Raising the King

by mAd_parnes

Summary

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The devils gate spit out demons and Dean's knee was twisted into the wrong direction.

His father lay against a headstone and wasn't moving anymore. The Colt only inches away from his limp hand.

Dean wanted to crawl over.

Save his father. Not take the shot, like he was ordered. He wouldn't have drawn attention to them. He just had wanted his dad to live.

But he couldn't move, every time he tried, pain shot up from his knee into his head and threatened to knock him out with black spots dancing in front of his eyes.

This thing was watching him back. Uninterested in the army Yellow Eyes released, unimpressed by the howling and the madness, it watched the human that tried not to puke from pain.

Dean locked eyes with it. Stared back. He was thinking, if he couldn't die standing, at least he died staring this thing down.


A monster in the body of an overgrown-puppy-man-child, complete with emo-hoodie and all.

It couldn't take it's eyes off Dean, even when the demon wanted it's attention, and maybe, maybe this one second of annoyance...

This one second Yellow Eyes focused on the kid, not on them, cost the bastard his life.

The shot rang clear and sweet through the wuthering storm of black smoke.

Dean saw his father, his arm, sure hand.

He saw the flashes inside Yellow Eyes' body. Dying.

He saw his father adjusting his aim...

It screamed wrong. Inside of Dean, it broke loose panic, before his thinking caught up, before the reason he would rationalize it with later, before anything, there was a thought of No, when John aimed at the Thing that watched Yellow Eyes die and then it snapped it's head up, stretched it's arm-
The second shot didn't sound any different.

Dean didn't hear the difference. Yet he saw no impact.

He felt nothing. He knew his father was dead before his eyes followed back and saw John's broken body.

That was why he didn't move. Not out of fear. Not because the thing stared at him again. Or because the pain was still there, through the shock and mind numbing grief. Torn apart limbs were funny like that, they didn't care your whole world just died and you could be next any second.

No, Dean didn't move, because he knew his father was dead.

That was the reason why he watched without any passion when the monster went over to John's body and collected the Colt.

The reason why it didn't matter in this moment, that his mother was avenged. That his father had won his never-ending war.

It didn't even matter, that the murderer of his father vanished through hell's gate and drew it shut behind him. That it got away. In that moment it didn't feel right to trade the crusade after his mother's killer for the crusade after his father's killer.

It was the shock. He thought so, at first.

But it never felt right.

It should have. He was raised a hunter. He should have found purpose in hunting the thing that killed his father.

But he didn't.

Bobby worried about him. Thought Dean had given up on life. Because that was the only logical explanation for a Winchester letting go of something.

Maybe Bobby was right, Dean sometimes thought, and proved them both wrong by living and breathing day in day out.
His leg took forever to heal. He followed Bobby around as soon as he was on one crutch. They did exorcisms like the demons waited in line for it. *Do you want fries with your holy water?*

Maybe not in line. They had to hunt them and trap them and endure the vomiting and the blood spitting and the head-twisting. But it felt easy. Maybe because Dean didn't care as much anymore about all the bodies, the people and their last words free from demons. He didn't get any last words from his father. John Winchester had had no time to say goodbye.

Dean often wondered what he would have said.

If he would have said thanks. They said Thank you so often, all those shuddering, dying gasps thanking the hands that brought the end.

If he would have spoken a praise. Would have been a first.

If he would have given a final order.

But ordering Dean to do what? Avenge his death?

Gordon thought so. Gordon hunted the thing, called it the Antichrist. Gordon, who was nuts and right in the end.

Because It fought a war over hell's throne and that war wasn't fought in hell alone.

The Boyking's demons tore Earth apart in the search for the rival:

Lilith.

The oldest of demons. Hiding in little girls -exactly as sick as it sounded. It had escaped at the day at the cemetery.

The day it came to him, it wasn't wearing a little girl.

Lilith sat on Dean's bed and smiled at him.

She wanted his soul, and she offered everything.

For all the slumming he had done in the past he never actually fucked a demon. Werewolf, shapeshifter, catholic priest, all kinds... but no demon. He almost didn't go through with it, because of the girl- young woman. Looking into those human eyes, nothing human looked back at him. Still she was there and knowing what old Lilith enjoyed most, she definitely got her kicks from the girl's awareness of what was happening.

He would rape that girl. Another first.

It wasn't enough to make him stop. He had done a lot worse to achieve a lot less. Another reason not to be scared of hell, because, seriously? How much worse than his life could afterlife be?
Dean pushed that chuckling demon down on the mattress. He wasn't sorry. Opening his belt, he thought, that the girl would be free. She would wake up in her own bed, in her home and all would be a bad dream -was part of the deal; Lilith really had given him everything he wanted. He had forgotten to ask for a sandwich.

“Why?” he asked as soft fingers wrapped around his dick. “Why me?”

She only laughed. Another thing he had forgotten to demand: An answer. An explanation. The reason for all this.

He was just a two-bit hunter. John Winchester's disappointment of a son.

“Why- do you- want me-?” he breathed out between her strokes.

The demon's smile was ugly on that beautiful face. He wouldn't get hard, everything about her was too disgusting.

Till she tugged his head down for a kiss.

So clean that taste. Dean wasn't able to remember when he last kissed a woman who didn't taste of booze and smoke and cheap lipstick. Or if he ever had. He felt like an animal thrusting into this soft and yielding meat, the slim chest vibrated from the chuckle the demon couldn't hold in, he pushed her down and hid his face in the groove between delicate shoulder and smooth neck, in the smell of a woman who had never known men like him.

When his orgasm started to built, something cracked. Above their heads.

That the ceiling did come apart over them did not slow him down. He was about to die and go to hell, he expected shit like this, the howling, barking dogs and thunderstrike...

In the end one hesitating hand on his shoulder alarmed him, like no unholy terror could've.

The demons eyes had flashed white. She pushed him away a bit, he had time enough to think, that something wasn't going as it supposed to go, before the room exploded.

They were like in the eye of a storm, the walls were ripped off and thrown away, while they weren't hit by so much as a stray breeze.

Her thighs clamped down around him and she drew him back in, her hands on his neck. For a full second quietness settled and he asked himself what she was waiting for, her fingers twitched like she barely kept herself from breaking his neck-

He had not come yet. The deal wasn't done.

Something gripped him tight around the middle, next he felt absolutely weightless.

He slammed into the ground, on hands and knees. Brunt force – like the ground knew where to hit – on his bad knee.

Pain woke him up from a month-old stupor, only to take him by the guts and force him flat on the ground.

Sneakers walked into his field of vision. Dean looked up and up, and up and there it was. The Antichrist.

Dean Winchester, personally cock-blocked by the Adversary. His damn luck.
Ashen-gray smoke shot from the girl's mouth, skywards and was yanked back by a fist that closed around empty air. The smoke struggled and almost broke loose, but the kid was merciless, with a dark focus that painted his eyes close to inhuman he pulled at the demon and like her own grip suddenly slipped the smoke gave and-

White light.

Chapter End Notes

Since we have it on good authority that the world as we know it is going to be gone in less than six month...
...
I hope you knew, bc if not that was probably a harsh way to find out -from a stranger - on the internet -surfing for incest porn...Anyhow, since not much matters anymore my writing buddies are much more chilled out about what I post, so I decided to share this baby with you: 89130words in tiny little pieces of dozens of chapters, because I'm a sadist and because I can, mwhuahahaha!!!
And because I'm going to make most of those six months, which means gifting the fandom with something we all wish for:
To go back in time and re-watch the early seasons of Supernatural as if it was the first time. Which is impossible and therefore:
Awesome AU novel! In one episode per week style...not that its a very episodic style, the writing I mean. It's a novel, not a tv series, you have to imagine the stuff in your head...like Sammy in leather pants for a completely random example...like Dean's pale skin covered in protective sigils for another.

Now that I totally ruined your low expectations, Happy Reading
xxxJo

PS
Franny will kill me if I don't mention:
This was not beta-read, he did his best to correct me(electroshocks and everything short of a lob'b'bottomywHaT WaS i goInG ttto sAy § -Ah, yeah, everything that looks like permanent braindamage was probably written by me and since its rude to pick on the retarded keep it to yourself -unless its useful critique, then you know what to do...my muse will take it from there. Cant promise to answer any commeents by myself. My Internet time is still limited-must prioritize,sry
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

JSYK, from now on updates will be made at least once a week. This novel is complete, so you don't worry, we won't leave you hanging in the middle of it,

Bye Bee

Dean's eyelids felt heavy, red light weighed on them. He blinked against the daytime brightness.

He lay on the floor, but not in the motel room, there was a ceiling above him, far above him. First thing that told him he wasn't in Kansas anymore, was that his knee didn't hurt.

Open plan room, nice house, homely, no noise, not even a mouse, cream colored couch, wooden dinner table, milk glass lamps, soft colors, he first recognized the feeling -imprisoned, alone, worthless- before he recognized the place.

It had every detail. Down to the garden with the swing set one could see through the glass front of the winter garden.

Dean calmed himself with the thought it couldn't be real. Then he mentally kicked himself. As if it was better he was in an unreal version of the nice foster home he had spent the worst seven months of his life at.

The seven months after-

Shit. It was there, in the kitchen, only ten feet away from him.

Dean struggled to get up and ready.

But It didn't come any nearer.

It waited.

After a few seconds during which Dean's mind screamed to run and his legs asked, Where to, stupid? We are at 1987.

"You are Dean Winchester," It said, like It wasn't sure, or surprised, irritated of sorts.

"Naw, I just look like him. Dean Winchester is taller and has bad knee, you're-" He shut himself up when he felt a telekinetic push-pull, static, like being touched. Like that thing's powers felt him up.

It watched him with narrowed eyes. Like It probed him-(bad choice of words) like It tested his nerves.

Dean stared It down till the bad-touching stopped and the Thing spoke again, "Before we begin, you should understand something:

There is nothing, I cannot do to you here. We are in hell. There is no way out, no place to hide, the only way is through because your own soul betrays you here.
You will answer my questions. Under how much pressure, is completely up to you. You can give me the truth. Or I could break open your mind. That would be unpleasant - for you, of course.”

In all fairness the kid was intense. Dean wondered how long one had to practice in front of a mirror, to make a puppy seem so cold and terrifying.

“Why are you in league with Lilith?”

*In league?*

“Answer me.”

“I'm not-”

It came closer.

Denial probably wasn't the best way to start, when you had been caught with your pants down, literally.

It stood at least three inches taller than Dean. “Look, I,” Dean held his hands up and searched for a way out when his gaze fell at the window on the far side of the room. The window to the street, the ledge he spent on all his daytime here. Waiting for his father to come back, to change his mind, to take him back, to ride up this hill with Sammy in the backseat, who wasn't dead, because Dad saved him and now they picked him up...but denial and hope slowly died-

The Thing in front of him shifted it's stance impatiently and snapped Dean out of the memory, he stumbled a step back. Dammit, he had to get a grip on himself. That Thing was playing his mind like flute.

“It will only get worse,” It informed him unemotional, like this wasn't fun, “The longer you stay here, the worse it gets. I don't even have to do anything yet. Hell generates it's own torture. I don't understand what this place is to you, but as we are in the Dungeon, I guess this is some sort of prison to you?”

“Was that a question?” Dean spit out.

“You are a hunter,” it ignored his counter-question. “Hunters are neutral, why have you sided with Lilith?”

“She offered me a good deal. But I am not on her side. You – Her, to me you are the same thing.”

It narrowed It's eyes again, like It knew Dean lied. But hey, It had started with the bullshit of hunters being neutral. Most hunters, like Gordon or Kubrick, would take the devil they knew, in other words the Queen of the Crossroads, over the Boyking, which no one really knew what, who, why or even where it came from.

“What did she want from you?”

“My soul.”

Monster-puppy was confused. “What for?”

“I dunno.”

It drilled an angry-puppy-stare into him.
“She didn't say. I forgot to ask,” Shut up, he told himself, you're only provoking It.

“I believe you,” the kid assured him, like Dean needed coddling.

Dishes and cutlery rattled in the sink. She stood there, like she had grown from the ground, at the sink, washing dishes, turned her head, her dark doe eyes found his and she smiled, offered, “Dean, come here, help me a little. You missed dinner again. You would make me very happy if you would at least eat some pudding, hmm?”

To this day she was one of the most beautiful women he ever met. It wasn't real, just a memory. But her smile hurt so much, he wanted to cry. What business did she have to smile at him. Her dark, big eyes so caring for her prisoner.

She had two kids of her own, her youngest a spitting image of Sammy. Sure he was too old, his hair was shorter and he was skinnier, but to Dean, it was like living with his brother's ghost. The kid was lucky enough never to be home, always over at a friends house. Dean would beat him up one day, make him into a bloody, crying mess. Break his skinny nose. Wipe that smile off her face-

“Dean,” she dried her hands and would tell him it was alright to talk to her, she wouldn't tell anyone he started to talk again, it would be their secret...

-it wasn't real-

...she told him, it wasn't his fault his dad couldn't take care of him anymore...

-the problem was, that it had been real. Very real. For seven months it had been Dean's reality. Till after this place broke him and his dad came back and collected the pieces.

Someone gripped his arm painfully, a piercing pain that felt like a blessing.

It slipped all away, down, deep down to memories long gone.

The foster mom was gone.

The feeling of being trapped too.

The room remained – but it didn't seem real anymore, more like a stage prop, walls that would fall away when you gave them a fierce push.

The kid seemed worried.

Interesting. Dean had met many monsters with friendly faces, but this one...it seemed sincere. It had to be fake of course. But it faked concern well: how the kid steeled his voice: “You answered my questions truthfully,” but slipped up in between like he was sorry, “There is no reason to stay here any longer. Follow me.”

When It let go of Dean's arm, the pain went away and with it the protection from this place.

No all of it rushed back at once, but the empty room became more solid with each second and reality crept closer, hiding behind the furniture, ready to transform into a living thing.

Dean shook the feeling off, just in time to witness how the kid stuck his finger into his mouth and doodled with spit on the glass of the backdoor. When he opened the door, it didn't lead to the garden Dean had seen through the glass.

He had to jump down and the door of...Bobby's old tow truck slammed shut behind him. This was
the salvage yard. On a very wet day. Chilly. But not anywhere near cold enough for January in Sioux Falls.

“We're still in hell, aren't we?”

“Yes,” the kid kicked a can away, “But you do not have to be concerned. This place is...not unfriendly.”

Interesting choice of words. Maybe because in hell they went by the rule, that there were no friendly places, because if there were, it wouldn't be hell and hell would go to hell in a handbasket-

The kid was smiling at him.

Creepy.

But on the other hand good, because the creepier It acted, the easier it was not to think of this thing as a kid. “So that's the deal? I don't make a fuss and you go easy on me?”

“I can hurt you here as easily as in the Dungeon, therefore it would be incredibly stupid to try and deceive me. Not to forget strenuous on my nerves.”

“You tellin' me you didn't enjoy that little mindfuck you gave me?” Dean asked to test if the puppy kept up his harmless act. He needed to figure out It's play. He asked too few questions with Lilith, he was not about to make the same mistake twice.

“I've told you already, what you experienced in the Dungeon wasn't my doing. I do not even exactly know what it did to you. For that I would have needed to break into your mind. You gave me no reason to intrude.

Forgive me if I do not empathize befittingly to your experience, but I do not know you well enough to understand what was so disturbing about the nice lady who does the dishes and offers you pudding.”

For a few seconds after the kid ended, Dean just stared, then he asked, “Are you fucking kidding me?”

The kid narrowed his eyes, thinking, like this wasn't obviously a rhetorical question.

“Empathy?” Dean added, because, seriously?!

Puppy's eyes narrowed further: Angry puppy. “You insinuated, I did enjoy your pain and you mistook me to have caused it.” Dean got the feeling the Antichrist took offense when called sadistic, “Neither is correct. When I bring on pain, I will inform you beforehand. And as I doubt you will ever succeed in making me really, really angry, you don't have to assume I'll ever enjoy your pain.”

Yup. Does not like being called a sadist.

The kid strolled ahead and flung a pile of cars out of his way like the moody Hulk with psychic powers. After a few more steps, the Antichrist turned around to make sure Dean followed.

After he closed the gap, he watched the kid from the side and noted, that he really looked unhappy.

Okay. Dean was in hell. Which was a lot more crazy than he imagined. So if crazy was the beat of the drum, he would march to it, till he found a way outta here. Which left the question open, how does one apologize for hurting the Antichrist's feelings? “I didn't mean- I mean I meant what I said,
“but...” this wasn't going well. “Maybe it wasn't right to say those things, but you gotta understand- I have no frickin' clue what you are!”

If this was a game, where they pretended the Antichrist was not evil and Dean should join him or something, then the kid didn't play along.

He shot Dean a toxic glare and said, “Why should I tell you?”

“Quid pro quo, Clarice,” he answered, a genuine reflex to quote Silence of the Lambs.

The kid didn't seem understand why Dean had called him Clarice.

Which was prove they really were in hell. Because Dean had always known, that there would be no TV in hell.

“It is actually an interesting question,” the kid sat down at the wet hood of an rusty VW beetle. “What are you?”

“Me?” Why were they suddenly talking about him?

