. “I’m getting really sleepy, so…”
“Right, sorry!” You switched into the role of looking after your friends as guests. “Uh, sleeping arrangements, let’s see…”

“I believe this bedroom would be best suited for me and Dean,” Castiel supplied.

“I figured…tell ya what, Sam: you can take my bedroom. It’s a little small, but trust me, you do not wanna sleep on the cabin’s settees. I know from lots of past experience, they are not comfortable.”

“It’s fine, you can have your own bedroom-” Sam volunteered, but you weren’t having any of that nonsense.

“No, no, you’re my guests, so you guys get the best beds. I’ve slept on those settees enough times that one more night on ‘em won’t kill me.”

He let it drop after that, too thankful for the opportunity to get a good night’s rest to argue. He set off towards the tiny head, bumping his head on the doorway in the process.

“Oh, I should have warned you about that, Sam!” you chirped. “Tall people always have to watch their heads below deck! Be careful!”

Rubbing at the top of his head, Sam just drowsily nodded in acknowledgement and unpacked his toothbrush from his pack.

You pulled out some old emergency sheets and blankets from your closet and laid them out over the settee beside the galley. The fabric really was nearly unbearable on its own, so any layers you could put between you and the itchy surface were welcome.

Sam was the first into bed. You watched him stumble into your bedroom and promptly collapse face first onto your mattress. The resounding boom was loud enough that you suspected it had created ripples on the water’s surface. Dean took his turn to get ready for bed second, and you let your creeping exhaustion take over and pull you right down into your makeshift bed.

Shuffling off your shoes and pulling out your phone from your bag, you saw that it was just a few minutes to midnight. What a hecking day.

You happened to catch Dean just as he was walking past you. You swatted at his arm to get his attention, and he paused to see what you wanted.

“Hey Dean,” you greeted in a playful tone. “You make sure you go in there and cuddle the heck outta that angel, y’hear?”

Though he blushed and sighed impatiently, he nodded. “That’s kinda the routine now, yeah…”

“Just please: don’t make me throw my shoes at your door, mkay?”

“…Yeah, don’t worry about that. We’ll be on best behavior.”

He continued on towards his bedroom without a word, ducking through the doorway and closing it behind him with a click.

Laying back in your own bed, you settled into the blankets. Even if your bed wasn’t the most comfortable in the world, you knew you’d rest easy with the water rocking you and the knowledge that you’d finally escaped the genie carrying you off to sleep.
Good *CHUCK* this chapter was long! *collapses* But hey, it sure got in a lot of plot
and fluff, huh? Anyways, WOOOO the main conflict is resolved and now all that's left
is to wrap up this sucka! There is going to be...a *lot* more Destiel in the last two updates,
so prepare yourself.

That whole thing about the penny and resulting bad luck with delays? Literally
happened to me when I was flying back from Alaska. It was beyond a pain to deal with,
but hey, it gave me direct inspiration for how this story should go. The moral of this
chapter is, don't pick up face-down pennies in airports, kids! You might ruin your travel
plans or worse!

Image source for plane over Alaska:
http://scapeside.com/resources/assets/img/articlesimg/s-p8PHnE-scapeside-window-seat-
view-landscape-Seoul-Anchorage-image.jpeg

Image source for creepy gas station:
https://imgix.ranker.com/user_node_img/50062/1001230090/original/it-all-started-with-
a-power-outage-for-this-witness-photo-u2?
w=650&q=50&fm=jpg&fit=crop&crop=faces
Here’s the thing: you had all the perfect ingredients for an awesome night’s sleep. Yet even though it was past midnight by that point and every fiber of your body was ready to drift off, you didn’t sleep.

It wasn’t because you were uncomfortable; on the contrary, you slept better on your sailboat than anywhere else in the world, even if it was on the settees. Rather, you ended up staying awake well into the night primarily because of your travelling companions in the next room over.

Turned out that boats having thin walls was a universal thing. Who’d’ve thunk it?

You could hear Dean’s voice easily even over the swarming frogs and insects outside. “So…” he started somewhat awkwardly.

“So?” Castiel, who had apparently been waiting in the room, repeated.

“We’re finally alone. Thought that’d never happen at this rate.” Dean huffed the tiniest of chuckles.

“That’s true, we haven’t had time purely to ourselves since…our, uh, confessions.” Castiel regained some poise. “Why do you bring it up?”

“Means we get to be alone. Together.”

“Yes…and what do you propose we do while we’re ‘alone together?’”

“I dunno.” You could nearly hear the shrug in his voice, which surprised you a little. He was being more laidback about this than you’d expected. But what he said next was more startling by far.

“Wanna make out?” Dean suggested in an utterly casual tone.

You nearly choked on air.

“Make…out?” Castiel probed. “Remind me what that term means.”

You could picture Dean’s signature smirk curving its way onto his face like a serpent. “It involves a lotta kissing and petting and bein’ close; basically what we did at the gas station, but for longer. I’d be happy to provide a more thorough demonstration.”

“That…sounds quite nice,” Castiel airily decided. “Let’s do that.”

“Awesome. I’ve been wanting to be close to you this whole time, but uh…inconvenient circumstances, what can you do?” Dean softly plopped down on the settee cushion. “We’ll take it at your own pace, so…you don’t have to worry about this turning into anything else, or…yeah.”

“Into…what else?”

Castiel seemed genuinely confused by the insinuation. Bless the innocent angel. But it was a relief to have confirmation that Dean was heeding your warnings and keeping the night’s activities safely
within the confines of a PG rating. You really did not want to go throwing any shoes at them tonight.

“Just…ah, here,” Dean muttered, shifting around on the cushion. “I’ll show you how it’s done.”

Castiel decided to be a bit cheeky as he migrated across the room. “I feel it relevant to remind you that the pizzaman already taught me a fair amount about this.”

Brimming with nervous chuckles, Dean replied, “Maybe, but that was just acting. Acting in those kindsa films isn’t usually the best anyways…” He cleared his throat. “No, I’m gonna teach you the real way, right from the expert.”

The settee creaked as Castiel sat on it. “In that case…teach away.”

You expected to hear some smack of lips or the like, but all that wafted from that closed room was Dean and Castiel’s intermingled breathing. They must be holding back, you realized; Castiel waiting patiently for Dean, and Dean hesitating because this was still all so new. This was just the two of them, alone together, without any other circumstances or bystanders impacting their shared moment. This was the two of them kissing because…well, because they could. This was a front-and-center reminder to Dean that yes, he and Castiel were really together and yes, now he was allowed to kiss him senseless like he surely wanted to.

That train of thought dissipated when a subtle smack did echo into the cabin, followed by more gentle, shy smooching sounds that slowly gained confidence. You were just about start settling back into bed to give them privacy when Dean’s hushed voice muttered something.

“Just watch your teeth, man,” he mumbled, and was quickly drowned out thereafter by more mouth noises.

Yup, that was definitely your cue to leave them alone. You hurriedly tucked yourself further under the blankets, blocking out all sounds but those of the encompassing cove.

You nearly drifted off after that, but as the minutes wore on, something kept clinging to your consciousness to keep you awake. Specifically, a very dry, scratchy sensation was clawing at the inside of your throat. Now that you were back in the south, your allergies were raring to wreak havoc on your sinus cavities and throat.

You withstood the scratchy ache for as long as you could, but inevitably, your parched throat dried out into what felt like a husk. Slipping off the settee, your feet automatically carried you on their learnt path into the cramped galley. Just as you were reaching towards an overhead compartment to grab a cup, your drowsy ears picked up the undeniable sound of squishy lip-smacking through the door right beside you.

How could they still be going at it? How freakin’ stifled were they after all those years of built-up tension?

Shaking your head, you took a plastic cup from the compartment and swiveled on the spot to face the sink. With the cup positioned under the sink head, you turned the handle without even thinking. The boat’s plumbing hummed to life with a throaty vibration that shook the entire vessel, a stream of pressurized water splashing into the cup’s basin.

You froze in place and hurriedly turned off the faucet. You hadn’t bothered to remember how loud the simplest of functions could be on this boat; even on low pressure, these pipes made a racket. In your defense, you weren’t used to having visitors over.

Holding your breath and hovering nervously over the sink, you waited and listened. Sam’s even,
sleepy breaths were still emanating from the front bedroom, so he must have slept through it like the massive slumbering moose that he was. Other than that, you couldn’t hear a single thing outside of the cove’s waters lapping at the hull and the distant murmur of shoreline frogs.

Which definitely meant that something was wrong. The two otters had fallen utterly silent in the adjacent room.

Finally, Dean whispered, “Didja hear that?”

“I did,” Castiel quietly confirmed. “I believe it was the boat performing one of its routine functions.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.” You didn’t miss how relieved Dean sounded. “I’m just a little jumpy after that whole genie chase thing. He snuck up on us when we least expected it…”

“We’re perfectly safe here and that genie is far gone,” Castiel gently reassured. “Now, where were we?”

“I believe I was in the middle of showing you the way of the French,” Dean rumbled.

You could hear the settee cushion shifting on one side. “I was under the impression that people in France are more known for kissing each other on their cheeks. This has been far more intimate than-”

“I meant what Americans think the way of the French is,” Dean corrected. “Doesn’t matter anyways. C’mere, your lesson’s not done yet.”

“Gladly.”

Aaaaaand yep, there was the lip-smacking again; except now, it was interspersed with hushed or muffled giggles from both parties.

Rolling your eyes, you downed what minimal water you’d managed to get in your cup. Thankfully it was just enough to ease the sting of your sore throat, so you quietly set the cup in the bottom of the sink and tip-toed back to bed.

You’d only gotten partway under the covers when you heard more unexpected dialogue. It was only a brief interlude in the incessant kissing sound effects, broken by Dean.

“Hey, hey, Cas,” Dean breathed out. “Make your wings corporeal, I have an idea.”

The only indication you had that Castiel complied was the familiar celestial whoosh of his wings turning physical. This was immediately followed by the feathery noises of someone grabbing ahold of those wings, followed by a rather happy sound from the angel they belonged to.

“Told ya there’d be petting,” Dean quipped. “You’d better believe wing petting is included in that, too.”

Oddly enough, Castiel didn’t seem to have much of a response to that. All that could be heard from him was a sort of underlying, throaty rumble, similar to the contended hums he’d vocalized in the past but much, much deeper.

Apparently, Dean was also concerned by the lack of vocal response. “Cas? You good?”