“I will answer your question, I am human, fully human, not like many assume, a cambion.”

Human? Was that kid-, Dean had time to wonder, before that pull-push-pull dragged him closer for the Thing to inspect, “Now about you,” It asked, “What is so special about you, therefore Lilith could want you soul?”

It felt like fingers, literally in his spine. One more minute of this and he would puke.

“Answer me.”

“I wont tell you a thing, as long as you're bad-touching me!!”

The fingers pulled away from his spine and in an instant the kid had pushed himself against Dean physically.

He didn't know where he took the common sense not to push back, but let the kid breath down his neck and reprimand him:

“Do not mistake my courtesy for kindness. I have only lead you out of the Dungeon because I find it unpractical to talk to you while your mind is under attack,” his fist curled in Dean's shirt, “You will not be allowed to stay in the Meadows if you become stubborn here, do you understand?”

One more hot puff of breath tickled Dean's neck and it was irritating, how little he cared. After how the touch of the kid's mind felt like, he would have assumed, to be touched for real would be disgusting. But truth was, it wasn't even really upsetting. Just like being crowded by a large, harmless animal – unfamiliar, but not alarming.

“Do you understand?”

“Yea, got it.”

The fist on him relaxed, “Answer my question now.”

That was a bit of a problem, “I really don't know what Lilith wanted with my soul.”

“Did you not ask?” the disbelief crunched up the kid's face comically.
He looked really funny like that. But Dean would not laugh, he would not! “No, I assumed I would go to hell.”

“But you did not ask to what cause?”

Slowly but surely this stilted interrogation got on Dean's nerves, “What does that mean to what cause? Why should I ask that – it's not rocket surgery to figure out what happens to souls in hell!”

The kid's eyes widened and he let go of him, shaking his head slightly, looking at him -weird again, not staring, just weird- “You are either,” he sounded amazed, “impossibly ignorant, or you really care very little about yourself. Souls are, as far as anything is, eternal. What could be so important,” the kid chewed him out. “you would not even take a minute to inform yourself about the consequences?”

“What do you care?”

The kid pressed his lips together, stern, still not letting up about being in Dean's space. Had this frickin-laser-focus on him like he was hard to figure out. “Maybe I can offer the same thing Lilith has?”

It took Dean everything in him not to use the close distance between them to sucker punch that demon-spawn. He swallowed, grit his teeth and made himself clear, “You're the thing that took my father away from me.” He would not make a deal with this scumbag.

“The man in the graveyard?” It remembered, “That was John Winchester?”

It hadn't even known.

“I'm sorry.”

-it wasn't the words, but how sincere they sounded, that ticked Dean off: “Yeah, I'm sure your heart's bleeding for the guy who shot your daddy in the face.”

It's head twitched to the side, but fast the tension drained from it's features and it adopted a look of pity. “You make many assumptions,” It said. “But I guess those who know very little have nothing else to go by.”

And with this last insult to his intelligence It vanished. Like It had become invisible. Dean was pretty sure It was gone – the kid had felt so real, so human up close, that he left a cold hole since he was gone.
Dean spent what felt like several days in the salvage yard. Time was hard to tell, the sun never set, the sky was always glaring gray, nothing ever changed. Yet still, from time to time Dean tried to open the doors to Bobby's house, but they were always like glued shut. Sometimes he walked for hours, but he always ended up in the same place, like he was running circles. The only break in the mind-numbing selfsameness was that sometimes it rained a bit and other times it got colder.

It should have been -well, like hell, to be alone with his thoughts and nothing to do, no way out. But it was okay. Maybe because the salvage yard provided just about the right level of discomfort – he had to find a car to hole up against the rain or walk around to get feeling into his cooled down limbs, or not do these things and get numb, and cold and wet and miserably aching, which was some sort of entertainment, he guessed.

The first time he fell asleep, he was genuinely surprised. He had been sure sleep wasn't a thing in hell. But hey, he was impossibly ignorant and prone to make assumptions, so he shouldn't be surprised to get stuff wrong like all the time, right?

He tried not to think about how long the Antichrist planned to keep him here, or if it already forgot about him. There was no escape but sleep.

But dreams were rare and even awake hard to come by. So when his mind drifted off to a pleasant experience he had once here in the back seat of this very '72 Dodge Polara, he first felt annoyed when something outside clattered.

That little waitress had bounced on his cock like he was her favorite stallion and she had smelled like fried onions, but in a good way, fresh fried onions, sweet, good enough to eat and her ass-

Nothing ever moved in this place; other than him nothing in Hell's-Salvage-Yard was alive, there weren't even rats.

He stayed down and calmed his breath and listened into the pouring heavy rain, but with every second the silence ticked away his heart beat faster, because he just knew-

A head moved by the car window, then a face came into view, a twelve year old girl -with beautifully evenly dispersed freckles, peered in, mouth open in an almost-smile, predatory.

He only sprung into motion when she ripped the car door off, but he had nowhere to go but shrink back to the other side.

Her eyes glazed over milky white.

Dean wasn't really surprised. When had anything ever worked out for him? He didn't even manage to sell his soul, now she got him for free. And she would probably eat him alive if how she licked her lips was any indication.

“Having happy thoughts in hell?” she struck a intrigued-girl-like pose, before she grinned, “Naughty boy. Did you miss me, Dean?” she touched herself between the legs, “Oh, I missed you so much,” she promised sickeningly coy and crawled into the backseat with him, reaching out for his thigh.

But before she could touch him, a growl announced the largest, ugliest dog Dean had ever seen – it sunk its jaw in Lilith's leg, draggin her out of the car.
The angry high pitch she screamed, bothered the monster dog none. It tossed her around like a doll and another three- no, four of what had to be hellhounds chased after them.

He was still staring, as the door behind him gave and he tumbled out of the car backwards. Rolling off over his shoulder he came back on his feet fast – just not fast enough to outrun the two demons:

He only managed to push the guy away, but the girl punched him hard enough to stun him and then her fist connected another time, thudding harsh and his vision grayed out.

He didn't black out completely, but he couldn't move or fight, when they carried him a few feet before they dropped him – he heard the Dodge's trunk get opened and when they heaved him up again, he heard the girl seethe- “Oh Dean, always a dead weight...” and then he fell.

He fell like the trunk was a bottomless pit. And when he crashed, it finally knocked him out.
Chapter 5

The cell he had come to in was one of Alcatraz. And not the tourist trap, but the glory days:

It was always shortly before light's out, they were all in their 5x9 single cells, guards coming and going, a never ending loop of the same time of the day, unless...well unless the sallow lights went out or worse, the guards came for Donny.

The thing was, this wasn't Dean's nightmare. It took him some time to figure out, but only one of the guys was real, the others were, just like the guards, a permanent fixture. Fidgets of Donny's imagination, or memories or whatever. But they were not real, they didn't respond to Dean, didn't mind him didn't do anything to him, no matter how obvious he tried to break out of his cell Frank-Morris-style.

Not that it worked, when Dean wasn't looking, the damn wall rebuilt itself and he had to start chipping at it once again. Funnily enough his pocket knife did not restore itself, it grew blunt and shrunk as he whetted it on the metal bedstead; which was bare by the way – another hint that he wasn't supposed to be here, his cell didn't even have the most basic comfort of a mattress or a blanket. Next time he went to hell he would wear more layers than a tee and a henley.

The other inmates jeered and laughed, because Donny was on his knees praying he wouldn't have to go to the hole, that the guards would have mercy on him, *I'm no trouble*, he swore up and down, as if anyone would listen to him, as if his begging didn't urge the crowd on-

"Donny, shut up!" Dean tried to out-scream the others, "They're not real!!"

But now Donny, who was in the cell across from Dean's, was covering his ears and kept his eyes fixed firmly on the floor, so he didn't have to see Dean.

The poor guy was still fucking freaked out by him; ever since Dean had figured out this was Donny's show and started to communicate, he had gotten worse. Like he couldn't make sense of a friendly face.

And into his hundredth's try of Dean's, walked someone who didn't belong here either:

His Royal Highness in a hoodie strolled down their row and stopped at Dean's cell. Reached through the bars and when Dean gave him the slip, simply stepped through them and grasped Dean's upper arm in his death grip again.

And suddenly he saw that his cell had been open the whole time and the guards and the other people were gone.

Only Donny remained. And as Dean was herded away by the Antichrist, he saw how an invisible force dragged the poor guy from his cell to spend another night in the hole; Donny screamed and begged and ugly-cried-

Dean wouldn't move another inch before he knew, “What are you doing to him in there?”

“Nothing,” the kid frowned, “This is hell.”

“So what, you have to torture him?!”

“I'm not doing anything,” the kid claimed and pulled a major bitch-face when Dean dug his heels in
and wouldn't go on. That was the biggest bullshit he had ever heard.

“Move,” the vice grip around his arm intensified to put some emphasis on the fact his highness was in a bit of a hurry.

Dean tried to shrug his hand off anyhow, “No,” he had spent days listening to Donny getting tortured and now it was happening again. “Stop it, stop hurting him, or I wont come with you.”

The frustrated growl made Dean question his own sanity, because had he really just provoked the fucking Antichrist?

But suddenly the abuse to his arm softened to a bearable level of pain – one that didn't make his knees unsteady, and then the kid looked down at him really patient, before he said,

“For the last time: I'm not doing this. It is this part of hell that hurts him. It is called the Dungeon, you were here before, when you saw the woman who wanted you to eat pudding. It serves as a prison, renders any soul and most demons helpless within seconds. Because it consists of desperation.

Him for an example,” the kid looked at the end of the corridor, where Donny had been taken. His eyes seemed to penetrate the walls, “In life he was a prisoner who was not very popular among the inmates – on the other hand he has nyctophobia, that made solitary confinement a horrible experience. He spent half of his time in solitary, the other half abused by inmates and guards. Until one of them bashed his head in. He is still caught between those two horrors. You couldn't have helped him, you are not part of his experience.”

“But you could help him.”

The kid looked at Dean and then very serious asked, “Why start with him?”

“What?”

“I'm not saying I do not sympathize with him, but I can't save every damned soul in hell, so why start with him?”

“Because he is right there!”

His argument was considered like something new and foreign, but interesting, but then the kid shook his head. “Your approach has it's merits...” but- would follow, because the pressure on his arm increased, “But I am strategist.”

“The word 's sociopath,” he let his mouth run off, in hope to irritate the kid enough to argue, and-

“You don't even know what he is in for-” succeeded.

“Doesn't matter! No one deserves this!”

“No,” the kid agreed, nodding “No one does. But we have to leave right now,” he insisted almost pleading, “I only kept you here to hide you. Demons stay out of the Dungeon if possible, but as awake as you are now, you are attracting their attention. They will come looking who this lively soul is who screams bloody murder in the deepest circles of hell.”

“What, you're scared of some demons? Aren't you their king?”

“No, that was my father, and yes, the demons that come and go -uneffected by the Dungeon- they do scare me and should scare you too,” he leaned in and his voice dropped to a soft assurance, “Because
I will rather annihilate you, than let them take you alive.”

Okay.

“Will you follow me now?”

Dean nodded.

“Try to stay close, or their cell walls will draw you in and throw you back into your cell. The one with the nice lady,” the kid added like it still iritated him that someone’s worst nightmare was a pleasant, pretty foster-mom.

They walked out of the prison corridor, into an completely empty underground garage, wide and yet oppressive, so well lit it felt like one huge trap.

“Wha-”

“Sshhh!” the Antichrist shushed him.

Quietly they walked the interior ramp spiraling up. On the next level a few cars littered the wide space. Dean just wanted to tell the kid he could let go of his arm – he wasn't going to run off or anything, as he heard gasps.

There between two cars, a woman was on the ground, struggling-

“Don't even think about it.”

Dean tried to tear away, but the kid had a grip on him that just wasn't normal.

“If you give into your instincts and go over to her, you’re going to walk right back into your cell. Come on,” the kid whined like Dean was being stubborn over nothing. “You can't help her.”

Just then the woman got up, on hobbting feet and broke free of whatever got her. Her knees were bloody, she kicked off her remaining shoe and ran, face wide in panic, but quiet. She ran like Dean had seen people run before, run for their life, with no energy to spare on crying for help.

She made it to the passage leading to the elevators and then she screamed.

“Uh,” the kid said awkward, “We’re...uhm, well, we heading the same direction. Try not to engage with her,” he ordered before he tugged Dean along again.

They had to step over her to get to the elevators. Dean tried not to look, but even in the corner of his eye and with her attacker invisible, it was pretty obvious she was choked, and raped. She was still fighting.

The doors glided open and revealed an elevator chamber that did not fit the concrete-stainless-steel-style of the garage, too beige, too seventies. But then again, they had walked into the garage straight from Alcatraz.

On their ride up his arm started to throb something bad under the abuse it suffered, but Dean kept his mouth shut. He had done the math by now: Alcatraz had become less real as soon as the kid touched him and so had his own personal hell. He really didn't want to see what made this elevator someone's hell.

And just as he thought that – he heard a sniffle.
Behind him a girl with Charlie's Angels' hair clutched on the emergency phone like it was her lifeline. “Please-someone help me,” she sounded raw, like she knew nobody was listening, “Doesn't anyone hear me, please, the elevator’s stuck, I'm trapped, I-”

“Hey-” Dean tried.

She whipped around and shrieked, her face deformed and the screeching became inhumane—and stopped as she was flung into the opposite elevator wall. The whole elevator rattled from the force and she slumped to the floor.

“This now,” the kid said very calm, “That was me.” He shook his head about Dean, “I told you not to engage with them.”

The elevator stopped. The doors opened, revealing a stark mix of reddish-black-dark and orange-white-bright.

A roomy place where most walls were of wooden ornamental lattice and from these walls flooded sunlight broken by shadows. A woman in a beautiful orange robe, with hair down to her ass, touched the lattice and gazed outside, her whole posture spelling out her yearning and her resignation.

“Do not,” the kid said slowly, “talk to her,” like Dean was retarded.

Then he looked around, gloomy, making Dean plenty nervous and ask himself what could lurk in the many secret corners of an oriental palace.

But then the kid suddenly let go of Dean's arm.

Nothing changed. Aside from the blunt pain becoming a little bit more exited now that blood was circulating freely again.

“Stay here,” the kid ordered.

Yeah, right.

After the kid made it only a few yards down the hallway, he turned around and frowned at Dean, “Stay,” he repeated.

What did the puppy-boy think? That Dean was some kind of dog?

As soon as the Antichrist was out of sight, Dean followed carefully to see what was going on.

And speak of the devil, there the kid was surrounded by Doberman dogs, three of them, wagging their tails and whining happily at him, while he talked to the girl-demon that had thrown Dean into Alcatraz.

The dogs were so stoked to be able to snuffle the kid, that they didn't notice Dean right away, but when they did they growled and their shadows grew bigger-

“Easy, boys,” the kid leaned down to pet them one after another, smiling when they nuzzled and licked his hands.

Figured, the Antichrist knew better how to interact with dogs than with people. Wasn't Hitler like that too?
The demon considered Dean with a smirk, predatory, but anything looked predatory coming from something with liquid black eyes.

Dean stared the thing down and stayed exactly where he was. Not that it did him any good. When they picked up their talk, he heard they were talking in old tongues, sounded pretty dark, and fussy. Even when they did rise above a whisper Dean heard the heat in the discussion...

Puppy chewed silently on the last thing his girlfriend said and then she touched his arm, crooning, "Moch’alai Aziz-"

"Don't," he shrugged her off. "I made up my mind, Iscah, trust has nothing to do with it."

She pursed her lips, handed him a glass bottle and left, slapping her thigh sharp to make the dogs follow.

"Trouble in paradise?" he asked as soon as man-puppy had walked up to him.

The kid regarded with a look that spelled a clear, What the fuck are you on?

And yeah, maybe it wasn't the most common saying here in hell, so, "It's a phrase," he started to explain-

"I know," the kid informed him, straightened his shoulders and lead back to the area with the silent woman, "I just don't understand how it applies on a commander and his subordinate."

"Sure," Dean said, mostly to make conversation.

But the kid jumped at his comment, "I may have history with her, but not a personal relationship," like Dean had hit a nerve, "She is just a tool."

"And denial is just a river in Egypt."

"Why should I deny having relations with someone?"

Dean bit back a laugh, relations?

"This is hell," the kid stated indigent, "Moral constructs mean very little here, so why lie about-"

"Ever heard the phrase, The lady doth protest too much?"

"No?"

Great, now he had to explain Shakespeare, "If there's nothing going on, why 's my little comment bothering you at all?"

"Because I try to educate you about hell," the kid explained with a pissed off twitch of his head, "You are going to stay here for some time and your assumptions grate on my nerves."

"What is some time?"

"As long as I decide it is."

"You can't do that, I- have no deal with you, he meant to say, but when he felt a pressure on his throat, he shut up, before it became more than a threat and the kid would pull a full Darth-Vader on him.
“Let me be clear,” the kid was towering over him again, “I could do anything to you. That I consider you a prisoner of war, is a privilege that depends on your co-operation. If I find out your second contact with Lilith was not an accident, if you try to spy for her, or challenge me in any way-”

“I'm not,” he swallowed before he could start to sound like he was scared.

“Good,” the kid nodded. “Now take off your shirt.”

Why did he always end up with the perverts? Seriously, was he wearing a fuck-me-sign or something?

“Oh, you with your assumptions,” the kid whined. “Like I told you, I consider you a prisoner of war. I don't let my troops practice raptio, no matter how convenient it would be to have souled hosts. So why do you expect me to personally disregard your human dignity?”

What? … … No, really, what?

“Where did I loose you?” asked the kid godawfully patient.

“Your demons don't possess people?” that had to be bullshit.

“No, of course not, they have orders to possess corpses. They are soldiers, not tourists.”

“That girl, back there, didn't look like a corpse.”

“Iscah likes them fresh. Maybe that's the reason why she smokes mentols. Now take off your shirt, I don't have all day,” he scrunched up his nose and shook the bottle impatiently.

“What's that for,” Dean asked about the bottle and he took off his henley.

“Both shirts.”

Fine so he would be the adult and quit stalling and connive at not having his questions answered. At least it was warm in this cell. But when the kid produced a five inch needle thingy from his pocket, Dean reviewed his intent to be strong and silent.

“Relax,” the kid rolled his eyes at him, “I told you, -prisoner of war-, that means I'm not going to torture you.”

How was he supposed to know it meant that? Not that he believed it, because, seriously?

“Sit down,” the kid nodded towards the plain bench, “I need to paint sigils on your skin, that will take a while.”

He sat and noted how the kid walked behind him, “What sigils?”

“Those which allow the more intricate glamour spells to take hold.”

That didn't sound good, actually the sound of it alone made his stomach cramp. He didn't want some freaky ass magic take hold on him. Everything in him screamed to run-

And he almost jumped out of his skin, as the kid stroked his bare shoulder. What the fuck had he done that for?!

Holding up his hand placating, the Antichrist viewed him with pity. “You don't have to be afraid, it's not going to hurt, I promise.”
Sure, just drink the kool-aid – what the hell was he doing sitting here, he should fight, he should run, but there was nowhere to run, no one who could help...

..no one could make it better, he messed up, Sammy was dead because he left him alone and now Dean had nowhere to be, because Sammy was nowhere. And his dad didn't want him anymore, wouldn't want Dean to run and find him, he could just die here on this window ledge waiting for a car that would never come-

He gasped for air when suddenly his sight was filled with a sun-speckled face, instead of the view on the street and without thinking he tore his hand out of the kid's grasp.

For a second he thought he would go back to the foster home, but the gilded cage of that woman and its more than comfortable warm sunlight drowned that out and it became more real, until he was able to see dust dancing in the rays of light between him and the kid who still was crouching in front of him, close, but not touching.

“You need to calm down, or the Dungeon will eat you alive, there is no reason to be scared like that, this is just a pipette,” the kid stabbed the blunt tip against his own hand. “See?”

He looked up at Dean with this wide concerned eyes, so much feeling in them, it made Dean want to scream.

“Or is it the magic that scares you? You don't know much about magic, do you?”

It should have pissed him off a lot more than it did, to be talked to like a frickin' child – but the thing was, this guy with his stupid bangs and his stupid puppy-dog-eyes was probably the least offensive being in the whole universe, so when he began to explain, how invasive, permanent magic was quite simple – like an axe; while the temporary softcore magic needed time and skill and so on – Dean actually listened and the only worry that remained was how nice this hellspawn was to him...

“...I wouldn't use invasive magic on you without necessity,” crouching like that it looked like the kid tried to make himself little, nonthreatening, “I wouldn't use magic at all, but you need to blend in. Your spirit, even your flesh, actually your whole being is like a beacon in hell.”

“You could just let me go,” he hated how small his voice sounded. “I wont deal with Lilith anymore. I learned my lesson – that was beyond stupid,” besides, his dad would have hated him for becoming a whore for them. He wouldn't have understood that Dean hadn't had the strength to say no.

“No offense, but I think you're lying,” the kid stood up. He didn't seem pissed, just more pitying than before.

He sat down behind Dean, close behind, his knee touched Dean's thigh, before he moved it away.

The bottle unscrewed, a ripe smell pervaded the air. One freakishly big hand touched Dean's shoulder and gently pushed him to turn a little, maybe so that more light fell on his back.

“It's not going to hurt,” the kid said over the clinking sound of metal against glass, “Maybe tickle a little,” his hand, warm and dry remained on Dean's skin and it felt nice. He didn't want it to feel nice, but it did. He hadn't been touched in a while, not like this, without a real purpose, but with a carefree kindness.

It didn't tickle. The sticky liquid wasn't cold either like Dean had suspected. In a soothing pace circles and stripes were laid on his skin.

Once the kid's paw in his neck pushed him to bend forward a little more, but he soon let up again,
holding Dean’s arm now that his shoulders were completely covered in lines of this stuff-

“I probably don’t wanna know what the black goo is, right?”

“Nothing nasty,” the kid answered absentminded, “Mostly hell hound blood. As long as it’s fresh they’re going to be a little skittish around you.”

Maybe that what the kid sprouted was normal, perfectly conversational in hell, but where Dean came from-?

It made Dean huff a laugh. He hadn’t thought hell would be so crazy. Bad-acid-trip-crazy sure, not Mad-tea-party-crazy.

“You’re not doodling dicks back there, are you?”

“Stay still,” the kid chided, and then paused, “But you’re right, I should have put them on your face, they look a little bit silly on your shoulder blades, like stumpy wings.”

When Dean looked at him -he had to, because the kid had sounded perfectly serious, downright grumpy because his dick-doodles didn’t work out like planned- he was met with the most mirthful pair of eyes he had ever seen.

It would have been hard to believe that someone so sweet-looking was evil. That he was able to crush every bone in a man’s body with a thought and a flicker of his hand.

It would have been hard to believe, but Dean had dragged himself over there, passing out from pain twice to get to his father and he remembered, he remembered how his father’s body had felt in his arms, how it had been loose and tight in all the wrong places, a sack of skin holding together mashed and crunchy insides.

The Antichrist studied him.

Go ahead, read my mind, he thought at him, See, what you’ve done and then tell me again how you didn’t enjoy it.

But the kid wasn’t reading his mind. Probably didn’t need to, not when how much Dean hated him was obvious.

Hesitant the kid pushed him to reach his shoulder top again, finished a line and asked, “Could you,” he swallowed, “Could you turn around?”

Dean took a deep breath and did. There was no use in being stupid and belligerent, not when he wanted to get out of this with his bones intact. And he knew how sensitive the Antichrist was about being called on his monster-status.

The kid-Dammit, was is hard to think of it as anything but a kid, but seriously, were there no scissors in hell? Those bangs got into the kid’s eyes again and he blew them away, deeply concentrated on the loops and curls he drew on Dean’s chest, right around and up to his nipple-

“Dude!”

“Sorry, did it tickle?”

He could only glare at the kid.

“I will try for a different design on the other side,” he said so sincerely apologetic Dean wanted to
punch him. And for that matter:

“What's that supposed to mean, *design*? You're making this stuff up?”

“Yeah,” the kid nodded, “of course,” he said very slowly, shaking his head about Dean, muttering to himself, “As if mild mannered magic occurred naturally in hell.”

“Did you have to make it look so girly?”

A grin split the kid's face in two again and without meeting Dean's eyes he nodded, “Yeah.” -he had to.

Whispering what sounded like quiet ESP, the kid put some final touches on Dean's arm and the last sigil heated up a little.

Looking at his work, he said, “I don't think it's too feminine, I think it suits you perfectly.”

“Sure, whatever.” Asshole.

“You can put you clothes back on.”

“What? Just...over all that” reeking, bloody, “*Blechh*?”

“Oh, this is nothing,” the kid grinned, “You better get used being dirty. Wait until you fall into a slug-tentacle-monster pit. Their slime doesn't come off for weeks.”

“You're shittin' me!”

“No, actually, I'm taking pity on you or I wouldn't warn you. The slug-tentacle-monster pit is like an initiation in hell. Anyone sooner or later stumbles into something the like. Are you hungry?”

Dean was starving – but what was new? He shrugged.

“Then we have to find someone in the Meadows who has food and knew you when they were alive.”

What?
It turned out it was pretty much like the kid had phrased it:

If you wanted to eat in hell, you had to find a place where both the food and you were on the same level of reality and for that, the one whose experience created this part of hell, had to have experienced you as real - in simpler words: known you.

Dean could have spent half a lifetime figuring out who he knew in hell who was bored into stupor by eating or preparing food or selling it, but thanks to his tour-guide the Antichrist, they only had to crawl through a window, into a windy, harsh cold city street.

Dean wouldn't have recognized the place. He had seen too many like it. Where people made a life out of other people's trash. In his mind all cities and the people within were like this, dusted with dirt of a life that passed them by. He always had either rushed through a city too fast to be there or stranded until Dad called him on the next job ... until he had more purpose than just survive from one day to the other. Without Dad he could have easily stayed in a place like this forever.

The improvised shelter they were approaching, with the church bus beside it and the people lining up to get a warm meal, it didn't seem familiar either. He had waited in quite a few lines like this in his life.

Only when over the bowl of seven-can soup, steaming white in the cold air, he heard, “Mornin’, Dean,” shy and timid, he recognized him. Father Ned Spinelli.

When Dean had known him, seven? eight years ago, his full beard hadn't been salt' pepper, and he certainly had had a few pounds less.

Father Ned handed out bread to the Antichrist and Dean didn't really like those two to meet.

“Whos'ya friend?” the priest made his trademark monosyllabic mumbly conversation.

“Are you aware, where you are?” the kid asked curious, stepped aside to let the next in line collect his bread.

“Mhm,” Father Ned answered and looked at Dean, his friendly eyes a little dull, he offered a small smile and asked, “How 's hell treatin' ya, Dean?”

He didn't really know what to say.

The kid stared at them, like this was a most fascinating turn of events.

“I'm fine. I'm not really here to stay,” he finally offered an answer.

“Jus' passin' thruh, huh?” Father Ned nodded resigned, like he didn't believe it more than he had, when Dean knew him in life and told him he didn't need to go to a youth shelter, he was fine, he was almost eighteen anyways, his dad would call him in a week, or two, he just needed a job to pay his meals; he wasn't homeless, not really, he didn't need help, he was just a little broke at the moment, but he would pay for everything...

And he had. Sent Spinelli's church the first few bucks he made in the next game of pool he hustled. He wasn't taking without giving back when there were so many people who needed a hot meal more than him.
What Dean didn't get and why he was still standing here at the side of the table, staring at the padre handing out bread and snippets of smalltalk, was why? What brought a guy like Ned Spinelli here?

“Your meal is going to get cold,” the Antichrist reminded him and maybe it would better to get away. Escape the wind in the shadow of a wall nearby. Escape Ned's eyes, more lively now, taking him in, like he collected all the differences of how much Dean had grown out of that slick, spitfire teen he had known.

His small smile told Dean, the padre didn't mind how rugged he had become. But it vanished fast, when Dean shivered against another gust of wind.

“Got a coat for'ya,” Father Ned nodded to side, where blankets, jackets and coats lay in neat pile.

“I'm good.”

The kid nudged him with his elbow, “You should take it.”

“I said, I'm good!” Dammit, he cursed himself, he should keep it together, couldn't be so damned thin-skinned around the fucking Antichrist. He chewed on his lip and caught Ned staring at it.

Without any warning the kid grabbed Ned's neck, held on for the span of a breath and it was like Dean were able to watch the light go out in the father's eyes.

When Ned was released, he carried on like nothing happened, asked the old man next in line, “Ya takin' ya pills, Manny?” nodded to the non-answer he got and mumbled, “That's good.”

“Hey,” Dean tried, “Padre?”

“Som'more bread,” he just held the basket towards Dean and made eye-contact, but his eyes-

“What did you do to him?”

“What had to be done,” the kid said dispassionate, and turned to leave, “He was on the brink to have lusty thoughts about you.”

What the- “So what?!” before he could think better of it, he had grabbed the Antichrist by his stupid hoodie and made him stop, “Who the fuck made you the jerk-off-police?!”

The kid had pursed his lips again in what Dean was starting to recognize as his standard-bitch-face: Somewhere between annoyed and frustrated. “These are the Meadows,” the kid spread his arms, careful with the bowl, “they are designed to paralyze without pain. Arousal is not possible here, not without outward stimuli, like for an example a very alive soul like yours. His thoughts about you are uncommon enough they would have alerted Lilith to our position. How do you think she found you in the Meadows before?”

Oops – his lusty thoughts about a certain waitress.

The kid found a place to sit and ate with a certain curiosity, that showed he wasn't hungry at all.

Dean joined him a little sullen.

The bread was good, the beans more salty than spicy, but he had expected nothing else. As he was cleaning out the last of his soup with the last of his bread, and the kid offered him his half-eaten bowl and his untouched bread, he took it and realized that that didn't add up:

“How come you can eat that stuff, I mean shouldn't it be all smoke and mirrors to you?”
The kid smiled indulgent, like he thought that was an excellent question. “All of hell is real to me, because I have become part of hell, like the demons.”

“And how does that work?” -the kid said he was human, but that could have been bullshit. Dean was just trying to pin down if the Antichrist was something that bled.


The invasive kind, he didn't say. The topic seemed to bother him. Which was kinda rich, after he just gave the padre a lobotomy.

Father Ned hadn't deserved that. Didn't deserve to be here either. If being gay was enough to get thrown into hell Dean was fucked, because the things he had done with women alone, he was pretty sure they were way worse than anything the padre had done. Not to forget what they had done togeth-

The kid frowned at him.

Screw you, he thought at him – the memory of the padre on his knees, sucking his dick, was hardly a lusty one for Dean. More a guilty one. He shouldn't have let him, that had been stupid. But back then he hadn't thought about right or wrong, a mouth on his dick felt nice and got him off, no matter who it belonged to.

“Where is your mind?” the kid asked gentle.

“Why, can't you tell?”

Instant bitch-face. “You- always with your assumptions. If I was actively reading your mind you would know it. You are in the flesh, there would be somatic manifestations of my violation. When are you going to get it into your stubborn head, that I am not going to torture you?! I do not inflict harm on anyone without a very good reason – do you think I enjoyed it when I stamped out the first bright thought this man had in years?”

Maybe not enjoyed, but Dean hadn't really assumed he cared much – until the kid threw a flailing bitchfit.

“We should leave,” the kid stood up, “I must return to battle and you need to stay in a place more secure.”

“You're not going to throw me back into Alcatraz, are you?”

“No. That was Iscah's idea, her attempt at irony. There is a region of the Dungeon you will find more comfortable.”

“Oh-hu,” a comfortable prison cell, awesome.

They took a ‘shortcut’ through the sewers, which were full of crawly, demony things, Dean was ordered to ignore. They climbed down for which felt like an eternity.

Then they walked through an original western saloon -lacking guests and atmosphere, with a lone girl of less than thirteen sitting in a corner, twiddling her stringy hair. And from the swing doors you got directly into a modern day street at night.

They walked the sidewalk in silence, until the kid nodded towards a vault covered driveway.
At its end Dean was faced by a...building.

Paintings of several naked, female -very female, devils decorated the fiery red walls of the entrance. The painted writing was German? Dean guessed, save for one word:

Girls.

If there had been any doubt left what this place was, the sweet smell and terrible music drove the point home before Dean saw the first halfnaked girl sprawled on neon lightened velvet.

“This is a brothel.”

“Oh, good,” the kid forced his voice over the dance beat, “You visited an establishment like this one before. I feared you would assume I stole these ladies' clothes.”

“Ha-ha, very funny.”

“Stay inside, make yourself comfortable and don't engage-”

“Yeah, I got it, which one is it?” none of the girls or the older women looked very happy to be here; even though their smiles were professionally warm and inviting.

“The bald guy at the table near the catwalk.”

Seriously?

“Your cell is an middle-class family home with nice lady offering you pudding,” the kid pointed out.

True.

“I chose his cell because his suffering is expressed internally, I thought it would be easier for you to ignore.”

Dean didn't know what to say, Thank you?

“Do not wander off,” the kid said very stern, towering over him again, “Hell is not a place where you want to get lost, have I made myself clear?”

“Chrystal.”

The kid turned on his heel, shaking his head, like he asked himself why he even bothered.
Chapter Notes

sry for the delay, we had a mad week; there will be another CH on friday
Bye, Bee

In his defense, Dean was a good boy for a whole two weeks, before he got convinced that the kid wouldn't come back.

He couldn't stay in this shitty place forever.

Sure, there were many clean and cozy beds, and upstairs one didn't hear the music anymore, so he got a little sleep. The girls were nice to look at too – all skin and classy black lace. And maybe this was as comfortable as it got in hell, but as the days went on his needs as a living, breathing being were harder and harder to ignore.

The showers weren't working, food was non-existent and the beer wasn't real. The girls were real enough to make him avoid any physical contact.

Listening to them when they chatted with each other got old real fast; mostly because he didn't understand any of the three languages they spoke. Only one of them talked to a 'guest' in Spanish, pretending to be from Spain too, when she clearly was Slavic. They didn't treat him like he was really there and Dean was perfectly okay with that.