The angel’s answer came in the form of a louder, self-satisfied rumble. You could hear the sounds of hasty shifting in what seemed to be a sudden maneuver, followed by the thump of what you assumed to be someone falling back on the settee.
“Whoa!” Dean cried out, startled but still keeping his voice low. “Cas, what’re-mmph!”

Dean’s voice cut in lieu of— you guessed it—more lip-smacking. Not that he seemed to mind being interrupted, as he could be heard happily sighing and laughing into the ensuing kisses he exchanged with Castiel.

Your face scrunched up a bit and you turned away again, fully expecting this to go on for minutes or perhaps hours into the night. But, to your honest surprise, there was another break in the smoochfest courtesy of Dean.

“Takin’ control, huh angel?” Dean managed in between a few short, successive kisses. “You’re learning fast.”

_Yup, definitely tuning out now_, you thought to yourself as you laid down and buried your head under your pillow.

Try as you might to tune out, the sounds from the adjacent room were always poking at the very edge of your consciousness. You wouldn’t have minded too much; after all, you’d stayed up to eavesdrop on them every night up to this point, but this time you really did wanna sleep and leave them to it.

You’re not sure how long it took, but eventually the making out did gradually reach its end. After one final, drawn-out smooch, the talking started up again and you tuned yourself back in.

“Ya know, I’d keep kissing you forever if I could,” Dean mumbled, barely audible.

“That would be impractical,” Castiel replied. “But I understand and return the sentiment.”

Comfortable silence took over for a few moments as they just…took in each other’s presence, you guess.

“You, uh…” Dean started. “You gonna let me up?

“Of course,” Castiel snapped to attention, and you heard someone moving across the settee. “I apologize, I’m not sure what came over me when I-”

“No, it’s fine!” Dean hurriedly assured as he sat up. “Cas, you are…” he warbled with breathless laughter, “really intense when you take charge.”

“Is that a bad thing?” Castiel sounded genuinely concerned, worry worming into his voice.

“Far from it. That was the best make out session I’ve had in…ever, actually. You really are one hell of a fast learner.”

“More than likely, that’s only because you’re an excellent teacher.”

“Ah, you got me there. I am the ‘certified expert on romantic endeavors,’ after all. Guess you’re pretty lucky you have me to teach you.”

“I…’have’ you?”

Brief reminiscent silence descended as Castiel echoed his words from your final night aboard the Noordam. Though his inquiry was the same as it had been before, Dean’s response to it was a far cry from his original one.

“Yeah, you do have me. And you’re welcome to keep me as long as you like.”
“Considering that I am essentially an immortal being, that is quite a commitment to make.”

“Count me in for the long haul, then. ‘Cause now that you’ve got me and I’ve got you, I’m not planning on letting go.

“Good.” There was another brief smack of lips pressing to lips. “Neither am I.”

“I mean, hell, I already called you my…my…”

“‘Boyfriend?’”

“Yeah, that, so it’s all official! Still gotta get used to that word…”

“I will have to adjust to it as well, actually,” Castiel agreed. “It’s such an odd term; it’s just a combination of the words meaning ‘male’ and ‘companion.’ And although we are friends, we are now also much more than that.”

“You know what, you’re right!” Dean’s voice rose in volume as he got into the discussion. “It is weird. That’s the English language for you, though…maybe I should just call you my ‘male companion’ as an act of rebellion.”

“Technically, Dean, I’m not really male,” Castiel corrected. “My vessel is, and I have come to comfortably identify as such, but angels are not gendered.”

Dean hummed as he absorbed this new information. “Then uh…what are you actually?”

Castiel had to think about that for a bit. “Um…I don’t really know. Angels just…are. But I do know that I’m happy to be identified as a male, so that may the simplest answer.”

“…Fine then, we’ll just…keep using the word boyfriend.”

“This entire conversation was pointless.”

“Might wanna get used to that,” Dean said with a laugh. “People that get together tend to have a lotta these talks.”

“Perhaps we should discuss something of more relevance? Such as the fact that you just proved to me that you truly are an expert kisser?”

Quietly snorting, Dean dismissed, “Oh, please-”

“I mean it. I have limited experience with this sort of thing, but never before has something made me feel so…loved.”

“C’mon, stop it, you’re makin’ me blush over here.”

Humming with warm laughter, Castiel kept going. “I find it incredibly endearing when your face flushes.”

“You’re making it worse!”

“But it’s making you smile.”

“‘Cause you’re a sap!” Dean insisted, but he certainly sounded like he was smiling. “Listen, if we’re together, I’m gonna give you all the TLC I can, that’s just my job.” Steering the conversation elsewhere, Dean teasingly asked, “And speaking of which, how about those wings of yours? Think
they could use some more TLC?"

"Some…what?"

"TLC. Tender loving care."

"Oh…” Castiel’s mood had shifted to one of eagerness in an instant. “In that case, yes, I believe they could use some ‘TLC.’”

The sound of ruffling feathers filled the air as Castiel lifted his wings up. Soft footsteps crossed the room followed by somebody climbing up onto the bed and settling near the edge where it met the settee. It seemed that Dean was trying to get into a better position to reach his angel’s wings…

This must’ve paid off, because right after that you could hear his fingers running over the wings. The sound of smoothed feathers was almost like a lullaby, another instrument in the natural song of the river’s waters and nature’s cries.

“Good?” Dean checked, sickeningly sweet affection uplifting his tired voice as he worked.

“Mmm-hmm,” Castiel just lazily hummed in reply.

And so, Dean’s hands continued to run through the oily black feathers, the boat continued to spin on the axis of its anchor line, and for the first time in over a week everything felt at peace.

This continued for about a minute, Dean never once letting up on his petting.

“Whoa, are you purring?” Dean hissed out in surprise, fragmenting the peace somewhat.

“Not purring;” Castiel slurried out in a gravelly voice. “Just…humming. In my long existence, I can’t recall ever once being as relaxed and at peace as I am in this moment.”

“Well,” Dean chuckled, “sounds a hell of a lot like purring to me.”

“I suppose you could call it purring. That would not be entirely inaccurate, seeing as purring indicates contentment.” He hummed/purred particularly loudly then, enough that you heard it clear as day. “And at the moment I am exceedingly content.”

“M’glad.”

Dean yawned, which in turn made you yawn. You really should have been asleep, but dang it, you were an adult without a prescribed bedtime. If you wanted to stay up past midnight listening to two otters doing cute things, then you would.

“And why wouldn’t I be content?” Castiel sleepily mused. “We’re finally here; together, that is. I was beginning to fear we would never reach the day where either of us wrangled our feelings…but I am very, very thankful that we finally did.”

“Better late than never, right?” Dean hummed a laugh. “Ya know, you should really be thanking Little Miss Intuitive out there.”

You tensed up at the mention of your nickname.

“She’s the one who helped me finally…uh, ‘wrangle’ my feelings,” Dean continued.

Castiel hummed thoughtfully. “You did mention that she guided you back at the gas station. How exactly did she help you wrangle your feelings?”
“Forced me to confront ‘em, which in hindsight was really what I needed. Spent a few days pep-talking me, gave me some ideas about how to get, uh, closer to you, that sort of thing.”

“It took you a few days to work up the nerve to admit your true feelings towards me?”

“What can I say? I just really like you. Doesn’t help that you’re a handsome son of a gun, only makes it tougher to approach you.”

“You’ve approached attractive women on little more than a whim more times than I care to count.”

Silence followed Castiel’s statement, hanging in the air like an anvil poised to drop on either or both of them. Even the sounds of feathery petting had ceased.

Clearing his throat, Dean calmly replied, “Well…you’re different, you know? You…you mean way more to me than any of them ever could, you understand? Don’t ever doubt that. They’re not even on the same playing field as you- no, scratch that, not even in the same stadium.”

“I don’t doubt it.” You could picture one of those affectionate smiles on Castiel’s face, the kind he only reserved for Dean. “I know how you act towards your ‘flings’ as you call them, and you have treated me as anything but. I’ve known for certain since you told me you needed me in that hotel room that this is far more than that.” He paused, then stated matter-of-factly, “And I hope you know that I intend to smite anyone who attempts to make you their next ‘fling.’”

A flustered laugh escaped Dean. “Yeah, well, don’t worry…I’m all yours now.”

“Mine and mine alone.” There was the sound of another short but sweet kiss. “And I’m yours and yours alone, I swear it.”

“…Jeez, you really are turning me into a sap.”

Another, more amicable silence ensued. The soft ruffling of feathers interrupted this one.

“Oh! Oh right, wings, sorry…got kinda distracted…” Dean could be heard resuming his wing petting duties.

“It’s quite alright,” Castiel breathed out, airy and relaxed. “I understand much better now why my wings distracted you as badly as they did when you could first see them.”

Dean laughed to himself for a few moments. “God, you have no idea…first time I saw those things, I knew I was hopelessly whipped.”

“…How…how was it that seeing my wings caused someone or something to whip you?”

“It’s just a phrase. Means you basically had me wrapped around your finger by that point, even if you didn’t know it. And god, when I saw them in sunlight…” You could literally hear him swallow as the memory returned to him. “I was even more of a lost cause, and I didn’t think that was possible.”

Castiel hummed to himself. “I have to wonder what you make of my true form, then.”

You already knew Dean would be caught off-guard by that. “W-well, uh, you don’t have to show me that, I mean that’s a pretty big deal, isn’t it? I thought it’d be kinda private.”

“[Y/N] has seen me in my true form.”

“Okay well she’s [Y/N], that’s not the same.”
“I trust you more than enough to show you my true form. You should be capable of safely perceiving it thanks to that spell, and it has the potential to greatly strengthen our bond. You have only seen me as I appear within my vessel; seeing my true form would allow you to see who I really am. That would be the next logical step in our relationship, wouldn’t it?”

Dean didn’t answer. His silence radiated nervous vibes, and once again his hands stilled between Castiel’s feathers.

“W-we can talk about it later,” Dean finally managed. “Or not, whatever, it’s fine.”

You had half a mind to bust down their door and shout “Use your words, Dean!” right in his face, but you knew that would do more harm than good so you stayed put.

“Communication is key to a successful relationship, Dean,” Castiel patiently pointed out. “I see no reason to delay this discussion, aside from your apparent nervousness.”

Another quiet descended, this one noticeably less nervous. It was broken by Dean sighing out in a much calmer voice, “…Yeah, you’re right. I’m just bein’ stupid and constipated still.”