But it got lonely. To chat up this guy whose cell this was wasn't too tempting either. He really didn't want to know what the guy's issues were.

But what really pissed Dean off was that some doors were locked, like the one to the kitchen. Not that he expected to find food more real than the beer, but it was the principle of the thing. It reminded him, that there was a perfectly open door for him to leave through any time.

And every day it got a little bit chillier, until he spent his time sitting in a pillow fort, wrapped in every piece of cloth he could find.

To keep track of 'time' was all that was to do and after two weeks he convinced himself it was absolutely unreasonable to expect the Antichrist to return. And hey, maybe the kid's talk had been a scare tactic, maybe it was possible to find a way out of hell and the kid only parked him here to keep him from finding it.

Traveling through hell on foot, with one blunt knife on him. Yeah, the most stupid thing he ever did. At least he hadn't run into a slug-tentacle-monster. Yet.

But he had gotten lost terribly fast:

He only had tried to find the empty saloon, explore it a little...and wham, he was in the middle of
strip club during a police raid.

Now, fifteen cells later, he was in an antique place that oscillated between two thousand years ago and how this city probably looked today. Didn't make sense at first, until Dean saw the ghost.

Frizzling in and out of existence. An undead hooker - Yay. Something about this region of hell was tied to mankind’s oldest profession.

He tried to avoid her, but for some reason she was well aware that he was in the flesh and followed him around, cooing Latin obscenities, trying to get him to follow her to her truly uncomfortable looking alcove. But maybe it only looked uncomfortable because he had seen it how it looked today:

A mossy withered stone bench.

The pornographic murals looked much more inviting too when this place was in it's original state.

He was seriously scarred for life when he finally made it out of there – no one should see a half-skeletonized woman finger herself.

He stumbled into prison showers during a guard-sanctioned gang rape. Awesome. But at least he knew the easy way out here. He took a guards key's without the man acknowledging him and opened a door to an restricted area – where no prisoner and therefore also the prisoner had had access. Which meant that if the door actually opened, it would lead to a different cell. Seemed like he was starting to get the hang of it.

The room was pitch-black. That was not good.

A slight push moved him forward and the darkness slid the door shut behind. Dammit- he patted the wall down and found nothing, only a smooth black surface, expanding to all sides.

When he turned around again -in reasonable panic, the room had changed.

Light, unobtrusive, had appeared without a clear source. Water licked at his feet, like he was standing at a shore and on the far side of the room a dark red curtain fell down to a platform, covering half of a woman lying there. Her naked back turned to him, her black hair flowing into the water, she lay motionless. Too far away to tell if she was breathing – as if that meant anything in this place.

As she was the only being in this cell, it was probably a bad idea to make her aware of his presence. The prisoners tended to strike out against anything that scared them – he had two broken ribs and a busted lip to prove that.

Dean moved at his most careful and stealthy, but as soon as the water under his boots made a sound, he knew he was screwed. She had moved.

Backing away against the walls was not an option. He had learned the hard way: some cell walls were sentient. And handsy.

At first it looked like waves, but the black water was as smooth as water could be – it was the reflection of her hair, or was it her hair? moving in the water, black against black.

And from one breath to the other he was breathing fluid and his vision blacked out.
He tried to scream.

He was getting ripped apart from the inside and he couldn't even scream!

It took him several minutes to come back to reality, to reconnect his mind with his body. His body that wound itself, retching and shivering on dry land like a fish, like it didn’t belong there.

And when he finally relearned how to breath air, he freaked out over the big hands that held him down.

Pale and concerned, a face hang over him.

It was the kid.

He helped Dean to sit up. Feeling every bit like the drowned rat he had to look like, he managed a, “What-?”

“It possessed you,” the kid was stroking his back soothingly.

It had to be whatever was torn apart by the grayish mass of bodies on the platform: Hell hounds, all teeth and claws, every bit of their skin covered in spikes. They seemed... hungry.

The kid made a fire. Pretty much out of nothing. But the flames were real and warm and calmed something in Dean. Something primal, that was appeased by having a fire between him and these beasts.

Shaking his head about the gruesome scene the kid said, “What a waste these ferals. If someone showed it some care, it could have become a powerful hound instead of a daeva.” He sighed, “One more victim of the cold war – sometimes I think the so called peace Father kept with Lilith was worse than the war we have now. Are you alright?” The kid crowded him again, looked at him with intensity.

He was wet and felt violated and his ribs hurt worse than ever. But yeah, he was alright, which meant that all the kid's concern was really unwelcomed,

“What'cha starin' at, never seen a guy in frilly robe?

The kid grinned about Dean's gear and backed off.

There from a distance, he said, “You are in a good condition for someone who strolled through hell without shield or aid.”

Dean had tried to pick up weapons and collect equipment on the way, but stuff just kept vanishing. Only the shiny emerald nightgown had stayed with him from the beginning. Even wet it still smelled like the brothel, of candyfloss perfume and strawberry lube.

Strangely enough the kid didn't chew him out. Not even an I-told-you-so.

He tossed Dean a plastic bag. “I brought you fresh clothes.”

Holey jeans, denim shirt, purple plaid flannel, his other black T-shirt- “Those are mine.”

The kid didn't comment on it.

“Where did you get them?” he asked, but he already knew. He bunked those clothes at Bobby’s, they even smelled like him, smelled of his detergent and air-dried – The Antichrist had been inside
Bobby's house!

“Your friend was so nice to make a package.”

“What-” Dean tried to reign himself in, he really tried, “What were you doing at Bobby's?”

The most innocent expression answered him, before the kid opened his mouth to explain:

“A prisoner of war’s next of kin should be informed of their capture. I told him not to worry, that you will be treated well. He didn't seem to believe me though,” he flicked a bit of water into flames and made them sizzle. “He tried to shoot at me. Several times. Then he swore he would find a way to kill me and my whole army too, if I don't let you go.” He smiled like that was funny.

Dean just felt sick. “Did you hurt him?”

“No, of course not,” he frowned now, “Bobby Singer is not a threat and he seems to be neutral. I also guess he is rather intelligent? I mean he seemed to calm down when I asked him for your clothes and explained a prisoner of war should be allowed to receive letters and packages from his people-”

the kid paused and smiled again, “He tried to smuggle metal charms against possession into your package, but as I informed him, these are useless in hell.

He cares for you. He threatened me again after I assured him I take my responsibility to my prisoners very serious. There was more confusion until I started to suspect the basic rights of a prisoner of war are not common knowledge among humans of your century?”

There was a question in there somewhere, but Dean could only shrug.

“Your friend seemed equally surprised that my treatment of prisoners conforms generally with the ideas formulated for the Third Geneva Convention.”

“Uh-hu?”

The kid rolled his eyes at Dean, “Well at least he knew what that means. Even though he doesn't seem to believe I provide you safety, treat you humanely and will release you as soon as possible.”

He was always so huffy and annoyed when it came to this, that Dean had to remind him, “People up there call you the Antichrist, that title comes with a side of trust issues.”

“Is that why you never asked me for my name, because you want to hang on to your resentment?”

the kid asked to tight-lipped his mouth looked like a sharp edge.

Dean decided it was wiser not to answer this question truthfully. Instead he started to shed his wet clothes.

“Not that it matters much, I don't have a name anyhow,” the kid rolled his shoulders and brooded, staring into the flames.

“How can you not have a name?” he thought that was a pretty reasonable question, but he suspected that was another one of those things he was ignorant about.

“They call me many things,” the kid provided what certainly wasn't an answer, “None of it are names. A person's name belongs, does not mean somethings else above that.

The damned souls, when they see me for a person, they call me, like you, as a variation of Antichrist, Dajjal, Satan. The old ones mistake me for Asteroth, father's first son; they forget he died thousands
of years ago. Most demons call me Nagid, *Prince*, which is a title not a name."

“What did your daddy call you?”

“Aziz. It means *Beloved*. It also means love for power, love for glory, but he didn't tell me that. Father said it means:

The apple of my eye, Child of my heart.”

If it had been anything else but the yellow eyed demon they were talking about, Dean would have felt sorry for the kid, would have been able to relate to what it meant to lose-

“He lied,” the kid said so dispassionate it fell far beyond disappointment. “Demons usually do. They speak a lot about love. But they mean possession. Down here, it is the only reflection of love strong enough to prevail.”

Dean did not feel sorry for it. If the kid was really human, had had human parents and all that jazz, but called Yellow Eyes, Daddy now? Then there was no way he wasn't screwed in the head six ways from Sunday. That was so much worse than Stockholm syndrome, it needed another name, Dean pondered, just as something under the shirt he dug out of the plastic bag made a crackling sound. Crinkled orange wrapping-

“You're likely to assume I don't even know what I am talking about when I say love,” the kid brooded out loud-

An opened Reese's family bag, half-empty of the mini cups, but re-filled with protein bars.

“This,” the kid said nodding at the orange bag, “is love – to care – give everything you have, only to wish you had more to give.”

Bobby. One more person Dean had let down. He knew exactly what the old man was going through now. Bobby, who had always been there for him and Dean wasn't even able to stay alive. But he had tried, he tried so hard – if it hadn't been for Bobby, after Sammy – Dean would've thrown himself into the fire at much younger age. “Did you tell him? That I almost sold my soul?”

The kid shook his head.

Knowing Bobby, he made good guess without anyone cluing him in.

Reese's. Clever, typically Bobby, that he sent along something Dean would know came from him. He couldn't tell how many times Bobby snuck a bag of those into his things when Dad picked him up again. Partially to spite John, but mostly because he knew Dean needed to be reminded that there were good things in the world.

The weird thing about peanut butter cups was that they always tasted good, no matter how crappy you felt.

Eating two and chewing down a protein bar too, he tried to ignore the noises from the hounds ripping into the bony parts of the demon.

The kid took note of him frowning at the hounds.

Dean hadn't liked them even before he had seen them in their true and seriously fugly form. But of course, the kid coddled them in this form too:
Called them over, to get slobbered in demon blood and his hair licked and one mutt brought a little present – a ‘human’ thigh bone. Yum.

They almost put the fire out and then one started to nuzzle Dean’s leg-

“Dude, can't you put them on a leash or something?”

“Why are you so hostile? They never did anything to you.”

“I just don't like dogs, okay?”

It maybe was the flames -or something just had flickered in the kid's eyes.

“I cannot claim,” the kid said coolly, “to know much about dogs, but the hounds are the most innocent creatures in hell. They don't deserve your hate and if I ever catch you mistreating one, I will make you regret it.”

Item number two on the list of things to avoid, shortly after not calling the Antichrist, the Antichrist:

Don't insult the Antichrist's ugly ass dogs. “Look, I didn't say, I hate them. They just freak me out.”

With a stroke of the kid's hand the beasts transformed into cuddly St. Bernhards.

“Yeah, that doesn't help.” Someone here had not seen Cujo. “We never really resolved what I should call you,” he offered an olive branch.

“You can call me as you please, I don't care much about names.”

“So you wouldn't care if I wanted to call you Daisy?”

The kid just huffed a laugh; one could say a lot about the Antichrist. That his taste in women sucked, or that he picked his pets for how appalling they were. Or that he clothed himself like an emo girl - seriously the only thing he was missing was the Hello Kitty tattoo.

But, and that was a big point in his favor:

The kid had a good sense of humor. He would probably forgive him, that the only name Dean came up with when he looked at this man-puppy, was,

Snoopy.
Of course he didn't call the Antichrist, Snoopy to his face. But in his mind it popped up at times and again and then more often.

The kid stayed true to his word. As long as Dean didn't get himself actively in trouble, he wasn't hurt. And he was allowed to send a note to Bobby telling him thanks for all the unnecessary sugar. Bobby would be able to tell Dean quoted John – Bobby had pretended to turn a deaf ear on Dad's rants often enough, so he would know Dean was okay.

And he was, okay-ish. He wasn't coddled. He was still cold more often than not, his clothes got wet all the time, yet to this point slug-tentacle-monster-slime-free. And he finally collected a bottle and a tarp to collect rain water in the Meadows – which according to Snoopy was the cleanest water in hell.

While the war was raging, Dean didn't see much of it. He was mostly alone, hidden away in the labyrinth of empty cells that made up the seamless transition from the Dungeon to the mid levels of hell. If he saw anyone, or anything it was the hell hounds or this girl-demon who always smirked at him.

And the kid would visit more often, bring him food, or take him out to find someone in the Meadows who served it.

It was distressing how many diner cooks Dean had met during their life were now in hell.

Today they had a little picnic – cherry pie with walnut crumble, in the middle of a brick-red desert. Right beside the ruins of a 'house', with the wide sky opening up in front of them, a sky so blue it ruined one's eyes.

Tracks in the sand told of people once here, now gone...or not completely gone. Maybe there was someone hiding in those ruins.

But it felt quiet anyhow. Peaceful. And warm. As always too warm for comfort, but the heat was better than the chill. He wondered if he would get a sunburn if he took his tee off. The black cloth made the sun only more intense anyhow. “We're in the Meadows, right?”

“Oh, I replied, lazy. “I like it up here. Before the war I came often, to talk to the damned souls.”

Hadn’t the kid pointed out more than once there was no reason to engage with them, “What for?”

“So they wouldn't be alone. It wasn't for me. They never remember me. You spend days, weeks with them and from one second to the other they forget who you are. Who they are. What was said. Some know nothing but this place and what it once was to them. Its not like in the Dungeon where suffering keeps them focused on their experiences. In the meadows they just loose themselves and the lucky ones are not aware of it.”

“But there is more to hell than the Dungeon and the Meadows?”

“Yes, but it is not safe.”

The tone told Dean to leave it. But Snoopy had to do a bit more than a tone to shut him up, “I got that. I wanted to know what else there is?”
“The lowest circle are the Shadows or also called the Morass, alive beings cannot dwell there.”

Dean could be paranoid, but it seemed like the kid gave him only useless information.

“Or for an example the Racks, just below the Dungeon” Snoopy said with a dead voice, “Where souls get turned by hand. The realm of Alistaire, brother to Lilith, grand torturer of hell. I was obliged to study under him for a time. Before he lost his patience with me and told Father I was too clumsy to master the arts.

Alistair was the only one who was ever allowed to hurt me.”

Great, now the kid had opened up emotionally to him and Dean was done with his pie – what to do? “Well you know what they say about teachers who blame their students for their failures?”

“No?”

“They have a small dick.”

That snorting, snuffling laugh again – it was so cute, really disgustingly cute. But Dean was glad that Snoopy was able to laugh about dick-jokes. He really wouldn't have known how to handle it if the kid stayed all serious and haunted-

“There is something we need to discuss.”

-he had to think it and tempt fate and now the kid wanted to talk.

“You do know that I planned to release you as soon as the war is over.”

“Yeah?” Known, sure? Believed, naw. So he wasn't too disappointed that the kid didn't keep his-

“I may release you even sooner now.”

Okay. Unexpected turn of events.

“If the next battle ends in my favor I would come out of it powerful enough to secure hell against Lilith.”

Okay? Following so far, not knowing what that had to do with his release?

“Which means I would be very powerful,” Snoopy used simple words, “Powerful enough by far to be able to hide a human on Earth – as long as you, as they say, lie low, she should not be able to find you.”

“Great, but you wouldn't beat around the bush, if there wasn’t a catch.”

“No, there's not. I simply have an alternative offer to make…”

-

...

The kid was not saying more, so Dean had to:

“Okay, what?”

Still Snoopy seemed reluctant to simply spit it out. He pursed his lips and sighed first. That had to be
done before Snoopy explained stuff. Not always, but sometimes, for dramatic effect, Dean guessed.

“I have,” the kid started, yet still reluctant, “Certain needs, which have not been met in the last years.”

Dean already didn't like where this was heading. He knew the pie had been a trap, it had been too good. And now Snoopy looked at him with these puppy-dog-eyes,

“I think you as a sincere person – you never tried to win my favor, perhaps mostly hindered by your hate- but even your hate inheres sincerity...” The kid was stumbling over his words, that was a first.

“You certainly have the intelligence to try and trick me, but you never did. It doesn't seem to be in your nature. You're loud and prejudiced, but also outspoken and empathetic. I enjoy your company, it helps me to stay focused. I don't want you to leave.”

Well he had seen that one coming a mile away. About at the time when he noticed the kid laughed about all his stupid jokes. “So you're not going to let me go,” he stated and kept his voice neutral. Wouldn't do him any good to get angry.

“Of course I'm going to let you go,” Snoopy hurried to assure him. “I simply offer you an alternative to a life in hiding. I need someone honest around me, as company. Someone whose loyalty is secure.”

“Loyalty?” He almost laughed. “That's not the same thing as honesty, and to be honest, I'm never going to-”

“You should know,” the kid interrupted him, “If I had the power I would have brought your father back from the dead already. First and foremost to question him of course, but I would let him go afterwards. I struck out at him without the intent of killing him and I regret that I used too much force.”

Dean looked away, bore his eyes in the painfully white clouds far away. He had waited for the kid to pull this card – it had always been there in the deck, they both had known it since he had hinted it was his father he meant to sell his soul for. He really didn't know why he was disappointed now – was a part of him really so stupid, that he hoped the kid wouldn't dangle this promise in front of him?