“You are most certainly not stupid,” Castiel refuted. “And…if you’re constipated, I could use my powers to rid you of that if you want-”

“No, not literally!” Dean hurried to interrupt before that awkward conversation could unfold. “I mean, ah…my feelings are constipated. Talking about all this mushy-gushy stuff doesn’t really come naturally to me.”

“I suppose that is a hurdle we will simply have to overcome, then. You could start with explaining why any mention of my true form makes you nervous.”

Temporarily at a loss, Dean gathered his thoughts and took a deep breath. “I, uh…it’s just…I’ve always know you as this dorky little guy in a trench coat. Sometimes I forget that you’re really this millennia-old creature made of like…wavelengths, and grace, and who knows how much other stuff I can’t comprehend. Your true form is just that, the real you, and…ah, I dunno. It just feels like this huge thing to me when it probably isn’t, like it’ll change my whole perception of you, and there’s already been so much breakneck change between us recently…”

Castiel had turned quiet. “Do you fear that my true form will be inadequate to your standards or taint you view of me, then?”

“No!” Dean shouted on impulse, catching himself and lowering his volume afterwards. “No, god, of course not, Cas! It’s the exact opposite! I’m sure you look amazing, even if you’re normally imperceptible or whatever…” He paused to think. “Your…your wings, they’re part of your true form, right?”

“An earthly projection of it, yes.”

“Yeah, right. And…they’re friggin’ amazing, and like I said, I was whipped when I saw what they were really like. That was just one part of your true form, and if I suddenly saw the whole thing at once…”

Breezy realization lifted Castiel’s voice. “…You’re afraid you’d be even more ‘whipped.’”

Dean mumbled something in confirmation, and you imagined him sheepishly nodding his head.

Pondering this for a moment, Castiel calmly stated, “Love is…a terrifying emotion, that’s for certain.
I understand why humans say they ‘fall’ for one another. It feels much like tipping over the edge of a precipice.”

Hey, that’s my analogy! you thought, but you were curious to see where he went with it, so you kept listening.

“You don’t know if the other person is going to fall with you,” Castiel continued. “It’s entirely a leap of faith. If they don’t go over the edge with you, you’ll keep falling and falling alone until you hit the bottom…and I’d imagine that then you’d have to climb all the way back to the top on your own and risk falling again in an awful cycle.”

“Didn’t realize you had a talent for imagery, Cas,” Dean joked.

The angel hummed a single laugh, then refocused. “But in the event that when you fall, the other person falls with you…then you’re both falling together, and you keep falling side-by-side and end up bonded as close as two people can be, navigating the sensations of plummeting together.”

“Yeah, I’d think plummeting into a canyon with someone will do that. People bond over near-death experiences, right?”

“…You could add that to this analogy, yes. But my point is…the two of us are still falling; I should doubt that we will ever stop falling, in fact. So you needn’t be afraid of falling a little bit deeper, Dean, because I’ll be falling right beside you.”

Dean’s awed silence said it all. “…Jesus, that was…probably one of the sappiest things anyone’s ever said to me.”

“I trust it got my point across, though?”

“Yeah, yeah…I get what you mean. When you put it that way…I guess I don’t have anything to be afraid of. So you can go ahead and show me your true form sometime.” His voice turned urgent as he clarified, “But not right here! I don’t think it’d fit in this boat anyways.”

“It certainly won’t.” Castiel sounded amused. “It can wait until tomorrow.”

“’Til then, you’re still my dorky lil’ tax accountant.”

There was an especially tiny lip smack, like Dean had leaned down to peck Castiel on the cheek or forehead; or at least you suspected it was one of those two, because Castiel tittered with ticklish laughter following it.

“I can still barely believe it,” Dean huffed out. “That we’re…you know.”

“Romantically involved?” Castiel supplied.

“Yeah, exactly. Doesn’t even feel real sometimes…part of me worries that I’m under a djinn’s spell, but I don’t think a djinn could pull this out of my subconscious. I wanted this for a long time, but it was buried deep.”

Castiel shifted around on the sofa, you assumed to properly face Dean. “May I ask you something?”

“Anything, Cas.”

“If you wanted this, why did you wait so long to do anything about it? I know that you’re ‘constipated’ in the emotional sense, but…you could have had this anytime you wanted. I know I
wanted it, and I would have been willing to join you in it at nearly any point.”

For a long time, there was no answer. You didn’t blame Dean for taking so long to come up with a reply; knowing how his brain processed feelings that rarely got past his lips, he was surely trying to be as careful as possible.

“There are a lot of reasons,” Dean quietly confessed. “A big one is how...well, big this is. For all the bad stuff that happens in my life, this is one undeniably awesome development. And in my experience, anytime some great thing happens in my life, it gets taken away, or goes awry.” His voice got even quieter upon admitting, “And...maybe after everything, I didn’t really deserve this anyways.”

More than anything right then, you wanted to march right into that room and pin a medal on Dean for emotional honesty. Did a medal for emotional honesty even exist? If not, it should. You would make one, possibly out of garish construction paper, glitter, and craft skills equivalent to a four-year-old’s.

“Dean...” Castiel murmured sadly. “I know you may not believe it, but you do deserve this. You are worthy of love.”

Huffing a humorless laugh, Dean halfheartedly replied, “S’nice of you to say, Cas. Wish I could fully believe it.”

Cue another silence, this one forlorn in nature. You heard an inhale of breath from Castiel, but he hesitated, trying to think of what to say. Eventually he settled on digging up an old phrase from years past.

“Good things do happen, Dean.”

“In my experience, they usually don’t. But...I guess this is a prime example of an exception. Don’t know how I even ended up here with you trusting me this much, but I’m not gonna take it for granted.”

“I trust you very deeply, Dean. You have done more than enough to warrant that.”

“It just...blows my mind. Hell, you gave me open access to your wings before I even told you how I feel. Surely that’s really intimate.”

“My wings are one of the most important features of my form,” Castiel explained. “I do trust you with them, and rightfully so; you handle them so gently, with a sort of veneration I’d never expected to feel from anyone. I’m glad you can understand how much of a gesture that is...in fact, I feel as though I should return the favor to you.”

Dean lightly scoffed, lightening the mood. “Nah, it’s fine, really, I don’t even have...” Blankets gingerly shuffled as Castiel climbed up onto the bed and Dean changed positions. “Oh, o-okay, I guess I’m laying down then, that’s fine.”

“I insist,” Castiel asserted. “Unless...you would truly rather not, which is of course acceptable...”

“No, whatever you’ve got in mind, I’m here for it. I trust you too, you know that.”

“In that case...lay on your stomach.”

“Oh, I see where this going: backrub, right? I am definitely here for that.” The mattress could be heard flopping with redistributed weight as Dean complied. “Anything else I gotta do?”
“Just lay still and relax,” Castiel instructed. “I’ll take care of you to the best of my ability.”

Then there came the sound of rustling feathers brushing together and moving softly through the air. You couldn’t deny your own curiosity, and you found yourself sitting further up in bed to find out what Castiel was cooking up.

The feathers briefly rustled again, and then…though it was faint, they sounded like they were ever-so-softly brushing against something. It was similar to the noise a soft-bristled paintbrush would make as it stroked along a fresh canvas.

“Is that…?” Dean wondered, his thought cut off by a pleasantly surprised sigh. “Oh my god, it is.” He hummed with a bout of calm chuckles. “A wing massage…Cas, you are a friggin’ genius.”

“I try,” Castiel joked, the sound of his wing falling into a pattern of up, down, up, down as it caressed along Dean’s back.

“I was wrong,” Dean murmured. “This is the closest human equivalent to wing petting.”

“I suppose you’re right. Wing petting does not only have to mean you petting my wings; it can also mean my petting you with my wings.”

The next few minutes were filled with pleased hums and sighs, this time from Dean rather than Castiel. It made for a sweet backdrop, and you felt sleep dragging you back under the covers.

“Cas, I’m…I’m ‘bout to fall asleep on you here,” Dean groggily warned, snapping you back to wakefulness.

“You’re…not on me,” Castiel pointed out, though he came to understand what Dean meant just a second later and rolled with it. “Although that can be arranged.”

“…Was that…you just flirted.” Dean bellowed a deep, sleepy laugh. “Clearly I have taught you well.” The feathery rhythm ceased as Dean shifted over the covers somewhat. “Gonna have to say, I’d like to take you up on your offer, though.”

“Certainly.” Castiel sounded immensely pleased with himself.

Blankets and covers shuffled in earnest then as the two arranged themselves. Once it sounded like they’d gotten comfy, Dean’s slightly muffled voice echoed from the far end of the bed.

“Ah, so you wanna spoon?”

Any remaining blanket sounds stopped. “I…want to…what?” Castiel gave up trying to figure out the term.

“Spoon. Where one person cuddles the other from behind and they fit together like spoons. We’ve done this before!”

“…That is what I was intending to initiate. I would never have guessed that was the word for it.”

“It is a weird one,” Dean agreed, shuffling under the blankets a little. “You want big spoon or little spoon, then?”

“You’re going to have to explain those terms to me as well.”

“S’fine,” Dean assured, yawning. “I’ll put it this way: big spoon does the cuddling, little spoon is the one being cuddled. Take your pick.”
“In that case, I had being the big spoon in mind for tonight.”

“Sidle on up, then. If there one thing I need right now, it’s sleep; and havin’ you holdin’ me might just carry me off to dreamland way faster.”

Sheets shifted in earnest as Castiel pulled himself closer. “How do you figure that?”

“It’s worked wonders for me so far. Why do you think I’ve been sleepin’ so well this entire trip? S’all been you. No nightmares, no night terrors, nothin’. So…thanks for that. I should’ve said all that sooner, but…constipated feelings and all that.”

“I’m always happy to help you, Dean.” More blankets moved about as they presumably curled up together. “By now, I’m sure you’ve realized that this brings me great comfort as well.”

“Bet it does. And…and it’s also nice ‘cause I like bein’ so close to you.”

“I’ve noticed.”

Dean let himself sigh serenely. “G’night, angel,” he mumbled.

“Good night…human,” Castiel replied, as awkward but endearing as ever.

“…We’ll figure out that nickname in the morning.”

That was the last strand of dialogue you heard from the room that night. You didn’t even realize you’d been smiling the whole time until the pain registered in your cheeks, but you were too thrilled to care. There had been fluff, feels, and intensity throughout their entire exchange. The pair had covered a lot of ground for such a short time, and yet, as this was only the beginning, they still had so much more to look forward to covering in the future.

Sleep claimed you sometime after that. You never thought to check your phone to confirm the time, but you suspected it had been nearly an hour since the fluffy festivities had ended.

The next morning, you took your opportunity to sleep in. You had nowhere to be, no pressing matters to attend to, and no supernatural entities tracking you and threatening your memories and/or lives. Plus, you’d lost a lot of sleep eavesdropping the other night…

Each of Team Free Will’s members were already up and about by the time you rose up from under your cocoon of blankets. Sam sat on the settee opposite you, perusing one of the nautical books from the humble, single-shelf library behind him. Dean was busy pouring coffee into a mug in the galley, grumbling to himself about “cramped spaces” and ducking his head to avoid colliding with the ceiling. You found Castiel upon venturing abovedeck; the angel was standing on the bow, astride the taut anchor rope with his wings stretched wide in the foggy lake air.

You sat in the cockpit and just looked out onto the water for several minutes. That was one of the things you missed the most about living on the water: the lack of urgency. There was no rush to go anywhere or do anything; you and the water just were, existing in a silent symbiosis.

Sam joined you after a while, toting a book of cruising stories. Dean followed shortly after, holding a coffee mug that sent swirling steam into the air to sink down to the mist covering the water’s surface.

Once Dean saw Castiel stretching, a smile twitched onto his face. He abandoned his coffee, leaving it half empty in a cupholder attached to the steering wheel, and walked along the boat’s edge to join his angel.
“Dude, I’ve said it before, and I’ll say it again,” Dean said to Castiel. “Your wings are awesome.”

Lowering his wings and turning to Dean with a sentimental smile, Castiel replied, “You use that word, ‘awesome,’ to describe my wings every chance you get, Dean. Are there no other adjectives suitable for them?”

“Of course there are others! They’re strong, and soft, and graceful, and unique, and beautiful…” He smirked. “Just like you.”

Castiel blushed extremely hard at Dean’s affectionate words, unaccustomed to such open adoration from him. “You still have not seem me as I truly am, though, only in my vessel.”

“We could fix that. I already gave you the go ahead last night, so…”

Sam perked up when he overheard that, peeking around you to get a better look at the two. You, too, gave them your full attention, undeniably curious to see how this would unfold.

Shifting nervously, Castiel agreed with a simple, “Okay, if you are sure…”

“Don’t tell me you’re the one with cold feet now,” Dean joked, placing a reassuring hand on Castiel’s shoulder. “Remember, we’re fallin’ together.”

Brightening at the mention of his analogy (which he totally somehow managed to psychically steal from you, grumble grumble), Castiel closed his eyes and brought his wings back up.

“Very well,” the angel calmly agreed. “It may be a little disorienting to see me as I am at first, but I will do my best to show you what I look like under my vessel’s skin.”

In a blink, Castiel was gone. Dean lurched back in surprise, turning his head around the perimeter of the boat in a futile attempt to locate the angel. You were already one step ahead of him and were looking upwards at the aquamarine sky.

Castiel reappeared in his true form high above you, once again defying your senses and plunging you into a world of beautiful confusion. You swore you could almost hear the ukulele strains of “Over the Rainbow” wafting over the cove this time.

Beside you, Sam was squinting at the sky with no comprehension. You took a moment to look back at him and grinned sympathetically.

“Imagine Over the Rainbow,” you told him. He looked even more confused after that, but you didn’t bother to elaborate since it wouldn’t help.

Something was different about Castiel’s flying this time. His movements, abstract as they were, seemed more calculated, every little curve or swoop driven by some purpose. On a few maneuvers, he nearly dipped below the surface of the cove, his mindboggling form skimming dangerously close to the water’s mirrored edge and sending wisps of mist spiraling in tiny funnels. It was almost like he was putting on a show, and you realized that must have been the case when you spared a glance at Dean.

Ah, Dean. Poor, head-over-heels in love Dean Winchester had his gaze turned upward with a sort of amazement you don’t think you’d ever seen in him before. For as long as he’d known Castiel, he must have speculated about what the angel looked like. To all at once be able to see him as he actually was, as he’d been for the majority of his millennia-long life, must have been something else. This was a grounding reminder that although his boyfriend certainly looked normal and human nearly all the time, he really was a massive, indescribable celestial wavelength of intent. Even more
mind-blowing than that, he was a massive, indescribable celestial wavelength of intent who had proven he was wholeheartedly in love with him.

This massive, gorgeous being who defied the fabric of earthly reality, who had witnessed the birth of the world and humanity and its every vice and triumph, loved him. That realization floored even you.

The show came to a deliberate end after a few minutes. Castiel reappeared where he’d been on the bow. He looked nervous about Dean’s reaction, though you knew he had no reason to be. Dean was speechless as he stared at the angel for a few moments, trying to find the words but floundering like the lovesick puppy he was.

“That was- how did you-” Dean sputtered, stumbling towards Castiel. He observed the angel with a subtle difference now, a new kind of respect. When he placed a hand on Castiel’s shoulder this time, he seemed to do so with his true self in mind, awed that the celestial being that had been putting on a ballet in the sky mere moments ago was physically in front of him.

Swallowing down his slew of unanswerable questions, Dean settled on, “You’re…beautiful. I-I mean, your vessel’s awesome too, but…wow…”

Flushing, the angel’s eyes crinkled as he stared at Dean with all the adoration that could fit in his massive true form. “After all that, do you still think I’m a ‘dorky little guy?’” Castiel asked, half-joking smile on his face.

Giving it some serious thought as he looked the angel up and down, Dean replied, “Yeah, you’re still a dork. But you’re my dork.”

He leaned in closer and nudged his nose against Castiel’s, earning a single giggle from the angel. That laugh was drowned out by a sweet kiss shared between the two of them. They were both so wrapped up in their own cutesy little moment that they seemed to have forgotten the world around them.

Beside you, Sam thought aloud, “I never thought I’d get to see them being this sickeningly cute.”

“Welcome to the club,” you huffed out, turning back around to give the otters their privacy.

“I’m still not really sure what just happened, but…” Sam a genuine smile. “I’m happy for them, I really am.”

You couldn’t agree more. Another thought nibbled at the back of your mind, and even though you hesitated, you gave it voice.

“So…you guys probably want to get back home, don’t you?”

“Yeah…” Sam sighed. “I don’t want to even think about how much we’ve missed since we’ve been gone. There’ll probably be a backlog of hunts and developments to catch up on.”

It hurt a little to think of them leaving, but you knew it was inevitable. Every family vacation, whether it was kickstarted by an insane genie or not, had to come to an end at some point. Besides, with your updated contract, you could visit them in their own world practically whenever you wanted.

“Are you gonna be okay?”

Sam’s question surprised you, but as you let it settle in your mind, your spirits brightened. “Yeah… yeah, I’ll be okay.”
As for what kind of “okay” that was, for once, it didn’t feel like it mattered.

Once Dean and Castiel had their moment, they traversed over the boat’s surface to the cockpit. Sam briefly conferred with his brother about leaving and climbed below deck to begin gathering his stuff. Castiel graciously volunteered to gather Dean’s items from their room, and that just left you and the older Winchester.

When Dean didn’t say anything to initiate a conversation, you just raised an eyebrow at him and smirked. He reverted back to his old pattern of sighing, blushing, and hiding, looking away from you.

“You and Cas are doing great,” you commented. “You make a pretty cute pair.”

“About that,” Dean abruptly turned back to you again. He struggled with words for a moment, but took a deep breath and told you, “Listen, I just wanted to…thank you, I guess. For bein’ my winggirl. Most people probably would’ve given up long before you.”

You shrugged playfully. “What can I say? I’m a hardcore Destiel shipper.”

“Right, that,” Dean chuckled. “Are you sure it’s not pronounced ‘Dee-stiel?’”

“That would make more sense, but I don’t make the shipping rules.”

Dean shook his head. “Destiel it is, then.”

Seconds later, Sam and Castiel climbed the steps to rejoin you outside. They carried a bag each, and Sam was carrying your phone in his free hand.

“Since you used this before, I figured you’d need it again,” he explained before you could ask, passing the device over to you.

“Yeah, thanks,” you replied, opening your phone’s lock screen.

Staring at the digital screen for a few moments, an idea occurred to you. “Hey guys, we should take a picture.”

Dean overdramatically rolled his eyes, but he still gathered with you, Sam, and Castiel. Once all four of you were in position under your phone, you tapped your finger against the screen and captured the photo. Everyone dispersed and the moment was over as quickly as it had started, but the picture made it live on forever.

You were in the bottom corner of the frame, your arm extended upwards from where you held the phone. Sam was in the opposite corner, smiling and hunched over so he could fit. Behind you, Dean and Castiel were pressed against each other, their arms around each other’s shoulders. The latter wore a half smile that told a thousand words, and the former was striking a pose, reaching to hold up rabbit ears behind his brother’s head and grinning confidently at the camera.

This one was a keeper. You might even make it your new background.

“Alright,” you breathed out, opening your Netflix app. “Let’s get you boys home.”

“How exactly does it work?” Sam asked, ever curious. He peered over your shoulder at your phone screen as Netflix loaded. “…Netflix?”

The pre-loaded episode you kept on hand appeared on the screen before you could even hope to
explain. Sam’s eyes widened as he took it in; it was paused on a scene of Sam, Dean, and Castiel watching an old film reel at a table in the bunker.

The smarty-pants pieced it all together and saved you the trouble of a long explanation. “So…our life is a TV show in your world?”

You nodded meekly, not meeting his eyes.

“Huh…that explains that guy at the rental place.”

“Wait…” Dean joined the discussion as he slowly pieced something of his own together. “Is this the world that we…didn’t that Misha guy who plays Cas die?”

“Oh no, no, that was a different world,” you hurriedly refuted that. “There was a whole episode about it, The French Mistake. It’s one of my favorites.” You couldn’t resist a smile at the memories that particular episode brought to mind. “The scene where you guys tried to act is still one of my favorites.”

With all the insanity they’d endured up to that point, the boys just accepted all of this.

Unable to delay any further, you instructed, “Each of you put a hand on me and I’ll take us back.”

The Winchesters each put a hand on one of your shoulders, and Castiel…put his palm on top of your head. Good to know he was still as socially awkward as always. Reaching towards your phone screen and concentrating with all your will, your finger touched the screen and you were back inside the library of the Men of Letters Bunker.

The smell of books and earthen musk hit you like a sucker punch, but you welcomed it. Team Free Will stepped away from you, all huffing sighs in varying degrees of relief as they enjoyed being back home.