“I do not expect blind loyalty of the unconditional kind,” the kid explained, “I spoke of secure loyalty.”

“You're talking 'bout a deal,” the words felt dry in his mouth.

“A secure arrangement would benefit you as much as me. What kind of life would you lead on Earth, hiding from Lilith? All I ask for is your time, not your soul, not your body, you would be free.

For now as free as safety measures allow and after the war, free to go anywhere you wish. If I die, you're still free to have any deal with Lilith you want to have. But if I kill her, if win, if I rise above the other competitors for the throne, I will bring your father back. And you both will be free.”

And he had thought the deal Lilith offered him had been too good to be true.

“I understand you have your doubts-”

“Do I have to have sex with you to seal the deal?” -he aimed for a horrified expression.

And succeed in making the Antichrist snicker.
The kid shook his head, if as to answer or just about Dean's humor, or his obvious desperation...He was just as ready to do anything to bring his father back as he had been when he was balls-deep in Lilith.

“What I wanted to explain before you rudely interrupted—”

“That wasn't a No, I just don't bottom.”

“-it would not be a traditional pact. Only I would be bound. You don't have to promise anything. If you stay with me until the end, I will see your side of the arrangement fulfilled. As for your secured loyalty: Because I am bound to bring your father back as soon as I win the war, my interests become yours. Can you follow me so far?”

Oh, Dean was way ahead, “Sure. Unless of course, I sell you out in exchange for my Dad,” he joked.

“I believe you are too smart to do something so foolish.”

“Yeah,” that wouldn't end well.

“She is the Queen of the Crossroads. Since you offered it once, she will demand your soul, on principle alone.”

Lilith hadn't been the one Dean would worry about if he was such a rat. He would worry more about Snoopy's wrath if Lilith didn't make it. The one head-on confrontation he had witnessed between those two – it hadn't looked so good for the Queen. The Little Prince had had her by the short and curls. He wondered how Lilith got out of his grasp-

“Are you contemplating my offer?”

“What-? Sure, sure, I am contemplating your offer. Who else is going to teach you to speak like a real boy.”

“I am very adept at languages, I speak fifteen.”

“Cool, I speak only two,” he quoted Bruce Willis, “English and Bad English.”

“You speak English?” the kid hit him with snark.

Atta boy. “Okay, I'm in, do we shake on it, or-”

The kid touched his thigh, leaned in close, and before Dean could avoid him, kissed his cheek.

Snoopy let go of him immediately, perfectly bussines-like.

And then nothing...

…

“That was it?”

Snoopy nodded, but shoved up the sleeve on his right arm and trailed his own skin with his fingertips and suddenly glowing letters appeared. Sizzling and soon invisible again.

Shit, that had to hurt. “Why did you do that? I mean you said, you would bring back my dad anyhow-?”
“Yes, I will. But now you have it in writing. Phrased so I could not betray you. At the moment it is the only thing I can give you which is more tangible than a promise.”
Chapter 9

Snoopy won the next battle. Hell was secure – Lilith was cut off from her followers in the lowest circles, couldn't communicate with them and couldn't raise them. Which was good for everyone, because without her, they got lost in their own little parts of hell and upstairs they would have just run around killing people – or you know, torturing them in Alistair's case. -the kid always shivered when he was talking about Lilith's brother.

Dean was now allowed to roam the Meadows freely – he found his other manifestations of the Meadows and one of them was a laundry mat – the run down kind, but a laundry mat anyhow, with water and everything – no more washing his clothes in collected rain water. One learned to appreciate the small things.

He didn't have to go anywhere creepy anymore, no more cells.

Because he was allowed to talk to any damned soul he liked, give them as many lusty thoughts as he liked, his days flied by and at the end of a 'day' -the concept of time in hell was still a little hazy to him- the kid would collect him and they would eat together and then share a room as they slept.

Because that was obviously what the kid meant when he said he wanted company.

Not that Dean complained – the rooms were very nice, downright royal:

Hotel suites, bedrooms of kings, the like. Always clean enough and kept at a nice temperature. And the kid not once batted an eye on Dean's choice to rather sleep on a couch, or a pillow cot in front of a fire place, anywhere really but to share a bed with the Antichrist.

Which was why it came as a bit of a surprise when one evening, in front of an incredibly ritzy fireplace, over milk and oatmeal raisin cookies, Snoopy reached out for Dean's hand and...held it.

Dean stared at their hands for a solid minute, but when he felt a slight tingle in his spine, he jerked his hand away,

“What was that supposed to be?”

“I was holding your hand?” Snoopy made a face like Dean was weird.

“Why?” -he thought the kid didn't use his psychic shtick on him?

“Because it's nice.”

It took him a second to process, but then:

Crap. His first thought had been right, “Are you coming on to me?” -his voice was a little high, but he was entitled, since he was freaking out.

Snoopy shut the book, completely at ease, with only the tiniest frown, “I am not familiar with this figure of speech, but in context I would guess you are asking if I wanted to impart a sexual interest in you, right?”

“Uh-huh?”

“Then the answer is, No. I just wanted to hold your hand.”
“Rigghhh-t,” he nodded slowly because that kid—on his best day—was the weirdest creature ever and making sudden movements might not be a good idea.

A small smile played on Snoopy's lips “I already know my interest wouldn't be appreciated, so there is no point in coming on to you.”

“Yeah, I don't swing that way,” but Snoopy obviously did.

“Inflexible sexual orientation is a fascinating concept.”

“Could talk about it all day, Mister Spock.”

“I like that character. But the show is a bit silly. It's older, isn't it?”

“Wow. With you, discussing Star Trek is actually more awkward than the gay thing you have for me.”

“I'm not gay.”

“No, you'd just like to suck my dick.”

“Exactly.”

“Sooo. What's so silly about Star Trek, aside of the pants and the boots and the hair cuts. Which is all excused for the fact that it was the Sixties—”

“What upsets you? The fact that I find you arousing or that I could force myself on you?”

“Oh, it's the combination of those two that gives me the chills.”

“I didn't say I want to force myself on you. I am saying I imagine I would enjoy sex with you. Rape has little to do with sex, for it is about power. Sex is more than that.”

“Sounds like you know the difference first hand,” and not from the receiving end. The kid wasn't as innocent as he sounded, that was just because he was talking like an encyclopedia come to life.

“When you have absolute power over almost everyone you know, you learn the difference very young,” the kid agreed, palming the book in his lap. “Good sex is a rare experience in hell.”

“So that's what Lilith wanted me for. That minx.”

“No, the demons get their thrills alright,” he paused, Dean could tell the kid was trying out lingo he picked up and waited for an reaction, if he used it correctly, before he kept talking, “But I do not share in them. And I prefer human partners. Demons are so foul I rarely get it up for them.”

Dean bit his tongue not to grin, because the kid sounded like he had never so much as taken a dirty word in his mouth before he sat down here with him to discuss sex. Maybe he had been wrong, his new growing suspicion was The Little Prince feigned experience where he had none, so he put his idea to a test:

“Well I don't have that much experience with demons, but I remember Lilith to be a pretty sweet treat.”

Snoopy's nose twitched. “Probably because there was a soul in the body you mounted. I wouldn't know, I've never forced myself on a possessed human. Here in hell, where demons rarely possess living flesh with live souls in it, sex with them is nasty. And do not let me start on their natural form.
At least the corpses cover that up. Still: Nasty.”

“Leave a bad taste your mouth?”

“I could get used to the taste. But it's the skin...clammy cold and feverish. I remember, humans only have a hot and cold feel when they are sick. So to me, all demons feel sick.”

“All of them? How many did you take for a test drive?”

“A few. I stopped taking them as lovers when it became obvious I can only get satisfaction from them when I simultaneously engage in binge-drinking.”

“Binge-drinking?” that was a term the kid hadn't learned from him, he bit the insides of his cheeks not to grin.

But Snoopy nodded, explained, “I accidentally killed the first demon I had intercourse with, because I sucked too much blood out of her and weakened her to the point where my presence alone crushed her.”

...”

“Was that, as they say, Too much information?”

“Naw. Just-” Jeez! “-not what I imagined when you said binge-drinking.”

“You thought I meant alcohol,” the kid guessed, all thoughtful again, “What does being drunk on alcohol feel like?”

“You can't get drunk?”

“I suppose I would get drunk if I did drink alcohol, I'm human?”

“So let me get this straight, you fucked a demon to death, but never had a drink in your life?”

“I didn’t.” Snoopy pursed his lips flustered, “....I did kill her, but...” and now he let his head hang and hid behind his bangs.

He hadn't meant to insult or worse upset the kid, just trying to get the facts straight.

“I was fifteen,” the kid stopped mumbling, “And it was my first overdose.”

“Now that sounds nasty.”

“It is. Back then doubly so, because Father put me on cold detox and forbade that I would use my powers to relieve the pain and spur on the process. It was the only time he had no mercy with me. Not because I killed the demon,” the kid clarified, “He would have killed Ruby anyhow, she was a rogue, she had no business seducing me. He punished me for allowing weakness to govern my decisions.”

“So he was cool with the whole blood-drinking as long as you knew your limits?”

Snoopy hid behind his bangs again, shaking his head slightly he said, “You assume it was Ruby who introduced me to demon blood.”

…? Ah, Daddy Dearest. Dean sooo hadn't wanted to know that and he absolutely didn't want to imagine it – like most of the times when Snoopy was reluctant to talk about stuff. He had to start to
watch out for the warning signs. “So blood-drinking is still a thing you do?”

“All the blood of demons,” the kid assured him with a smirk.

“All.”

“I am the Antichrist, as you love to point out.”

Hey, he had pointed that out once. But more important, “Don’t that freak them out a bit, that you practically eat them?”

The tiniest smirk – Oh my-, had the kid just caught whiff of a dirty pun? But then Snoopy shook his head and declared, “No, they view it as a great honor.”

“As long as you don’t kill them.”

“Some of them find honor in sacrifice too.”

Man, and he had thought demons were more simple-minded. Dean picked up his glass of milk, “Here’s to suicidal demons.”

The kid didn’t clink glasses with him, but flipped his book open again and for the rest of the evening, he wore a sweet little smile.
Chapter 10

Dean was just about wandering around in a skeevy hospital, minding his own business, collecting stuff...as something changed.

Everything became darker – which was barely conceivable in the murky pathology cellar, but it also got more contrast, the colors looked more natural, the air more rich, the rust under his fingers more crisp and the sounds from upstairs changed...sure there had been 'people' walking this hospital, but they were part of this passive hopeless place – perfectly apathetic.

Now it sounded-

He turned back to the empty room. What was that?

*Thump*

And there was the second noise from the body refrigerator. From inside of one of the closed drawers.

*Thump*

*Thump*

*Clank*

*Thump*

Several closed drawers.

Not that Dean was one who usually ran away from locked in imaginary zombies, but he walked fast. Planned to find another meadow as soon as possible. Because this was just not righ-...

-the nurse he walked by looked at him with wide eyes, looked at him like no one, soul or mirage, inside the Meadows had ever looked at him.

Everyone stared at him like that, wide-eyed, exied, hungry. It was like the hospital was suddenly a cell in the Dungeon, only worse.

Now he was running.

Out of nowhere someone tried to tackle him. His shoulder connected with the wall and he turned around to punch whoever's lights out-

“Stay still!” the kid pushed him hard. “Do as I say or they will devour you: Don't move, hold your breath, don't blink, don't even move your eyes.”

Dean did as told and the freaky nurse that had followed him stopped staring, looked confused, like she couldn't tell where he was until he let out a gust of breath, really nothing, and she zeroed in on him again, teeth bared.

“Shut your eyes,” the kid ordered and clamped his giant paw over Dean's mouth and nose.

He had never noticed how hard it was to hold still when your lungs screamed for air. But he managed.
Just before his lungs would've burst, the kid let him breathe again and when Dean opened his eyes, they were alone.

Still, Snoopy pushed a finger forbidding against Dean's lips and mouthed Be quiet, just in case he didn't get the message. The kid moved smooth and soundless and opened a door, gesticulating for Dean to follow him into the next meadow:

A wrecked swimming pool hall, missing half it's roof, it felt frozen in the moment of it's destruction, the air whitened thick from dust. God loves us, was written on the wall, with the d in God fractured.

From one blink to the other the pale nature of the place changed, like the dust had settled a long time ago and one was able to see reflections and shadows, a reality too sharp.

A child -a boy of five, watched them from a corner, his eyes were the same as the hospital people. When he dared to get up, Snoopy -pulling up to his full height- bared his teeth and forced the child to retreat.

Dean kept an eye on the damned soul anyhow, as he climbed after Snoopy, who, with his freakishly long limbs, made it a lot faster over the debris into the light of a bright day.

The next meadow was a broad dirt road between fields of some kind of over head-high green/sallow stalks, half dry.

“The Meadows are under attack,” Snoopy informed him and took him by the hand, drawing him into the tall fields, “It was to be expected that he would start to roam when he does not hear from Lilith anymore.”

“W-?-Ow!” he had meant to ask, Who, but these stupid green leaves had cut his cheek. That was new too, normally it was nearly impossible to hurt yourself in the Meadows. Or even experience such an intense pain.

Snoopy had stopped for him, examined his bleeding cheek, pushed his fingers into the wound and smeared his face full of blood with broad strokes.

“Dude, what the-”

“Just in case,” the kid answered like finger-painting people with their blood was the thing to do.

“In case of what? Who's attacking us?”

“Lilith's other brother, Samhain. His presence changes the nature of the Meadows.”

Yeah, Dean noticed that. Like he noticed how much darker the sky got over their heads. What he didn't understand was why they were running, why the kid didn't call his troops or the hounds for help or would do something, anything- Or why they were stopping now! In the middle of a barren patch of the field!

A humming joined the shadows and wind came up and everything pointed out that this demon was closing in on them and yet still the kid would not do anything.

And then Dean got it, thought the got it. Oh God, he hoped he didn't get it: “Are we playing bait?”

Snoopy looked something fierce with his hair ruffled up like that, but he sounded perfectly placid as he stated:
“The Meadows are located in the higher regions of hell, I grew up here. In this sugar cane field I was taught to overcome the primal fear of-" he stopped.

Suddenly it was perfectly quiet, the wind had calmed down and the darkness had settled to something like a late dusk.

Into this false tranquility blew a lone blast of wind, rustling the canes, brief and violent, the drier leaves cracking shortly and then silenced.

The demon was here.

Moving a little bit closer to Dean, the kid huffed an impatient sigh, and looked down along his shoulder at him, shaking his head, “Only a brute like Samhain would beset me at gates of my homestead. Listen,” he smiled predatory and nodded to the right.

Pattering rain was the first thing that came to mind, but then Dean saw the smoke and heard that it was the field burning fast.

Crackling and sizzling, closing in from all sides, white and black smoke licked at by tree-high flames, like waves rolling towards them.

The shapelessness of the demon seemed to press against it and screeched and hissed.

The kid grabbed his arm, “Don’t be scared!” had to scream to be heard.

Fire and pressure came down on them and sent them tumbling to the ground, they held on to each other, knees digging into the dry soil.

There was no heat, no pain, no sound but a white noise that blinded the eyes and numbed the skin and killed all thoughts. They could have been kneeling there for a lifetime and or a second, Dean wouldn’t have been able to tell. All he could think of was the fire his mother died in, the weight of Sammy in his arms. It felt almost peaceful -if someone hadn’t had a clue what peace was, but then again, that described him pretty well.

When it was over, the pressure gone, he was still holding on to Snoopy's shoulders, who sported a wicked grin, the grin of someone who had just kicked some demon ass and was damn proud about it, Dean felt he was wearing a matching grin, “Dude, that was awesome.”

“I didn't really do anything,” the kid's smile turned shy, “This field burns down on it's own and fire is the only thing he is vulnerable to.”

“Ah, get out-” now was not the time for modesty, so he shoved the kid, “You totally kicked ass!”

Biting his lip, Snoopy jerked up a shoulder to agree.

It was weird, even after a stunt like this, the kid seemed, well, like a kid. A weird, overgrown, nerdy kid, but a kid nonetheless, being bullheaded like only kids were:

Because, Dean, he heard four-year-old Sammy argue, it counts not. I hafta do it all alone.

The only difference about Snoopy's argument, was the wording:

“I didn't kill him, you should know. It is much harder to kill demons in hell than on Earth and I didn't want to waste power on an almost feral one. Samhain is like the daevas, only a true threat when leashed and put on a purpose...” the kid rattled off to explain demonic motivations, while Dean cut
himself a way through the singed stalks. He thought they would smell like caramel, but sadly, the only things in the air were the smell of burnt paper and the kid’s chipper voice.
Technically speaking there is a minor character death that happened between the chapters but we already used so many tags, that we will deal down a little on the tagging for now, well now you're informed or warned or whatever
Enjoy,
Bee

It was morning. After a night at which Snoopy had been too busy to come 'home' until dawn. They were playing cards on a bed big enough for twelve. The room was unbelievably tacky, gold and silver and red silk sheets. But dammit, those sheets had felt like warm skin and smelled as nice too. Dean hadn't slept so good in years. Didn't even bother him to wake to Snoopy napping an arm's length away.

The kid was in a good mood too, probably because he was winning.