A string of text tones sounded from both Sam’s and Dean’s phones, startling both of them. They fumbled through their pockets and brought out the buzzing devices, frowning as they synced with their own world’s cell service and were bombarded with messages.

“So, Kevin thinks we’re dead,” Dean announced as he scrolled through his texts.

“And Jody’s been trying to get in contact with us for five days now,” Sam added, shaking his head at his phone and lightly chuckling. “It’s like we can’t even take a week off.”

“Man, you guys are busy,” you laughed. “I’d better, uh…leave you to it, then.”

“You sure you don’t wanna stick around for a while?” Dean asked.

“No, I know you’ve got a ton to catch up on. And…my parents are probably past worried sick at this point. I bet some of my friends think I’m dead, too.”

“Alright, good luck then,” Sam encouraged. “You ever need us, you know where to find us.”

“Oh yeah, you’d better believe I’ll be seeing you all again soon,” you confirmed.

That should’ve been the moment you left, but you lingered. There was something missing, one little vital thing that hadn’t happened yet…

Evidently, Sam figured it out before you did. Setting his phone aside on a table, he grinned knowingly and held his hands out to either side of him.
Breaking into a massive smile, you ran right into his embrace, accepting the bearhug for all it was worth. When you pulled away, you set your sights on Dean.

Forcing a huff of annoyance, Dean begrudgingly opened up his arms. “If you really have watched my life on TV, you know I’m not a hugger. I normally only reserve this for when people come back from the dead, but I’ll make an exception for you one time.”

Taking your chance, you slipped between his arms and gave him a hug of your own. He kept a pretense of vague irritation, but you could tell by the way he gently patted your back that he needed the hug just as much as you had.

That only left the angel. Pulling away from Dean, you faced Castiel and inclined your head at him. “Cas,” you addressed him.

Glancing between the brothers, Castiel uncertainly opened his arms somewhat. You ducked under them and hugged him first. His arms stiffly settled on your back, and although the hug was awkward, it was so Castiel that it was exactly what you’d wanted and expected.

“Thank you,” Castiel murmured, catching you by surprise. “For helping Dean, I mean.”

“My pleasure,” you whispered back, squeezing him tighter before breaking the hug.

Stepping back and facing your surrogate family, you brought your phone back up and stared at the image of your house beneath your hoard of apps. Rather than settle for that, you opened your photo album and pulled up the first picture you could find of your sailboat instead. You’d have a lot left to face at home, and even though you were pretty sure you could handle nearly anything after what you’d been through that week, you just needed a bit more time on the water to remind you of how to be okay.

“I’ll see you all around,” you bid them a farewell. “And guys…please, try not to die.”

Your finger pressed against your phone’s screen, and you were gone.

Chapter End Notes

WOOOO it's the end! :D I tried to fit as much fluff into this last chapter as I could, but I still ended up with some leftover...hence why the final chapter in this story is a Destiel-centric epilogue that will posted soon. Thanks to anyone and everyone who has actually stuck around and read this trash heap of my imagination.

Peace out! *drops mic*
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Most of this is just...pure fluff. But I needed to get it out of my system, so here ya go! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Team Free Will was both comforted and disoriented by returning to their own world. What they’d come to refer as “the Alaska incident” impacted them an awful lot. For one thing, it gave them all a much-needed vacation they would’ve never taken on their own. For another, it left them with a backlog of fresh work to jump into headfirst upon their return.

Once they’d located Kevin and showed up in person to prove they weren’t dead (he’d assumed their initial texts to him were another trick from Crowley), Sam and Dean drove off to assist Jody. It turned out the poor sheriff was having to deal with an infestation of ghouls all on her own, and though she’d proven herself more than capable in hunts past, this particular one was overwhelming in sheer numbers.

Castiel had miscellaneous “angel business” to attend to, so he and the Winchesters split ways. His errands were done with much faster than the tough hunt the Winchesters were faced with, so left without anywhere else to go, Castiel returned back to the bunker and hid out there alone.

The loud clunk at the top of the stairs was a welcome sound to the angel’s ears; it meant his friends were finally home after nearly a week spent travelling and bashing in ghoul skulls.

“Dean!” Castiel exclaimed the second he saw the hunter enter the war room.

Before Dean could even begin to formulate a response, Castiel strode over to him and wrapped him up in his wings. One shimmer of grace later and they were corporeal, squeezing Dean tightly against the angel they belonged to.

“C-Cas, can’t…breathe,” Dean choked out.

Castiel immediately loosened his hold on Dean, pulling back to observe the hunter with concern but still keeping his wings draped over his shoulders. “I apologize, I was…a bit overeager to see you again.”

“A bit?” Dean laughed out in disbelief. “You were tryin’ to make me into a feather burrito back there.”

“I’ve just missed your presence in the bunker,” Castiel sheepishly confessed. “This hunt has kept you away for such a long time.” Momentarily lost in thought, Castiel snapped back to attention. “Where is Sam?”

“He’s still unloading some stuff from the car,” Dean explained. “We made a supply run on the way back.”

“And you left him to carry out the task of bringing everything inside all by himself?”

“He said he could handle it.” Dean smirked. “I think he knew that I wanted to see you.”
A warm smile spread across Castiel’s face. “You’ve missed me as well, then?”

“Of course!” Dean scoffed. “What, you think I wouldn’t miss my angel?”

Flushing happily, Castiel replied, “Just as I’ve missed my human.”

“I knew we’d make that nickname work somehow.”

Dean took a step forward and absently ran a hand over the outside of Castiel’s left wing where it sloped to rest on his shoulder. This brought an uncharacteristically huge, trembling smile to Castiel’s face as he leaned into the motion. When the petting picked up and continued, he let his eyes close as he slumped forward to rest his head against Dean’s shoulder.

“You really missed me, huh?” Dean commented as he gently stroked through Castiel’s feathers. The angel’s only reply was a contented hum and a nod of his head against Dean’s shoulder. Letting out a soft chuckle, Dean murmured, “Alright, let’s try this, then.”

Without warning, Dean scooped up Castiel, hoisting him up so that his legs were wrapped around his waist and his arms and wings were clinging to each other around the hunter’s back. Pulling back to stare at Dean in mild confusion, Castiel watched as Dean carried him further into the bunker through one of its hallways.

“Where are we going?” Castiel questioned.

“We’re going to make up for the time we spent apart,” Dean answered offhandedly. “Long as that’s okay with you.”

“How exactly do you propose we do that?”

If there was even a hint of coyness to Castiel’s inquiry, Dean didn’t acknowledge it. Instead, he replied, “I was thinkin’ something along the lines of copious amounts of Netflix and cuddling.” Donning a sultry smile, he added, “Unless you’re up for something a little more ‘Netflix and chill?’”

“The first option sounds plenty enjoyable,” Castiel promptly decided. “You seem weary from your hunt. Some rest would be good for both of us, and I would rather be warmed by cuddling than chilled by Netflix.”

“...Gotcha,” Dean didn’t bother pointing out Castiel’s misunderstanding. He actually wholeheartedly agreed with the angel; he really was exhausted and just wanted to curl up and snuggle away the lingering weight of his recent hunt. Besides, it wasn’t like they’d had the time or mind to take that next step in their relationship yet anyways…

Upon reaching the TV room, Dean carefully maneuvered himself and Castiel down onto the large, plush sofa he’d had moved there some weeks ago. Once he’d snugly settled into the seat with his lapful of angel, he retrieved the television’s remote from the armrest and set to scrolling through the various options available on Netflix.

“How about this one?” Dean asked as he pulled up “The Arrow” onto the television’s screen.

Castiel repositioned himself just enough to glimpse the title and preview. “That looks acceptable.”

With that settled, Dean started up the first episode and sank back into the cushy embrace of the sofa. Castiel settled in as well, maneuvering so that he was laying sideways in Dean’s lap and resting against him. He was at an angle where he could easily see the TV, watching with curiosity as a man onscreen frantically ran through the wilderness.
Finally feeling that he could relax with his hunter right there with him, Castiel nudged one of his wings against Dean’s back. Dean got the idea and lifted himself up to make room for the wing to wrap around him, effectively turning him back into a “feather burrito.” To show his appreciation, Dean returned to petting Castiel’s other exposed wing, massaging it from base to wingtip and back again.

Satisfied with the arrangement, Castiel hummed and nestled himself right into Dean’s chest, settling there as he took in the events of the TV show before him.

At some point during the second episode, Dean observed, “Ya know, that Somers guy looks a lot like Benny, don’t you think?”

Castiel had dozed off into his own haze of thoughts, having stopped paying attention to the TV a fair while back.


“I do,” Castiel eventually responded, peering up at the flickering television screen. “I suppose he does bear a striking resemblance to Benny; near identical, actually.”

Huffing a relaxed laugh, Dean speculated, “Maybe ol’ Benny landed an acting job between escaping purgatory and bein’ a vampirate.”

The mere mention of the great escape from purgatory instantaneously brought back memories, painful and bittersweet, to both Castiel and Dean. Neither of them said much of anything, but they both were thinking the same things, remembering the frantic race to flee the vengeful leviathans, the swirling roar of the portal, and the desperate feeling of joining hands for what they thought would be the last time.

Castiel frowned to himself as he recalled with stinging, crystal clarity the shocked and broken look on Dean’s face when he shoved his hand away. Worse still was when he later discovered that Dean had blamed himself for the incident, his brain twisting the events around so that they were his own fault. Dean literally couldn’t fathom the idea that Castiel hadn’t wanted to return with him, and that realization had clawed right through Castiel’s grace when it first hit him.

Forcibly pulling himself back to the present moment, Castiel reminded himself of where he was now: closer to Dean than he had ever been during or after the pain of purgatory, both of them safely sequestered in the hunter’s fortress they called home. Purgatory and all the unpleasant associations it held was literally a world away now.

Hoping to dispel his lingering bad thoughts, Castiel quietly affirmed, “I’m glad that I’m here. With you. And with Sam, and your friends and associates, and…I’m just very glad I’m here.”

Though a little surprised by Castiel’s admission, Dean’s own thoughts were placated by it. “I’m glad you’re here too, Cas. Dunno what I’d do without you.”

Filled with warmth by Dean’s response, Castiel shifted and squeezed his wing around Dean a little tighter, happy for the physical confirmation of his presence. In return, Dean set back to idly petting Castiel’s wings, the angel instinctively leaning into his touch.

Hoping to brighten the mood even further, Dean mused, “You know, I’d think that with the wings, you’d act more like a bird.” He stared down at the angel wrapped around him. “But all things considered, you’re more like a cat.”

Castiel tilted his head up, a particularly cat-like expression on his face. “I am neither a bird nor a cat.
Angels are a distinct species all their own with their own traits and behaviors separate from my father's other creations.

Considering this for a moment, Dean dismissed, “Well then angels act like cats.”

Bristling, Castiel countered, “Angels existed long before any species of feline. I fail to see any correlation-”

He cut himself off with a trilling sigh that sounded suspiciously like a purr when Dean gave the top ridge of his wing a particularly strong rub. Smirking proudly to himself, Dean repeated the motion, having found another one of Castiel’s weak spots to add to his steadily growing list.

Petty argument forgotten in a blink, Castiel let his instincts take over as he nuzzled his cheek against the fabric of Dean’s shirt, intending to show affection in return.

“Just like a cat,” Dean reaffirmed, continuing to pet the wing. “Except thankfully, I’m not allergic to you.”

Any claim to the contrary Castiel would have made to refute his feline similarities went unspoken. Instead, he occupied himself with lovingly rubbing his face into Dean’s chest. Somewhere in the middle of their affectionate exchanges, Castiel allowed his eyes to fall closed so he could better focus on the blissful sensations of his wings. Retreating within his vessel, he bore down to his true self, his grace happily thrumming to the soft rhythm of the hand on his wing.

Something broke through the shell of his vessel to his concentrated internal awareness. It was something warm and sweet that’d he’d felt before and come to know and love: Dean had pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

Castiel’s grace practically sang upon his recognition of the act, surging with a brand of affection he only reserved for his human. Before Castiel could properly bask in the glow of it all, Dean’s hand halted its petting and he abruptly broke the kiss.

“Whoa,” Dean hissed out, mildly startled.

Concern drew Castiel outwards and he opened his eyes to refill his vessel. “What is it?”

Dean didn’t have an immediate answer, engaging in one of those infamous staring contests with the angel presently clinging to him. He blinked slowly a few times to clear his head.

“I…think…” Dean shook his head and tried again. “Was that your grace?”

Confused, Castiel questioned, “You felt that?”

A heavy beat passed before Dean replied. “When I was…kissing you, I felt this jolt through it. It was like your grace, but…warmer somehow?”

Understanding slowly overtook Castiel’s features. “Oh. I…yes, that was my grace. I didn’t mean for it to transfer to you, but it surged up unexpectedly and…I wasn’t paying attention.” Pulling himself up to get closer to eye level, he curiously inquired, “You said it was warmer than usual?

Barely able to meet Castiel’s eyes, Dean reached to reflexively scratch at the back of his neck. “Yeah, like…I felt this wave of sappiness when it hit.” He donned a fond expression and looked back at his angel. “Maybe that’s just ‘cause I’m with you.”

Though appreciative of Dean’s sentimental words, Castiel knew the real reason behind the
phenomenon. “Actually, I believe that was caused by my grace. It transferred my emotional state to you. Normally I would have far better control over what flows through my grace, but seeing as it caught me unaware this time…”

It had been too long since Castiel had seen Dean’s signature, flustered blush, and the angel was pleased to see it make a comeback.

Clearing his throat with a husky cough, Dean said the only coherent thing he could think of at the time: “Oh.”

Regaining some of his composure, Dean elaborated, “So…that’s how you’re feeling?”

Castiel simply nodded.

“Warm and…sappy?”

“Yes, Dean,” Castiel affirmed in a warm and sappy voice.

Right about then, Dean managed to reclaim some of his smooth side. “Guess I’m doin’ my job right, then.”

Growing bolder, Castiel kept the banter going. “I would suppose that you are. As a matter of fact, your performance has been so exemplary that I believe a reward is in order.”

Dean watched in anticipation as Castiel shifted so that he was sitting up in Dean’s lap, face-to-face with him. “Are we talkin’ a pay raise, or a promotion, or what?”

“I had something else in mind.”

Waiting just a bit longer to keep the moment going, Castiel ever-so-slowly leaned in and kissed Dean on the lips. Dean responded instantly, pressing back against him eagerly.

Time melted into insignificance as they shared their slow, tender kiss without a care for the rest of the world. It was moments like these where they could truly be at ease, temporarily lifting the weight of the world from each other’s shoulders. They tried their best to make these moments last as long as they could, drawing them out and stretching them taut to delay the inevitable return to their own harsh reality. Here, embracing and joined at the lips, that reality was a world away, comfort and assurance and love foremost on their minds.

Unlike Castiel, Dean required oxygen, so eventually he had no choice but to pull away, opting to rest his forehead against Castiel’s to keep up the intimacy.

Huffing a laugh as he caught his breath, Dean joked, “Normally I’m not one for lip service in the business world, but that?” He rested a hand on Castiel’s cheek. “That was perfect.”

Though he didn’t quite get the reference, Castiel understood the gist of it and uttered a single small chuckle. “I find myself considerably more susceptible to humor around you.”

“Yeah?” Dean allowed himself a genuine, heartfelt smile. “How else are you feelin’ right now?”

“I could show you,” Castiel offered, sending a pulse of grace through his palm and holding it up to show Dean.

Eyeing Castiel’s hand with curiosity, Dean quickly confirmed, “Go for it.”

Making sure to let his emotions flow freely through his buzzing grace, Castiel brought his hand up to
rest on Dean’s where it covered his cheek. Dean’s eyes flickered through several emotions at once as the grace brushed through him, leaving Castiel to watch with fond amusement as he poured a healthy dose of his affection, contentment, and other blended sentiments into Dean’s core.

Dean’s composure melted into something mushy and pliable, allowing him time to just feel. He was nearly overcome with the stream of emotions, some of them sleepily soothing parts of his brain and others insistently prodding to keep him alert. It was a rarity for Dean Winchester to let down his external walls down and allow himself to be loved, but curled up on that sofa with Castiel in his arms, feeling each and every one of the angel’s emotions as his own, those walls came tumbling down faster than they ever had before.

“You feel…all this?” Dean mumbled out through the breeze of feelings wafting through him.

“I do,” Castiel confirmed. “All because of you.”

That hit Dean like a sucker punch, sending him momentarily reeling. He was the one responsible for all these feelings, he was the one eliciting these lovey-dovey sentiments and sensations, the one who had managed to make this stark warrior of heaven fall in so many more ways than one.

Castiel was actively feeling all of these wonderful things. Dean was the reason that he could at last feel the security and adoration of being loved, all those things that Dean had always thought the angel deserved to have.

And more miraculously than that, Dean felt for the first time in a long time that he himself rightfully deserved all the love given to him, too.

Then actually overcome by the storm of his own and Castiel’s emotions, Dean did the only thing he could: pull his angel in for another long, adoring kiss.

The mixed sensations of the kiss and Castiel’s grace were foreign but definitely pleasant. Dean had been so wrapped up in the emotional side of the grace sharing that he’d nearly forgotten the basic benefits of the grace itself.

Brain faintly buzzing by the time he pulled away, Dean gave Castiel one last drawn-out peck on the lips for good measure. The angel eventually slowed and stopped his grace altogether, sliding his hand away from where it gently covered Dean’s.

Repressing a whine and falling back, Dean whimpered out, “Why’d you stop?”

“I do not wish to overwhelm you, Castiel calmly answered. “We are both aware of the effects my grace has on your mental state.”

“But I’m not even buzzed,” Dean protested. “Just a bit more? I’ll keep my soul from tugging on it or whatever.”

“Your soul’s pull on my grace is reflexive and out of your control. But if you would like more…” Castiel trailed off as he considered something, hatching a new idea. “You said you felt my grace when you kissed me earlier?”

Color faintly rising to his cheeks at the reminder, Dean stuttered out, “Y-yeah, why?”

Growing excited as his idea took flight, Castiel announced, “I would like to try something.”

“Whatcha have in mind?”
“I may have devised a new application for my grace, if you’re comfortable with me testing it.”

Dean’s eyebrows rose. “Well now you’ve got me curious. Go right ahead.”

“Very well. Let me know if at any point you would prefer I stop.”

“I doubt I’ll want to if it’s your grace, but alright.”

Now a bit apprehensive but curious all the same, Dean watched as Castiel closed his eyes in concentration, bringing his hand up to Dean’s cheek.

When did Cas start wearing blue lipstick? was the last thought that crossed Dean’s mind before Castiel used his wing to pull him in for another kiss.

From the very second his lips brushed against Castiel’s, Dean was immersed in a whole new world of sensation. A mist was eddying outwards from the sensitive lines of his lips, drifting straight towards his brain. This was…Castiel was sharing his grace with him through a kiss, Dean giddily realized. He couldn’t help himself; he muffled a moan into what was already shaping up to be the best kiss of his life.

Castiel immediately pulled away, his feathers standing up as deep worry creased his brow. He frantically examined Dean’s face. “Dean? Are you alright? Do you want me to stop?”

Mourning the loss of the kiss, Dean grunted out, “No, it was just getting good!”

The feathers on Castiel’s wings unruffled, though he still appeared concerned. “You made that sound, and I wasn’t sure…”

Allowing himself a laugh, Dean assured, “Cas, that was a happy sound. I was really getting into…” his face scrunched up, “…whatever that was.”

“I call it a ‘grace kiss,’” Castiel supplied, proud of the title. “So…you enjoyed it, then?”

“Hell to the yeah.” Dean playfully puckered his lips. “Any chance I could get another?”

Smiling and nodding his head, Castiel replied, “Certainly.”

Castiel’s lips regained their blue glow as he guided Dean back towards them, his wing a steadying presence on the hunter’s back bringing him closer. Dean closed the remaining distance between them when he couldn’t wait any longer, this time toning down the reflexive sound that escaped him to a sigh upon first contact.

In Dean’s humble but professional kisser opinion, these “grace kisses” blew every other kiss he’d ever had clean out of the water. Not only did they come packaged with all the awesome things Dean had learned to associate with Castiel’s reverent, sweet kisses, but on top of that it was all wrapped up in that one-of-a-kind soothing mist of grace that never failed to put him on cloud nine. Just when he’d thought grace sharing couldn’t possibly get any better, it had. This time he swore he really could feel his soul tugging for more.