He had to be cheating. For that he would only need passive mindreading -the kind Snoopy had neglected to mention. But Dean could read too, not minds, but books. And if Snoopy wanted him uneducated, he shouldn't leave books lying around that were written in Latin and old English -which was a bitch to read, seriously German was easier to decipher, but someone who had braved John Winchester's hieroglyphs was able to read anything. So yeah, he was educating himself about hell and it's sneaky denizens.

Dean planned to strike up a conversation, keep the mindpowers of the kid's busy. "Where's your girlfriend?" he asked, because he hadn't seen her in a while -unless she rode a different corpse now-

"Iscah is dead."

Crap... "I'm sorry."

Snoopy called his raise and shrugged, "To feel sympathy for demons is even more futile than to forge connections with damned souls. I knew her a long time, she was useful in the past, that is all there is to it."

"Sounds lonely." Aaand he lost again, with three kings against a low straight. Definitely cheating.

"I always had company. Father knew he had to provide human attachment figures or my intellectual development would have been impaired by the conflict between the need for affection vs. the need for self-preservation."

"U-hu." Dean suspected his plan would bite him in the ass because his intellect was getting impaired by the kid throwing five-dollar-words at him.

"See, Humans tend to favor affection over self-preservation,"

-oh God, now he was explaining it,
"Even when both are inconsistently provided to them; they rather start to excuse their abuser's behavior than to live a life completely shut off.

If a child does not have anyone to interact with but demons it would start to humanize them and grow up with a skewed sense of reality. Where it's need for affection is a weakness, rather than a biological fact, are you still following me?" he asked and shuffled the cards, only went on with his psychology lesson, when Dean nodded and faked interest, "Such a child could be intellectually aware of the demonic nature, but it's instinct would insist to trust some demons due to former positive experiences with them. This conflict has to be resolved and the solution a human would come up with is to understand themselves lacking, which would be true, because humans are not designed to form relationships with demons. Yet the need for affection would still prevail, a never-ending conflict between the mind and the heart - which in itself is an impairment. Or do you think someone who constantly has to ask himself if the decisions he makes are rational, could lead an army of demons?"

Probably not. But where did that leave Daddy Dearest, if Yellow Eyes had raised the kid so it wouldn't confuse demons with humans, why did Aziz still call him Father? Also, and that wasn't curiosity, but Dean's own need of self-preservation: What had happened with the last human who had kept the kid company? "So when you say attachment figures, are we talking, a nanny or more something like a professional girlfriend?" The kid had dealt him a three of diamonds and an eight of spades. He folded.

"I wouldn't describe them as such," Snoopy argued, "But if you must, then I guess it was both, actually. I had several caretakers over the years, they showed their affection differently."

"And what happened to them?"

"They left after their time was up."

"Left how?"

"Through a gate."

Dean stopped shuffling and gave Snoopy a stern look, "You don't want to get it, do you?"

"You want to know what became of them after they left?"

"Yeah."

"They had made a deal with Father, their services in exchange for something they wanted. They got what they wanted and most of them still live a good life."

"And the other ones?"

Snoopy bought himself some time taking a peek at his cards and frowned before he answered, "One came to death by his own doing and two were killed by Lilith after she escaped. It was an attempt to lure me into a trap. A very poor attempt," he added, visible disgusted by the affront to his intelligence. "She should have known I would use the momentum to go after her most notorious elite troop: The Seven. Because she was busy, they strayed and behaved reckless and I was able to kill them." He tipped his chin up, reminding Dean to deal the community cards.

But Dean wasn't playing anymore. "You let the people, who took care of you when you were little, die, just like that, just because it gave you tactical advantage?"

"It was The Seven," was explained to Dean, "As in the demonic personifications of the seven deadly sins."
"Yeah, I'm sure they made impressive notches on your belt-"

"You are so ignorant sometimes-"

...only now, by the wetness of his voice, Dean noticed, there were tears in Snoopy's eyes-

"I don't even know why I talk to you! You really think I fight Lilith for the glory of it? How many times do I have to tell you that I care, I care about humans, I don't like it when someone gets hurt. I care, I care so much that I don't play favorites." He drew air, like it was painful to stop for breath, his nose scrunched up from the strain, "The Seven ruined more than a thousand lives within the first week of the war, should I have let them make it a million?!" he paused for breath, close to sobbing, "That's not what the man, I let die that night, taught me. Mike taught me what it means to be a soldier. How the ability to kill is a responsibility. Not a right to make your own rules. He would have never forgiven me," -every word was paced like it cost him to say it, "-never! -had I saved him and let civilians die in his place."

The kid was shaking and Dean really didn't know what to say and for the first time he thought he was the wrong one keeping Snoopy company, because he always managed to push him into a meltdown-"I'm sorry."

"You better be," the kid told him, so sad it lacked the threatening tone completely, "I can't continue these meetings if you search for reasons to hate me. I am what I am and I know what I did, what I took from you.

I understand what I ask for is hard. But if you don't even try to stop seeing me as the thing that killed your father – as the thing your father tried to kill, you could make the same mistake he did." The kid sniffled and looked away.

His words could be easily interpreted as a threat, but the crux was, Dean knew Snoopy pretty well by now. He knew the kid worried and brooded too much, thought ten steps ahead and he was starting to trust Dean and saw that this could easily lead into a disaster. The kid meant well. He was scared for Dean. Which was kinda reasonable, when one was the Antichrist – to be scared for the people close to you.

"I will try harder," he promised.
Chapter 12

Only a day after this emotional scene, Snoopy opened up to him even more and showed him his private quarters in the mid-level regions of hell. The regions which were emptier than the Meadows and more susceptible to magic.

He would have thought he had to jump through a few more hoops to prove the kid he was trustworthy. But Snoopy was weird like that, one minute he behaved like they had all the time in the world, the next he was baring his soul like a meteor was headed for Earth.

The white door Snoopy had lead him to, was marked with a snake biting it's own tail.

Dean hadn't really expected a dusty double bedroom, that at the first sight looked a little bit like a hunter had crashed here. With the blades and all the occult stuff, the old books, the second bed that was used as a wardrobe and the open wardrobe stuffed with questionable things like sigil covered boxes, bleach-white animal skulls and an honest-to-god stuffed black cat-

“Son of a bitch!”

The beast had scratched him and given him half a heart attack!

“I'm sorry, I should have warned you about Bagheera, she likes to play dead,” Snoopy smiled sheepishly and petted the beast with two finger. Which she seemed to take as an invitation for play, rolling around between the skulls, pawing lazily at them.

One framed drawing hung between the beds, showing what could've been one of the pillars of hell. Dean had read about those. They were the oldest structures of the place, holding everything together.

On the opposite wall, pinned there without frame or protection, were photos of people. Not in a neat row, but crowded together, arranged around one in the middle. Dean looked around for clues what it was about the pictures, but Snoopy's desk was terribly orderly and aside from the fact that the people were all white and fair-haired, they didn't look much alike.

Not even the two guys who were close in age:

A bearded guy with scraped knuckles, turning away from the camera. Another bearded guy with long hair and soft eyes and a kinda flat face.

Then there was a girl with an ethereal gaze, looking a little bit like Barbra Streisand.

An androgynous kid of unrateable age -could be twelve or in his mid-thirties- with tattoos, piercings and his/her hair half-shaved off.

A lady in a pretty white lace dress, the picture clearly taken from afar while she was unaware, with a lot of greenery complimenting her simple beauty.

Right next to it a girl, mid-twenties, dirty, sweaty, full -but chapped lips and eyes that bore tragedy.

Above her the picture of a smiling, young, long-haired punk, ratty jeans cut off above the knee and a washed-out band t-shirt, he sat crosslegged on a lawn. Then there was of course the one that Dean saw first and gave another onceover now:

A busty beauty, showing tanned cleavage and so much more soft-looking skin. Skin, only covered
by pearl-beads around her neck and strands of sun-kissed hair falling over her shoulders. She looked shy into the camera like she had no idea how tasty she was - *Damn.*

With her and the picture in the middle, Dean counted ten people. The picture in the middle...the only one that showed more than one person:

A guy on a bike, holding a little kid. The kid had the same dark blond hair as the guy, curling cute to chin-length.

“This is Matthew,” Snoopy explained when he realized Dean's gaze had been caught by the guy with the kid, “He was my first human caretaker. He stayed the longest, more than two years.”

“So that’s you, as a kid? Cute,” he stated before he did the math and realized, it couldn't be because-

“No. This is a girl.”

Dean made a point at not saying it, but he grinned at Snoopy until the kid rolled his eyes and stated:

“Feminine people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones at those who happen to wear their hair fashionably long.”

He gave a sad head-shake, “That has to be the unwittiest comeback I ever heard.”

“It is unwitty on purpose, doofus, that's called a humoristic element.”

Now Dean really had to laugh.

“She is his daughter,” Snoopy pointed at the kid. “She is the one he sold his time for. He left me the picture when his time was done.”

That was probably the only thing the kid had from this guy, yet still-

“Her name is Leyla”

“You remember that,” how was that possible, “I mean, weren't you just a baby?”

“I was a little over six years old, when he had to leave. I remember him like it had been yesterday.” Snoopy blinked and swallowed and because Dean was already uncomfortable, he didn't ask, but the question was on the tip of his tongue:

And before? If Snoopy remembered coming to hell, did he remember where he was before, who his mother was? Why Daddy got custody of him...yeah, Dean didn't feel up to the task of wording such questions with tact. “What was he like?”

“Quiet,” Snoopy answered, staring at the picture, “and thoughtful. As far as anyone is, he is incorruptible. I remember him to fight with Father over seemingly little things – like for an example, that... *Azazel* drilled me to call him Father and never anything else. I don't remember Matthew to show fear or to back down, not once, but he had to have been scared.” Snoopy mused, “The deals they all made – Father wouldn't grant them security – the deal could have been revoked at any time. But Matthew took his task, to raise me the human way, very serious. He pushed every boundary he could. But he was smart about it. When time came to say good-bye he did not put up so much fight Father had to kill him. Only enough to have me remember, that he had tried to stay.”

Dean looked at the guy, holding his little daughter so she could play riding the bike and he really didn't want to know how hard that had to be. To be a father, then watch out for a little kid just like
yours, care for him, get to raise him for two years and then have to walk away, back to your family -
happy, but broken, never knowing what would happen to the little boy who came to count on you.

That was worse than selling your soul, that was selling your heart. “You ever seen him again?”

Snoopy's eyes were vacant, but he nodded, “I've put spells on all of their homes after hell became
secure.”

“No, I mean... ...-” Dean got it, Snoopy had understood perfectly well, that he had meant face to
face, not from afar. Maybe he should shut up or change the subject or something.

“You are not staying here,” Snoopy did change the subject for him, “Not all the time at least. I have
arranged for your own living accommodations. Let me show you the way.”

They re-entered the same white rooms and hallways they took to get here, only now they headed to
the left. The hallway was on one side bare gray stone, on the other white smooth wall and the ceiling
was so high, the light didn't reach it. It was like walking the suture of two worlds.

Taking the third door at the side of the wall, they entered an empty ballroom, glittering with darkness
and indirect light, most of it coming from the ceiling that was covered in floating white balloons.

Dean didn't notice it at first, hard to discern one shadow from the other, but before they passed it, a
cloud of black smoke transformed into a solid monster, kneeling for the prince.

Snoopy didn't acknowledge it visibly, but his way to hold himself changed.

And changed again in the next hallway – he seemed to shrink into himself, when no demon was
there to be commanded by his presence alone.

The living accommodations turned out to be a frickin' presidential suite. Clean, warm and spacious.
The colors were toned down whites and browns and greens, the kind of luxury that didn't put up
with showing off. It was the first place in hell Dean had been in, that didn't feel lived in and used up.

“I thought you would like it,” was all the kid said.
Chapter 13

Though he was free to go wherever he wanted, he was recommended to avoid the middle and lower regions of hell. He didn't really need to be told so, he knew, to the demons, he was just another damned soul – fresh meat. Also, only his place was shielded against hell's bad mojo – and of course the kid's room too. But Dean only went there once to search for Snoopy, after the kid wouldn't pick him up. He only found the cat and had trouble to convince her to stay. She was still pretty young, playful and affectionate and up to no good.

Even though Dean knew how to get to the Meadows, he started to enjoy staying in.

Not only because the white hallways were always crawling with demons. He simply felt no need to leave, there was a TV that sometimes worked, sometimes it even spoke English to him, sometimes he didn't care because: Boobs. And of course there were grimoires he sneaked from Snoopy's room. He also borrowed a hoodie, because most of his clothes were more practical, than comfortable.

But the main reason was that he had a shower now – with hot water! He didn't wanna know how many virgins Snoopy sacrificed, -or whatever, to get him running, hot water.

If his stomach wouldn't demand to be fed he could've easily stayed in the shower the whole day. The kid had called him epicurean and other nasty words.

But Bobby understood. Simple pleasures are the last refuge of the complex, he had written him back, when in his last letter, Dean had waxed poetics about the water pressure.

He was just about to write another one, when Snoopy picked him up for dinner.

They hadn't visited Father Ned in a while. Maybe because Snoopy was a bit creeped out by the old guy eye-balling him too – now that he wasn't wiping the padre's mind clean anymore, Father Ned had plenty lusty thoughts. The food wasn't overly good, but it was always fun to chat with the priest and see his eyes light up. Watching the kid squirm was a bonus.

They left the white rooms through a subway tunnel and Dean started to suspect they wouldn't come out in Father Ned's meadow. It was less orientation and more a physical feeling. It felt hot and hazy, which could only mean they headed-

Yep. They walked into the diner in Florida, a meadow conserved in a never ending circle of a slow afternoon, too many guests to kick back, too few to stay awake and overall too hot to stay sane. He shed a few layers of his clothes and made himself comfortable in their usual booth. No wonder that the cook lost it one day and poisoned everyone. She made delicious burgers though. And the key lime pie was...whatyasay – it was decent. Dean had had better.

Today he found something more simple on the dessert menu.

But he was served something that was...

White. With teeny-tiny black grains- “What is that?”

The patented Snoopy-smirk, “You ordered chocolate pudding, didn't you?”

Smart-ass.

Dean pushed his spoon into it, “That's white glibber!”
“Of course. There is no chocolate in hell. It is one of the few things that cannot be found naturally here. Like birdsong,” the kid shrugged and added, “Or music in general. Breastfeeding is also an experience-”

“Snoopy, seriously! I'm trying to eat here.”

“You're not eating, you are squishing it-”

“I can eat my white slush any way I please!” He did, but it didn't taste like anything, seriously compared to this vanilla was spicy-

“Did you call me Snoopy?”

Did he? Out loud? “Was the first dog that came to mind when I named you.”

“You named me after a dog?” the kid's forehead was scrunched up quizzically, between perplexed and questioning.

“Yeah.”

“You don't like dogs.”

He pushed the disgusting slush covered plate away and asked the kid in his sternest Dad-voice, “Is this going to be one of the times where you keep poking at something because you don't get it's just a thing?”

“No, I get the thing: You just don't like dogs,” and you don't like me either, said his sad eyes-

“See,” he slapped the table, “These puppy-dog-eyes, you're giving me – grown men don't do that!”

Now he confused the puppy.

Good. Maybe he could use the time to order a new dessert. But of course the waitress ignored him.

Their legs tangled under the table, but as always with Snoopy, Dean didn't mind so much. Maybe because he knew the kid was a bit gay for him.

Ever since he had been made aware how guys perceived him, Dean had dealt easier with those who were open about what they wanted. This shitty repressed attitude of some guys only invited all kinds of trouble he could do without.

He nudged his shin lightly against Snoopy's. “Look, it doesn't mean anything, I swear, you're a like-able guy, so stop brooding and share your pie with me.”

The kid smiled at him and nodded, but asked the waitress to pack them extra pie to go.

“I want to show you something,” was the only explanation Dean got.

On their way, he saw the insides of hell for the first time: a real pillar, looking more like a dried-up giant blood vessels than the tree in the drawing, but maybe they all looked different-

Were those? -people strung up, up there? The orange sky made it hard to see anything, but he was pretty sure-

“Dean,” Snoopy held out his hand.
“Yeah?” what was with the hand?

“You're getting lost again, hell is trying to draw you away.”

“It's alright,” he waved the kid to take point, “I will stay close.”

Snoopy shook his head, “No, you will wander off and get yourself hurt, like last week, when the Acheri scratched you up.”

Gawd, he was goin' to hear about that forever, wont he?

“-so just take my hand,” the kid ended strict. About as strict as a beagle cuddling a kitten.

“Kay.”

This would have been so much less awkward if the kid wouldn't lace their fingers together like that! But there was no arguing with the prince of hell when he got protective.

Snoopy took him to the seaside. Watching the sunset. Great, that wasn't gay at all.

About a half of the spindly skeleton of a rollercoaster stuck out of the gray water. Sea birds silently orbited the whole thing. Added movement to the aching sounds of waves crashing against the shore and wind shaking the metal, making the structure squeal melodically.

“This is the heart of the Meadows,” Snoopy explained, “One of it's names is The Sea of Swallowed Dreams. The last emotional memory the souls in the Meadows forget, manifests here while it slips them. Sometimes it's just a second, sometimes it takes centuries. Since I found the Sea as a young child, someone holds on to the memory of this rollercoaster.”