As it all of that wasn’t already enough, then Castiel opened the emotional stream somewhat, adding a dose of his own feelings to the mixture he was pouring into Dean. What Dean felt floored him, a complex tangle of sentiments so interwoven that he had no choice but to take them as a whole. At face value, Dean felt Castiel’s empowerment, his care, his devotion, and strongest of all, his overwhelming, irrefutable adoration.
In the single second all of that hit Dean, he instinctively deepened the kiss and Castiel smoothly responded in turn. Faint frustration bubbled in Dean’s awareness as he drank in every bit of grace that he could. More than anything, Dean wanted to show Castiel his own feelings, let him know that he fully returned that adoration as much as a measly human could; but where Castiel had a natural conduit through which to literally share how he felt, Dean was stuck with his own earthly limitations.

Frustration boiling a bit louder, Dean deepened the kiss even further in the hopes that it would somehow carry his own emotions into Castiel as the angel’s grace was doing to him. Of course, this did not magically happen, but that didn’t stop Dean from stubbornly trying.

Were breathing not a necessity, there’s no telling how long Dean would have kept at it. As it was, his lungs eventually forced him to pull away, regrettably breaking that miraculous stream of grace and all its contents. His frustration hadn’t settled, his heart pounding and breath panting in the aftermath of the best kiss of his life.

“I love you,” Dean blurted out.

The words hung in the air in a way Dean hadn’t expected them to. Getting a handle on his breathing, he looked at Castiel and was surprised by the unreadable mask covering his face. After a moment’s familiar staring, a genuine smile twitched onto the corner of Castiel’s mouth.

Growing more confused by the second, Dean calmly demanded, “What?”

Staring back at Dean with all the adoration in the world, Castiel murmured, “That’s the first time you’ve ever said that.”

That couldn’t be right. “Wha- no, no way, I’ve totally told you that before!”

“No, Dean, you never have. I’ve known it, and you have shown it more times than it would be worthwhile to count, but you’ve never said it; not with those exact words.”

At first Dean wanted to vehemently refute that, but when he actually stopped to think about it… Castiel was absolutely right. For all the times that Dean thought it or implied it or shown it, he’d never uttered those three simple words to prove it. His love for Castiel was never something he’d had to express that way; it was an unspoken truth that had been accepted the day they’d become a couple. And though he’d long gotten over most of his rampant repression and denial, perhaps ghosts of those inhibitors were still trying to pull the now unneeded strings he’d since left to collect dust in his brain.

“You’re…totally right,” Dean realized. “I’ve never…oh my god, that is unacceptable.”

“It’s alright, Dean, I-” Castiel tried to assure him, but Dean cut him off.

“No, it’s not,” he insisted. “I should’ve been saying it this whole time. If I’m gonna get over being constipated, I should be working at it!” Mind made up about the matter, he firmly decided, “Starting now, I’m gonna make up for all the times I should’ve said it but didn’t.”

Though unable to hide his smile at the idea, Castiel calmly let him know, “Dean, you don’t have to.”

“No, I want to. Starting right now.”

Not wanting to waste any time, Dean leaned forward and planted a single, gentle peck on the tip of Castiel’s nose. Pulling back just an inch, he whispered, “I love you.”

From there, he moved down to his angel’s lips and gave them a solid smooch. “I love you, Cas.”
He pulled back up to Castiel’s forehead and parted the dark locks of hair there to make room for a lengthy, shallow kiss. “So damn much,” he continued, surprised by the emotion weighing his voice.

In response, Castiel added his wings back into the equation, loosely enclosing Dean in both of them and rubbing them up and down his back. Pausing in his ministrations, Dean basked in the comforting gesture with a quiet sigh and then set back to the task at hand.

Tapping into a spur of spontaneity, Dean shifted so that his mouth was level with Castiel’s jawline. He left a ghost of a kiss there, punctuating it with, “Love you.” He moved onwards, peppering Castiel’s jaw and upper neck with ticklish little kisses and “love you”s.

It was when Dean incidentally reached Castiel’s pulse point that he got a significant reaction. The wings petting him trembled for a split second and then pulled him even closer.

Smirking against Castiel’s neck, Dean flirted, “You doin’ alright there, angel boy?”

“My…grace is not impacting your mental state, correct?” Castiel checked.

“I’m clean. Give me an angel breathalyzer test if you wanna be sure.”

“No such test exists.”

“I promise I’m sober,” Dean swore. “Just playing around.” He donned a dopey but still assuredly sober expression. “I still love you.”

Castiel hummed appreciatively at that, allowing his concerns to dissipate and closing his eyes to relish Dean’s loving words. “As do I you.”

“Have for so long,” Dean kept going, returning to lightly kissing along Castiel’s neck. “Always will.”

Dean maneuvered so that he was right above Castiel’s pulse again and pecked it. This time, he undoubtedly knew what he was doing.

A tremor went through Castiel’s wings and they instinctively tightened around Dean once again. “You are doing this on purpose,” he accused once he’d composed himself.

“Caught me red-handed,” Dean conceded, slumping back against the sofa. “Or, in this case, red-lipped.”

“I feel it necessary to remind you that ‘hickories’ are reserved for the right time and place only, as designated by you.” Castiel’s face softened. “Unless…this is the right time and place?”

At that moment, something clanged about in the kitchen, echoes of Sam unloading supplies a friendly reminder that they were not alone.

“Right time? Yeah,” Dean decided once the noise settled. “Not so sure about right place.”

Repressed disappointment shone in Castiel’s eyes. “Where would the right place be, then?”

“If you’re serious about wanting to try it,” Dean waggled a well-timed eyebrow, “my bedroom would probably do the trick.”

“Oh.” Castiel flushed bright red. “If you’re certain that would be acceptable, I’ve been rather curious….”
That caught Dean slightly off guard. “Oh, so…you really are serious?”

“Yes, Dean. When else will the right time and place for this ‘hickory’ business coincide?”

“You really ought to start calling it by its real name. It’s called a hickey, Cas.” Grammar lesson aside, Dean wondered, “What’s got you so obsessed with them anyways?”

“It’s just such a curious act,” Castiel innocently answered. “And seeing as I now actually ‘have’ you, and you I…it would only make sense to be marked as such, would it not?”

Losing any trace of his cool that he may have had in that moment, Dean blanked. “I mean…i-if you wanna, I can…we can…”

“I’m not expecting this to escalate to anything further,” Castiel clarified. “I would just like to experience…hiccies properly with you.”

Thought it took a few silent seconds of letting his brain catch up, Dean collected himself. “Alright, let’s…let’s do this, then.” He glanced at the TV, which had continued streaming forgotten Netflix. “Unless you wanna see how Oliver handles this baddie first.”

“That can wait,” Castiel promptly replied. “I’m much more eager for this.”

Trying and failing to hide a blush, Dean once again scooped up Castiel in his arms, carrying him bridal style into the bunker’s hallway and in the direction of his bedroom. The angel’s wings clung tightly to around him to keep balance as they bobbed along.

“I am perfectly capable of walking, you know,” Castiel felt the need to inform Dean.

Dean stopped in his tracks. “Oh, s-sorry, I didn’t even ask…”

“It’s quite alright.” Castiel laid back in the cradle of Dean’s arms and hugged him tighter with his wings. “I enjoy you escorting me around, even if it is wholly unnecessary.”

The remainder of their short walk was cloaked in comfortable silence; at least until Dean swore under his breath while fumbling to open the door to his room and hold Castiel at the same time. When they did manage to get inside, Dean gently kicking the door closed behind them, they both took one long look at the freshly laundered pile of extra pillows and blankets at the foot of Dean’s bed.

Dean was impressed. “You did the laundry while we were gone?”

“I figured you and Sam would appreciate the help,” Castiel replied with a note of pride.

Staring down at the blankets and pillows a few seconds longer, Dean asked, “You thinkin’ what I’m thinkin’?”

“Um…that we should make the bed?”

“Not just make the bed,” Dean corrected. “You ever heard of a pillow fort, Cas?”

“Pillows don’t sound like they would provide the sufficient protection required of a fort.”

“In a pillow fight, they do! Here, just…let me show you.”

Once Dean gingerly deposited Castiel back on his own feet, the pair set to bed making. After they’d gotten through putting the basic sheets and pillows in their rightful places over the memory foam,
Dean started working to make something out of what they had left over.

It turned out there weren’t enough extra materials to make anything resembling a pillow fort, so they took some creative liberties. Dean arranged and piled up the few remaining pillows in a semicircle at the head of the bed while Castiel tucked and shaped the rest of the blankets in tight, circular layers around them.

It was hardly a fort by any stretch, far too short and exposed to provide any protection from incoming pillow attacks. What they ended up with instead was more akin to a blanket nest, and though that wasn’t what Dean had been aiming for, it was perfectly-sized for the two of them.

Standing back to admire their makeshift handiwork, Dean and Castiel observed their cozy arrangement. The longer Dean looked at it, the more he began realize it wasn’t that bad; he could picture just how pleasant it would be to curl up and snuggle in a handmade nest like that, especially with the addition of a pair of heavenly soft wings.

Clearing his throat and forcing that thought aside, Dean turned to Castiel. The unspoken expectation of hickeys lay heavy in the air between them. Eventually, Dean thawed himself and broke the silence.

“Well, I’d best be getting to keeping my promise to you,” he said with as much confidence as he could manage. “Told ya I’d make it up to you after what happened on the plane, so…”

Heaving himself onto the bed and methodically positioning himself against the throne of pillows, Dean patted the space beside him, smiling reassuringly at Castiel. Warily, Castiel crawled over the layered blankets and took his spot beside Dean, wriggling partway under the nest’s contents to get as comfy as possible.

“You sure about this, Cas?” Dean gently asked.

“Yes, Dean,” Castiel promised him. “And if at any point I’m not, I’ll let you know as much.” He gave Dean a pointed look. “Are you sure about this?”

“Sure as I’ll ever be,” Dean said, lighthearted.

“You…sound like you may have doubts.”

“No, no, I promise, this is all fine with me! Just, uh…it’s a little weird. Normally you don’t schedule hickeys with someone, they just…happen, in the heat of the moment. But hey, new experiences, right?”

“If you’re certain,” Castiel bowed his head solemnly. “We could attempt to emulate a more ‘heat of the moment’ scenario if that would make it easier-”

“No, that would just things more complicated,” Dean disagreed. “We’ll just keep it simple. This is about showing you how it’s done, right?”

“In a way, yes. Do I…need to do anything?”

“Not really.” Dean reconsidered that. “Actually, if you could lose the trench coat, that’d be great. I kinda need access to your neck, so…”

Though he normally hated to take it off, Castiel shuffled his beloved tan coat off his shoulders, turning his wings incorporeal again to ease the process. He carefully tossed it onto Dean’s dresser, where it landed in a pile beside some dishes and bottles Dean had been meaning to clean up.
“Okay,” Castiel stated. “I’m ready.”

Eagerness taking over, Dean leaned towards him. “Alright then, time to finally make good on my word and teach you the technique. Be sure to take notes.”

Letting out a puff of heated breath on Castiel’s neck, Dean smirked at how Castiel reflexively stiffened. “Class is now in session,” Dean drawled. “Just relax.”

In a bid to help the angel untense, Dean started pressing soft little kisses to his neck. He wasn’t to the hickey-making yet, just smushing his lips against the skin of Castiel’s vessel to get a better feel for it and adjust the angel to the sensation.

It seemed to be working, at least if the little comforted sigh Castiel uttered was anything to judge by. Dean kept it up for about a minute, getting slightly lost as he mindlessly smooched around what he could reach of Castiel’s exposed skin around the collar of his suit.

“I’m not sure how this is supposed to leave a mark,” Castiel remarked.

“M’not there yet,” Dean explained, peering up at the angel. “You still takin’ notes?”

“Mental ones, yes.”

“’Kay then. Keep that mental pencil moving over that mental paper, ‘cause I’m about to go for it.”

Reaching up to pull back the collar of Castiel’s overcoat, Dean took a deep breath. In all his past hickey experiences, there’d been a rush to get it done, but here he could take his sweet time. Castiel deserved the best, and Dean intended to give it to him.

Locating the perfect spot as close to the base of Castiel’s neck as his suit would allow, Dean went for it. He pulled Castiel a little closer, curling a hand around the other side of the angel’s neck to steady him, and connected his lips to his chosen spot. For a while he just mouthed at it, staying soft and inviting but keeping a firm seal.

Dean both heard and felt a noise catch in Castiel’s throat, and he smirked. Confident that his angel was enjoying the treatment, he grew bolder and kissed the spot more fiercely.

“I…” Castiel’s voice cracked. “I understand now how this is intended to leave a mark.”

“You alright?” Dean pulled away just long enough to ask.

“Yes. Please, proceed.”

More than happy to comply, Dean returned to his task. He continued working at the hickey for another minute, encouraged by Castiel’s occasional happy exhalations. When the moment felt right, he finally broke away from the skin, pleased to see that he’d left a circular red mark.

Lightly kissing at the mark a few more times to soothe it over, Dean triumphantly fell back against the wall of pillows. “There ya go, your first hickey. I think I did a pretty good job with that one, if I say so myself.”

Craning his head as far towards his neck as he could, Castiel squinted at the hickey. “It was lovely, but…I had expected the mark to look more obvious.”

“Oh, it will,” Dean assured. “Gets darker the longer you leave it, like a bruise.”

“I’ll be sure to keep my grace from healing it, then.”
“You better,” Dean snorted. “I worked hard on that thing, it’s practically art!”

Staring at the mark a while longer, Castiel ventured, “May I attempt to reciprocate?”

Perking up, Dean immediately replied, “Yeah! Yeah, I’m sure not gonna say no to that. As long as you think you know what you’re doing, go for it.”

“I have at least a basic idea…” Castiel sounded like he doubted himself. “I apologize in advance if I make any mistakes.”

“S’alright, I’ll be your willing guinea pig.”

That dissolved Castiel’s self-doubt. “Could you remove your overcoat?” he requested.

Slipping off the outermost of his layers and tossing it on top of the trench coat, Dean went a step further and tugged down the collar of his remaining shirt to save Castiel the trouble. Bearing his neck towards the angel, Dean half-smirked and twitched his eyebrows upwards.

“Have at me,” he invited.

Ever cautious, Castiel took several moments to assess the situation as he shuffled closer to Dean. Mapping out the landscape of the wide-open neck before him, Castiel tried his best to imitate what Dean had done to him when his lips made contact with skin.

Cushiony little pecks pressed against Dean’s neck and he sighed out blissfully, gladly accepting the attention. Castiel got into the main event thereafter, gently latching his lips around a spot halfway up Dean’s neck and…

Just…kinda…squeezing. Huh. It was nice, but not exactly what was needed to make a hickey. Dean let it slide, figuring that Castiel was experimenting or building up, but after a minute of this with no progression, he had to speak up.

“You’re gonna have to be a bit rougher than that if you wanna leave a mark,” Dean pointed out.

Pulling away from the crook of Dean’s neck, Castiel fretted, “I’m worried I may accidentally hurt you.”

“You know me, I’m pretty tough,” Dean defended. “Like I said, have at me.”

Frowning uncertainly, Castiel returned to where he’d been mouthing at Dean’s neck and tried a bit more force. His lips didn’t seem to have much power in them; human lips were odd, floppy little things, and Castiel couldn’t for the life of him figure out how Dean had used his to such great effect.

Taking a chance, he pushed even closer and made room for his teeth, barely nipping at the skin under his mouth.

Dean inhaled sharply the second he felt the minute sting of something biting him. Castiel separated himself from him immediately, eyes darting over Dean to check his condition.

“I’m sorry,” Castiel frantically apologized. “I didn’t mean to-”

Having quickly recovered from the surprise sensation, Dean waved his concerns away. “Biting, huh? That’s a more advanced technique, I didn’t even show you that one.”

“I wasn’t sure how you managed to use such force with your lips alone,” Castiel explained, looking down in mild shame. “I…I suppose I really don’t know what I’m doing.”
Seeing his angel so distraught simply would not do. Dean tried to think of a solution, eventually settling on something that would end in a win-win situation for the both of them.

“Gimme your hand,” Dean requested.

Though he wasn’t sure why Dean wanted it, Castiel willingly put his left hand out for Dean to take. And take it he did, holding it by the palm and bringing it up towards his face.

“Here’s what I’m thinkin’,” Dean announced. “While you’re doin’ your thing, I show you what to do in real time.”

Dean brought the hand up to his mouth and momentarily dragged his lips over the back of it to show what he meant. Recognition flickered in Castiel’s eyes and he nodded.

“I think that would help very much,” Castiel agreed, relieved.

Nodding and smiling encouragingly at Castiel, Dean quipped, “Third time’s the charm: have at me.”

Glowing with much more confidence this time, Castiel reattached his lips to Dean’s neck. He stayed still, waiting until Dean put his own mouth on Castiel’s hand to start kissing.

Dean repeated his actions from earlier, kissing firmly and creating suction on the fine skin of Castiel’s hand. The angel copied him to a tee, drawing a pleased sound from Dean. Taking that as confirmation that he’d done it right, Castiel kept it up, showing care and devotion in how tenderly he worked his lips.

One minute later, Dean released Castiel’s hand; though he wanted to keep it going, he knew he’d had enough to leave a mark. Castiel slowly pulled away from him in response. He brightened when he saw that he’d successfully left a red mark of his own, leaning down to press one more pacifying kiss to it before retreating from Dean’s personal space.

“I didn’t do it incorrectly this time, did I?” Castiel asked, still not entirely certain he’d properly emulated Dean.

“No…” Dean said absently, pawing at the fresh mark with his fingers. “I gotta say, that…that was different from any hickey I’ve ever had.”

Castiel’s eyes widened in alarm. “I did do it wrong, then?”

“No!” Dean rushed to refute that. “No, not at all, you did awesome…it’s just…I’m used to it bein’ all heat of the moment and a little wild, but you…jeez, you made it all tender and sweet. Wasn’t so much a hickey as a love bite.”

Bowing his head, Castiel said, “I can attempt to be more ‘wild’ in the future if that’s what you’d prefer.”

“You do you,” Dean encouraged. “You wanna be wild, be wild. You wanna be sweet, be sweet. Don’t try to change your style on account of me.”

Quirking his lips into a smile, Castiel responded, “Thank you, Dean. Would…” The angel faltered, color rising to his cheeks. “Would it be acceptable to…cuddle now? I feel as though we’ve just bonded quite a bit, and cuddling would solidify that even more.”

“Still at it with the cuddling requests?” Pretending to roll his eyes, Dean huffed, “Alright, alright, you massive sap. C’mere.”
Admiring Dean with soft eyes, Castiel maneuvered himself into Dean’s open arms. The pair wrapped their arms around each other and ended up laying down, facing each other and surrounded by their failed attempt at a pillow fort.

“This isn’t much of a fort,” Castiel commented.

“Yeah, it really isn’t,” Dean agreed. “More of a nest.”

Something glinted in Castiel’s eyes at the mention of the word nest. “I…I quite like the idea of a nest. I think I greatly prefer it to a fort, actually. A fort implies a necessary defense from some threatening outside force, while a nest is a safe haven made to be a home.” He shuffled closer in Dean’s embrace until their foreheads were pressed together. “I would enjoy living in a nest with you, Dean.”

Chuckling, Dean’s eyes shifted to take in his surroundings. “Consider this our nest, then.”

The feathers on Castiel’s wings ruffled up at that suggestion, momentarily standing on end and then settling. Unable to think of how to convey his joy through words, Castiel turned his wings corporeal, sending the blankets billowing above them somewhat as they surrounded Dean. The hunter hummed his approval and let the wings pull him closer.

With all the soft things covering him and the sweet words echoing in his mind, Dean was starting to feel rather sleepy. That hunt really had tired him out, and it all came crashing down on him again in that moment. His earlier deduction had been right; this was an incredibly pleasant place to snuggle up together.

So as the night passed them by, Sam settling into his own evening routine elsewhere in the bunker, Dean and Castiel ended up lazily kissing each other to their respective states of rest, bundled tight in their bed of fresh blankets and soft feathers…just as two cuddling otters in their seaweed nest ought to be.

Chapter End Notes

Why’d I write this?? Funny story...after making all those references to hickies in this story, it made me wonder if anyone had ever written a story where Dean and Cas just gave each other hickies. I didn’t find anything and made the somewhat hasty pledge that I would fill the void myself!...Then I ended up with a ton of other fluff thrown in too because I couldn't help myself.

In case you missed the reference to Benny in there, Ty Olsson really did play a character in the second episode of The Arrow. It was...surreal to see him in another show, to say the least. :P

Anyways...that's it for this story! And so, this saga of my life comes to an end...I really enjoyed the universe that's sort of come out of this, so chances are super duper high that I'll write more for it in the future. Thank you to everyone who's read this!!

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