Dean knew what that was like – to hold on to memories with an iron grip, caring little about the fact that this grip were claws in your own soul.

A psychic -patronizing douchbag- once offered him to purge his mind of the pain that was Sammy. Funnily enough the guy hadn't seen a fist in his own very near future.

“No, I'm not hungry.”

“Do you want some?” the kid offered the box with the pie.

The kid started to hover over him, projecting worry. “We don't have to stay, if you don't like it here.”

He sighed and looked at the wide, gray sea under the wide, gray sky, streaked with gold where the sun would be. “I wanted to show you, that there is hope, even in hell.”

Snoopy's kindness was a special brand of torture. Dean just wished the kid would back off. “Sometimes hope is the worst kind of hell.”

“I never saw it that way,” Snoopy answered small and yet so defiant.

Dean looked at him and felt his heart swell for no apparent reason, but that the kid was there. And he liked him to be there. Maybe he should have told him so earlier, with no bullshit, just saying, that he liked him. He did like him. He had never planned to, but it was-

“I have faith,” the kid said, carrying on their deep soulful conversation.

Faith? “In what?”
“In humanity, in people.”

Okay, yeah, Dean could get behind that one. He slung an arm around the kid and dragged his floppy-haired head close. “You really are a Snoopy, Snoopy.”

The kid took advantage and snuggled a bit closer.

So Dean sat there with another guy watching a sun-set. So the other guy was a bit gay for him. So what?
Chapter 14

After two days apart they now would be spending the night at Snoopy's. He had a new pet - a Tinkerbell - and he didn't know yet if the cursed birdcage was enough to imprison her. So he needed to stay close to it.

Dean held his tongue, not to ask if the Lord of the Underworld didn't have more important things to do, than to lock up tiny naked ladies. And that he had so much self-control was good, because he would have frustrated Snoopy again with his assumptions, which would have been a big waste of time.

Because after Snoopy fed the fairy a cream-soaked sugar cube, he explained the tiny thing was a spy. He would eventually kill her, he only retained her to experiment on her.

Dean kept his mouth shut about that too. Waited to have a moment with her alone and got it when he volunteered to feed the tiny prisoner another cube.

The kid shrugged and returned to his paperwork, trying to finish some spell before midnight.

“Hey,” Dean barely breathed into Tinkerbell's direction. She was supposed to have super-acute hearing, so she should hear him:

“I'm not gonna let him do that to you,” he squinted to see through the glow around her and she seemed to listen. She wasn't sucking on the cube, but she reached beyond it and sank needle-sharp teeth into his fingertip-

“Ow!!”

Snoopy looked up from his work.

What the fuck? Biting the guy who could talk the Antichrist into granting her a pardon? “They're not very smart are they?”

“Oh, no, no, they're extremely smart,” Snoopy's grin split his face in two, “And they're also very vicious.”

“You could've given a guy a warning.”

“I am sorry,” the kid said, one part sincere, three parts wisenheimer: “But it is expected she will be hostile towards you. Since your loyalty lies with me, that makes you her enemy.”

“Yeah, sure, just-” Snoopy really hadn't heard him whisper, “I maybe told her,” he shrugged to play it cool, “I would save her from the gallows.”

Didn't work, Snoopy beamed at him like Dean was just adorable. “She might not appreciate your gentle nature, but I do,” the kid assured him.

God, kill me now.

Snoopy smiled, like he had read his mind.

Dean slumped himself on Snoopy's bed, ready to sulk until the kid was done with his homework. And then he remembered something, and this time he said it loud enough for the whole class to hear:
“Ya know, Tinks, I don't believe in fairies anyhow.”

She stopped mid-flight and convulsed kinda, producing a coughing sound.

Wow, that really worked-

“She is just making fun of you, Dean.”

Of course. Stupid bitch.

Well at least the cat liked him. When she strolled back in, from wherever she had been, Bagheera first hopped on the bed, touched her head to his hand, before she greeted her master, by slinking by his feet and then climbing the table with the cage. She spent a few minutes terrorizing the fairy, until that got boring, to finally retired on the bed.

Technically on Dean. Her short, black fur felt liquid smooth under his fingers and he dozed off a bit. When Snoopy told him he was done working for tonight, the cat was already gone. Got what she wanted and off she was to find new love somewhere else – Dean's favorite kind of woman.

Snoopy liked to watch chick flicks, but then, he had grown um in hell so Dean hadn't expected anything else. The choice for tonight was One True Thing and four minutes into the movie, when they learned the mother died of cancer, he vetoed and talked Snoopy into watching Thelma & Louise instead...

As soon as the credits rolled, Snoopy asked, kinda shocked, “And that was it?”

“Yep.”

“That sucks!” Snoopy exclaimed with a high pitch that made him sound incredibly young. “How was that less sad than daughter and mother reconciling before her death?”

“They got to see the Grand Canyon,” Dean offered.

“I am never going to let you choose a movie again.”

Dean shrugged, “I never got to,” he said, more to himself than anything.

“Got to what?”

“See the Grand Canyon. ... Crisscrossed all over the country my whole life, but the real sights? Well, I guess everyone has regrets like that.”

“You're not dead,” Snoopy said. “You know that, right? You can still go and see it one day.”

Yeah, he and himself staring at a hole in the ground.

“Dean?”

“You wouldn't understand.” It wasn't about seeing the Grand Canyon, it was about who held your hand in the end. He glanced over and noticed Snoopy was sulking.

Shit, telling him he wouldn't understand fell into the category of calling him something other than human, because that right there was the mopey-Snoopy-scowl Dean knew intimately from his early days in hell.

“That's not the Grand Canyon,” Snoopy snarled.
“What?”

“The landscape in the movie is not the Grand Canyon. It's a different canyon.”

“How would you know?”

“I just know, you wouldn't understand.”

“Wow, real mature.”

Snoopy stuck his tongue out at Dean, but his grin split his face fast and Dean had to laugh along, because the kid was just too cute when he laughed...how did someone manage to stay so innocent, growing up in hell?

“I must admit,” Snoopy said thoughtful, “The movie has one saving grace: Brad Pitt's butt looked fantastic-”

“Oh, nooo!”

“Don't worry, Dean, yours is much nicer.”

“Kill me now.”

“Actually, I think it was what saved your life. Made me pause-” he held up his hands, forming round globes, “-and think: That can't be one of Lilith's lovers - she has terrible taste in men, you have to know-”

“No, no, I didn't need to know that.” Innocent, what had he been thinking?

Snoopy threw one of those fancy almonds at him, those which were covered in soft chocolate and tossed in cinnamon- which left a powdery cinnamon stain on Dean's cheek and his shirt-

“Okay, it's so on,” he warned the kid before he hit him with a pillow.

But Snoopy just sat there, hair tousled, chewing on an almond and asked, “What's on?”

“Okay, now you made it awkward.” He let the pillow go, trying not to attract more attention to it, but of course:

The puppy focused on it, frowned and then...shot Dean a look that was only short of a pathetic whine.

“You don't know what pillowfights are.”

“No,” but Snoopy sounded like he was eager to learn.

One day, Dean would look back at this and think this was the night where he had the chance to set the future king of hell on the path of becoming a little girl - damn him if he let this chance slip between his fingers:

“It's a game, I'm gonna show you, but first we have to braid your hair.”

“It's not long enough to braid it,” kid said totally serious and that had Dean breaking up so bad he was rolling into a ball laughing, holding his belly.

Snoopy stared down at him, chewing, “Is that part of the game already?” he asked amused, yet
detached - amusedly detached.

He let Dean laugh a little more, before he smiled warmly and said, “You were making fun of me.”

“Sorry-” he managed between laughs and noted how Snoopy wasn’t one bit angry, just the opposite actually, he seemed to relax more; like the fact that Dean wasn’t scared of him anymore -not much at least- was something nice.

He rolled on his back and took a deep breath, telling the kid, “You are an okay guy, you know that?”

Snoopy smiled shy and then squared his shoulders, demanded, “So are you gonna show me how to pillow fight?

It was kinda sad, when someone grew up not even knowing...but then again, the kid had grown up in Hell.

“It's not really something adults do,” -okay now he was lying, but he wasn't going there, “-with each other. It's a children's game, you hit each other with pillows, pretend to fight and be brutal, when it's actually harmless.”

“And you played that as a kid?” Snoopy asked with some fascination, his mouth open in a half-smile, anticipating.

Dean wanted to say yes, but, actually...it was no; well:

“Yeah, once.” He had almost forgotten about this. “My dad threw a pillow at me, because I wouldn't stop bouncing on the bed and I threw it back and it kinda escalated, but we had to stop then, because my little brother thought it was for real and he started to cry. He was only two and... -looked too rough for him, I guess.”

Snoopy watched him wary, like he knew this was emotional and he knew he shouldn't ask, but he wanted to and he opened his mouth:

“So, it's like a tickle fight?”

and got the conversation back on track, avoiding derailment. Seemed like Dean finally had taught the kid something.

“Yeah, kinda like a tickle fight, only...don't eyeball me like that, I'm not going to have a tickle fight with a grown man-puppy. No! I mean it, stop thinking about it!”

“Are you ticklish, Dean? the kid grinned hard and inched closer.

“Let me guess, you're one of these assholes who's not one bit ticklish,” he accused the owner of the approaching horrifyingly long fingers-

Snoopy came closer and closer -Dean was prepared, but then the kid just rolled to the side and fell into the pillows beside him, smiling up at him and telling him,

“No, you're wrong, I'm terribly ticklish.” The kid stared up at him, partly waiting for Dean to use this knowledge, partly not moving to show how harmless he was, that he wasn't starting anything and Dean should have mercy with him.

He didn't really know what to do.

Snoopy was like a kid really, he wanted to be tickled and dreaded it at the same time.
Sammy had been terribly ticklish too.

One only had to put a finger on his ribs and Sammy became a wiggly ball of giggles. Cute, sweet laughter. Enjoying it – not like Dean himself, who was so wildly ticklish it started to hurt too soon. But he had let Sammy tickle him anyhow, because that was only fair. And Sammy always wanted to play fair, he never even used the advantage – he had been such a gentle little boy...

Dean had turned away, sat at the edge of the bed and just wanted this kid behind him to vanish – maybe he would, he sometimes did.

He swallowed against the tears, because of course the prince of hell didn't go puff, but shifted and even that sounded restless and uncomfortable, like he knew damn well, that Dean was crying.

“Did I do something-”

“No,” Gawd! Why did this kid have to sound so unsure, it played every string in Dean's heart. He wanted to turn around and tell him it wasn't his fault, that this talk about childhood just messed with his head and Snoopy shouldn't worry, he still liked him...only, this kid was the enemy. It was his people's fault that Sammy never had a mom, never grew up, that Dean lost everything – dammit the kid killed his father and he was sitting here with him having a slumber party-

He should hate him.

Why couldn't he just hate him?

Because he knew damn well, John had been aiming at Snoopy – it had been self defense, a kill in a war, not murder. The kid said he regretted it and Dean believed him. Snoopy hadn't chosen this life. Azazel had most certainly killed his mom and dad and dragged the little boy to hell.

Snoopy had crept closer, not really daring to touch him, he spoke over Dean's shoulder, “Whatever I said or did, I'm sorry.”

He was so damn sincere.

“If you tell me-”

“No.”

Behind him he heard the kid sniffle-sigh through his nose. He knew Snoopy well enough now to know how much he wanted an answer, but he was not pushing it.

He was asking what he did wrong, so he could do better. This kid was trying to become a better person, when he already made a more decent human being than most men Dean had met topside.

If he started to think about that this yellow eyed bastard had tried to break Snoopy, get him to enjoy hurting others- Dean would cry in earnest, so he took a deep breath and manned up.

Turned to the kid and gave him a smile.

Wasn't too hard – as tall as Snoopy was, with his legs tucked up underneath him, he looked more than ever like a puppy, Sit up and beg.

“It's fine,” he threw the kid a bone. And maybe it was because he was suddenly aware of the enormity of his responsibility towards this kid, that he explained, “It really isn't your fault, I just, really-really, don't wanna talk about it.”
“Okay.”

The kid trusted him. For the life of him Dean didn't know why. He had messed up everything he ever had been trusted with. He should have watched out for Sammy and gotten him killed. He should have had Dad's back and had lain useless on the ground as the man died. He had promised Bobby to stay alive and here he was, in hell-

He opened his mouth and almost told the kid he couldn't do it. He couldn't take care of him, couldn't-

He shut his mouth. There was no one else, he was all Snoopy got, no one else messed up and dumb enough to want this job. So if he didn't do it, no one would. The kid would be alone. And if Dean had learned one thing about hell, than that hell was loneliness. Not even Snoopy was immune to that-

“You're not gonna leave me alone are you?” Snoopy read his mind – maybe he was really reading it for real-claimed that he didn't do that anymore, but kids were sneaky, even the good ones...

“Nah” he shrugged, like it hadn't even crossed his mind. “We have a deal. Speaking of it, I still haven't taught you the finer arts of pillow fighting,” he grabbed for one and lunged at Snoopy.

Who let himself fall backwards, but didn't manage to avoid him completely when Dean pressed the pillow against his arm, trapping it and was presented with an exposed flank.

He wiggled spider fingers up Snoopy's ribs, trapped the flailing long legs with his own and dug for gold.

Snoopy was laughing too hard to be able to fight back right away, he tugged weakly on Dean's wrist, but that didn't get Dean's fingers away from his armpit – so he started to wiggle like an eel.

Almost bucked Dean off. Almost.

“I - th- - ou't we were- pillowfighting?” came the question broken by cackling, deep bellied laughter.

“First lesson: Always do the unexpected.”

When the kid finally unwound his arm and then managed to flip them - for about a fraction of a second – Dean got tickled too, but he was biting his teeth, and attacked with both hands. Second commandment: He who tickles first, let him have the upper hand.

When both were ticklish, the one who lost control first was almost unable to get it back. Snoopy was no exception, he struggled, he tried to flee, rolled Dean over a few times and caught Dean's hands in a vice grip once, but it never held.

After Dean had enough fun torturing the kid, he let up a little – but not too much, not to give Snoopy ideas...

First he thought the kid was so far gone, that he wasn't able to fight back anymore, but when he stopped and only threatened the touches, Snoopy launched at him. He had been faking it, Dean thought and attacked in earnest.

Snoopy giggled and huffed and pressed his arms against his sides to cover his flanks – useless move, of course, Dean had no mercy.

Snoopy started to struggle again, but only as much, as Dean pushed him and then, then Dean got it:

He proved his theory by taking it easy and Snoopy went with it, struggled only so much, he was
getting away with snuggling Dean, holding him close instead of really pushing him away.

His little brother had done that too. Hugged Dean in the middle of their scramble, chubby little arms, way too weak to immobilize him. Like Sammy didn't really get it, that they were supposed to be fighting. But then he had always liked to get tickled.

He untangled himself from Snoopy and utterly failed at not rubbing their crotches any more together. Jesus, was this kid big.

Dean was on his back, staring up at the water damaged ceiling and he let Snoopy crowd him and lie close, while the kid still huffed out left over laughs.

Snoopy mumbled something he didn't quite catch and breathed hot deep breaths against Dean's shoulder.

Breaths that deepened.

That little sucker had fallen asleep, just like that. Clutching on Dean like he was a teddy bear. Great. Just, great. Dean Winchester's new resume:

Wet dream to the ladies, nightmare to all evil son's of bitches, but to the Antichrist? He was nothing more than a drool-wet security blanket. Awesome.

He waited a bit, before he moved out from under the snuggle-bug. And before he rolled to the side to catch some sleep for himself, he looked at the kid, really looked and allowed himself to feel this again:

Terrible fear combined with absolute certainty. He couldn't really protect this kid, he knew that and at the same time it was clear, that he needed to. He needed to protect Snoopy more than he had needed to do anything in a long time.

And now that the kid was asleep, it wasn't as scary anymore. It was more quiet in Dean's head and he knew that the only way he could fail Snoopy, was if he left him.

He dreamt that he was in hell and they were blazing pop-rock-crap - some pansy crooning how beautiful a girl was he saw in a crowd, how he never will be with her...

Also he dreamt there was something wet, warm and sticky pressing into his neck.

Only when the kid yawned into his ear, Dean realized none of this was a dream.

Where the fuck did the music come from? And how was there even music, he thought there was no music in hell? Maybe this crap didn't count...

But now they were playing Bon Jovi and that was a little bit too close to the real thing, so how - "Elgtss'ong" the kid mumbled and pawed and squeezed Dean's chest periodically, like he was a kitten and Dean his momma.

Oh come on! Snoopy liked this song? This song?! There were at least fifty Bon Jovi songs that
topped *Always*. Even that new one from last year, the super-schmaltzy one...Dean didn't remember the name, anyway- "We need to improve your taste in music, kid," he told the mop of hair under his nose.

The mop jerked awake and panicked eyes looked at him, "Crap – the music."

"Good morning to you too," he called after Snoopy who had leaped off the bed so fast it was still bouncing.

Ripping the cloth off the bird cage, Snoopy cursed again. The cage was empty. “I completely forgot about the clock radio, how could I be so stupid?!”

Dean was sure the question was a rhetorical one, especially since he felt way too mellow to think of an answer. But he had a hard time following the events anyhow, so the fairy was gone – how did that relate to Snoopy's radio tuned in on soft rock?

“Smart. She didn't even try last night to use the music from the movies...” Snoopy started, but trailed off when he scrambled through Dean's clothes, found a hoodie, the one Dean had borrowed from him, put it on and then suddenly stopped, looked at Dean and took a deep breath. “I need to go.”

Okay. Dean was way too comfortable to even consider asking what was up, or if he should stay where he was. He couldn't remember to ever having been so relaxed without getting laid. While Peter Pan flew off to catch Tinkerbell, Dean rubbed his face in the pillows and noted how nice they smelled. Very, very nice. Inhaling another deep breath he was reminded of cuddling Sammy.

It was Snoopy's smell. Something about how Snoopy smelled made his memories of Sammy lighten up like a Christmas tree.

This should've somehow bothered him, he should've at least felt weirded out or maybe even suspicious of the whole thing. But the happy feeling of contentment made it really hard to do anything but be.

Just be, and breathe in a time of purpose, a memory of being trusted, of feeling so proud of his little brother, of how smart he was, how fast he wanted to grow up-

And it hurt again.

If Snoopy really tried to mind-whammy him, he would have used Dean's memories of his mother. Those probably worked like roofies on him, but Sammy...

He should get up and do something with the day. Maybe find out more about fairies. If they were the bad guys, he couldn't go on being ignorant.
Chapter 15

After Tinkerbell made a run for it, Snoopy vanished for three days. No call, no demon herald, no smoke signals, zip, zilch, zero signs the kid was even alive.

When Dean found him in his room, Snoopy was out cold. Slept for fifteen hours straight and then wouldn't talk about what happened. Not really, Dean only got so much out of him to know he had been topside and no, he hadn't been in a battle. Lilith was hiding her forces from him.

There was a storm brewing, maybe that was the reason why the kid seemed so distanced. Or not, Dean didn't know and he hated to have to guess what was going on.

Up until now, taking care of Snoopy had been completely different than taking care of his dad. But the occasions where he felt the parallels became more frequent. He started to miss the times when the most annoying thing about keeping the kid company was how cuddly he was. It didn't go so far, that he missed it how much the kid had talked, but the upside of that had been, that he actually knew what was going on and what Snoopy did before he did it.

He felt like he was downgraded to a need-to-know basis.

For a while he assumed that was it. Snoopy got a scare about spies when the fairy slipped him and now he didn't trust Dean anymore.

But then his protective sigils needed to get renewed and Snoopy kept it almost clinical, no touches, no teasing...Dean almost asked if the kid was pissed at him or something, until he caught the longing gaze -the one that didn't look at skin, but underneath, lost in deep yearning.

Dean thanked God that he had kept his mouth shut. He didn't even want to think into that direction, or it would become too real. That the kid had the hots for him was one thing, -a thing they had joked about freely. But this? This was feelings. Those were best ignored. Even Snoopy knew that and that was why he kept his hands off him now.

Didn't mean that Dean had to act like he knew what was going on.

Because the problem was, Snoopy had gotten a little grumpy, now that he wasn't his cuddly self anymore. Dean fixed that with a few more pats on the kid's back and the occasional side-ways hug.

Worked like magic. Two days later things seemed to be back to normal.

Of course normal in hell meant, flagrant weirdness:

Snoopy bought him new clothes. Like store-new clothes.

Dean felt entitled to bitch about them, even though they both knew he would wear them anyhow; the kid also suggested, now that he had a jacket, he could let go of the multifunctional hooker-robe(made a good backpack, emergency blanket, sun-shield and occasionally Dean wore it as a coat) but that would never happen. He would wear it to his death bed, if only because the artificial candy smell offended Snoopy's delicate sensibility's. And Dean needed ever chance to get back at the kid, who said stuff like:

“Red ’s a good color on you.”

He almost dropped the henley, “Dude, could you not treat me like your mistress. Please?”
“It was just an observation, don't shoot me.”

“Sides, I don't really like red.”

“Why?”

Had he really missed Snoopy being snoopy? Hell took its toll on Dean's sanity. He looked up to check, but yeah, the kid was still waiting for an answer. “It's bad luck.”

“Actually most cultures deem-”

“It's not cultural, it's personal.” And strangely enough that made Snoopy back off the topic.

A blood red henley, venous dark -could have been worse: artery bright or worst, firemen's red, like the t-shirt Sammy had worn when- But it was not only that, red was just bad, it was blood and pain, and Christmas. Dean truly hated Christmas. Buying him clothes, what did the kid think Dean was?

Just because he was carrying his books for him when they were ransacking hell's libraries, Dean wasn't his boyfriend.

At least when they were working together the kid would let himself go a little bit. Maybe it was only the in-between-battles-stress – Snoopy was wound tight, even when he was asleep, he didn't roll over to snuggle the hell out of Dean -pun intended.

Sadly not every job could be done together. They found out that questioning the damned souls went smoother when Dean did it by himself. The kid had too much demon blood in him to make them happy and talkative.

So Dean started to enjoy the times when they were reading up on something, side by side and Snoopy -huge nerd that he was- forgot for a moment to be stern and silent and started to blab about what he just found.

One day Snoopy even joked a bit around, acknowledged that Dean wore the red henley, and complimented him as pretty.

He had some nerve, the kid. Dean hadn't called him his new wardrobe choice either, because he was sure there was a hell or war related reason to wear skin-tight leather pants.

He didn't call him on it the next time or the time after that, but the sixth time in a row, Snoopy wore leather leggings and a silk blouse, Dean had to ask,

“Did your hoodies retire, or something? Not becoming the new king of hell?”

“I'm not king, yet,” Snoopy corrected him without looking up from the scroll he was translating, “And I usually only wear them into battle.”

“You wear hoodies to battle?”

“I believe I just said that.”

Dean had learned a trick a few days ago and was making use now every chance he got:

He didn't say anything, only tapped an impatient rhythm with his finger at the book he should be reviewing for Snoops.

Unable to concentrate, the kid shifted beside him and finally turned his head to meet Dean's grin with
a gloomy look.

There had been a time when this look reminded him that the kid was able to telekinetically juggle trucks. Now he just found it adorable,

“So, you wear hoodies to battle?”

Snoopy sighed, fixed his eyes back to the scroll and explained, “They are more durable than silk shirts,” he made a note in his tidy handwriting, “And like the jeans, they are common fashion on Earth. Helps me blend in with the humans,” he added absentminded again.

“Dude, don’t say humans like that. You are human.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Regardless, you just don't use the word like that.”

“How is it,” Snoopy put his pen down and clipped his words, “That people with a puny vernacular are always so picky about semantics?”

He looked at him like he really expected an answer, while Dean was mouthing along his thoughts -vernacular? It was hard to stay serious when the kid was being so prissy, “Did you just insult my junk?”

Whatever answer Snoopy had expected, this one shot through his oh-so-serious demeanor like a laser: He huffed a laugh and shook his head.

Dean nudged his knee against Snoopy's and earned a wide smile, hardly hidden when the kid ducked his head away.

Only to face him again, pursed lips and stern talk:

“You know damn well what a vernacular is, Dean.”

“Yeah, but nobody says that in a normal conversation.”

Now he made the stern puppy sigh. Dean counted that as a win.
Snoopy lead from a sandy mine, tunnels so narrow they both needed to crawl and squeeze through, into a stonewalled shaft with a nice wooden ladder.

They climbed down into a high room, brown walls, wooden contraptions of a few centuries ago, a weird curved stepladder stood apart in the middle of the room, it's wood polished from use and age; but what really got to Dean was the smell, he knew that smell. “Where are we?”

“The meridian hall in the astronomical tower of the Clementium.”

The Cl- “No. Snoopy, nooo-!” he wasn't above whining, “No more work, it's Miller time,” they just had finished a ten hour reading marathon. Another library was the last thing Dean wanted to see.

“We just have one more thing to do, Dean,” Snoopy searched a glass cabinet and pocketed something, “Then, I promise, we will call it a day.”

Dean took a closer look at the stuff in the cabinet, was that a pickled pixie? “What are we doing?”

“It's a surprise.”

“I don't like surprises.”

Snoopy smiled at him and nodded for him to follow.

Dawdling behind, down endless stairs, grumpy and so done with all of this, he didn't appreciate Snoopy's favorite library one little bit.

Sure, the Jesuit college was one of the more beautiful places in hell -baroque, the real thing, not the kitschy Vegas version: Less plaster, more oak, less gold, more copper, overall more function, less decoration- but the fact, that it even existed here, meant bad shit had gone down in the real place or it wouldn't be someone's hell. Someone who had either faded away or become a demon, Dean didn't know. He just knew that he needed a break, a holiday, all this work and no play...It had come so far that he was able to discern hell's libraries by their smells, even though half of them smelled like old paper, dammit!

Snoopy was collecting a staple of books. Dean just leaned against one of the many big globes and stared up at the fresco paintings at the ceiling. They were beautiful, and boring.

At least the globes were riddled with mythical creatures, swallowing seas and devouring continents - huh, maybe the progress people made since the Age of Enlightenment was a little overrated. In his experience monsters did lurk in the unknown. Five more minutes and he would find himself a nice little bench and go to sleep right here.

Snoopy pulled a curtain back from one of the large windows, let bright light in and disturbed the drowsy, golden atmosphere. “Would you come here?” the kid was getting impatient with him.

The table in front of the window was littered with little bags and tools -a mortar among them. Dean blinked against the garish cool sunlight from the 'outsides'. Whatever the kid was up to, reading wasn't it, but Dean was too tired to inquire. Maybe he had hell-lag, by his count it should be past midnight, not early noon. He hopped on the table and leaned his cheek against a busty-carved-wooden pillar enjoying the smoothness and closing his eyes for only bit-
“I need your blood.”

*Do not open your eyes, it can't see you if you don't move.*

“Dean?”

He cracked one eye open, “Can't you need my spit, 'cause I can drool and sleep at the same time, I'm awesome like that.”

“I need more than just a drop of blood,” the kid wouldn't even entertain his offer.

Wait, more? Rubbing his face, he tried to look alive and ask the essentials, “What for?”

“I told you,” Snoopy gave a little shrug, “It's a surprise.”

He let his stare answer that one.

“It is a nice surprise?”

Cute, but no, “If your surprise doesn't have boobs that give whiskey, I'm not in.”

The kid cringed at the mental picture and shook his head, “Be careful what you wish for, the mid-regions of hell are known for.”

“Yea, whatever. How much blood?”

“A tablespoonful?”

That was enough for some heavy-duty spellwork. And that, was the reason why Snoopy was asking.

But Snoopy wouldn't be asking if he didn't think it was necessary, so Dean held his arm out.

The kid cut him expertly and made him bleed on a glass plate. Dean dug for a hanky in his pocket to staunch the bleed and almost missed as Snoopy cut himself and bled another neat blob of blood onto the plate, right next to Dean's-

“What-”

“Shh, I need to focus.” The kid had placed his hands at the plate's sides and steadied his breaths. His wound, other than Dean's, had closed right way.

*Under Snoopy's focus* the blood began to move, entangle, but not mix. It became two snakes intertwining and knotting together, biting into each others tails, glowing and then cooling to a metal shine, one gold snake, one charcoal gray.

It was small, maybe a good inch in diameter, but beautiful in the way simple things were. Snoopy fixed a fine iron chain to it to make it into a necklace and then to Dean's surprise reached up to him, to slip the chain over his head.

Settling the metal-ish pendant against Dean's chest, Snoopy's hand lingered a bit, before he retrieved it self-conscious. “As long as you wear it,” he explained, “It links our blood together.”

He had always known Snoopy was a tiny bit possessive, but this? It was probably meant well, but it had the tang of an official bond. “Does that mean, you plan on making me an honest woman?”

Snoopy huffed a laugh at his joke and touched Dean's knee distractedly, maybe just because it was
perfectly in reach. Was one's own risk when he sat on tables and let his feet dangle like a floosy. Getting groped that was, the risk of getting engaged like that had been unknown to Dean up until now.

Shaking his head, Snoopy smiled, but assumed a somber tone as he clarified, “It means, that you share in my power.”

It took a moment to sink in, “Wow.”

“No. I don't mean those powers. My natural ones and my authority. Not telekinesis or such.”

“Oh, okay. I have no idea what to imagine.”

“As long as you wear it, hell will not affect your soul. You can move through it without extended agony. How much you empathize with what you witness is your own choice-”

“So I could manipulate hell, even the Dungeon, like you can?” Realizing what that meant, he stared down at the little thing and touched it carefully. He was part of hell now, he could leave, find a gate this very moment or drill a tunnel to the deepest pit of hell by his imagination alone. He didn't need to carefully retrace his steps anymore, always at risk to get too deep and get lost...he had to make sure of that, “So I can't get lost anymore?”

Snoopy nod-shrugged, “With a little training, but you should not go deeper than the Dungeon. Right underneath is the Rack, you remember? Alistair's realm? And I pushed many of Lilith's followers to the deepest circles of hell. When you wear this, they will recognize you as my general and turn against you. Therefore I want you to have-”

“You what?” -he couldn't have heard that right.

The kid's forehead creased, only slightly irritated he explained, “I would only allow my second in command to wear a talisman this powerful, therefore, all demons who follow me, will assume you are my general and will protect and serve you like they would me. It is insurance they will take you serious and do not play with you, like they did before.”

Okay, “So it's just a title, I'm no general, still just a glorified pet?”

Snoopy did not like the insinuation and pulled a bitchface, “No, you are my general, it's not just a title. But the talisman does not come with obligations, I do not strictly need someone to lead my demons for me. I was trained to do that myself.”

“So, it's just a title.”

“No.”

“But.”

“What I want to say is:” Snoopy heaved a sharp sigh, “Don't boss my demons around just for fun.”

Dean bit back a grin, “Me?” he shrugged innocently, “I'd never-”

“You would.”

“Yeah, I would.”

Because he was still sitting on the high table, Snoopy had to look up to him and it made him seem even younger, and more stern. “I want you to take this serious. You represent me when you wear it.
Don't abuse the power I give you.”

“I take it serious, really.” Snoopy should know by now that he was only joking around because this was a bit much to take in.

Like his hand had a mind of its own it closed around the talisman, feeling its sturdy compactness, a hint of what it meant and what it could do – a part of him had already accepted, when his mind was still reeling, “I just thought...” how to say, that he wasn't worth that much responsibility, “Is there no one else?” At least one of Snoopy's former companions should have been closer to him than Dean was-

“There are of course the die-hard followers, they make fine lieutenants,” the kid misunderstood him, assumed he had been talking about demons, “They would die for me, mostly because they have no mind of their own. But you have. And I trust you. That is more than I can say about my late General. I always knew she kept secrets from me, but for some reason I didn't expect her to take them to death.”

He had to be talking about Iscah. The only demon who had called Snoopy by the same name Father had. She hadn't just died, the kid had killed her-

“I felt betrayed, but I guess that is human sentimentality.”

Snoopy had practically grown up with her and he had just killed her. Yellow Eyes really had succeeded if he wanted Snoopy unattached to demons. But then, the kid had let humans die too, “I should write a checklist, Things not to do, to avoid the title Late General:

Don't boss around demons for fun.

Don't keep secrets from the chief. Anything else?”

To his surprise Snoopy didn't laugh, nor pull another bitchface. “It depends on what kind of secrets,” he answered somber. “I killed her because I had to. She was too dangerous, she knew too much and she wouldn't answer me when I asked about you.”

“What do I have to do with her?”

“Iscah was father's favorite. One of his best agents on earth and his most trusted lieutenant here in hell. The last years he employed her with one task: To follow you around.

Most thought she spied on your father, but I am sure, that John was never the target. You were. Before you ask, I don't understand the purpose and she wouldn't tell me. I mean, she attacked you and your people a few times, that much I was able to determine. But the attacks were random and unorganized,” Snoopy shook his head, “One time she was allowed to play with you and take revenge for the exorcism you performed on her-”

“Wait, Meg? That bitch was-”

“Megan-” Snoopy interrupted, “--was the name of the woman she possessed, Iscah rarely ever told her real name to anyone, but yes, the demon you picked up as a hitchhiker, who saved your life and killed the pagan god, was the same who sicked a daeva on you only months later and failed to kill you.

Then she abducted your father, only to let him run and allowed you to capture her, then tickle her for information and on top of it exorcise her like she was a grunt who didn't know how to lock herself into a body or escape a devil's trap-”
“Oh, she did that just fine the time she possessed my friend!”

“Like I said,” Snoopy shook his head again, in affirmation, “It makes no sense, there was no purpose. As long as I remember, hell was on the brink of civil war but for some reason Father assigned his best agent to have her fun with you.”

“Fun?” that bitch-! “Jo never truly recovered from the fun she had.”

“Actually Iscah went easy on your friend,” the kid remained untouched, “She usually rode the girls she possessed so hard, they literally fell apart when she left the body. Like the one you watched die: Megan.”

Yeah, he remembered. Megan Masters had been a good girl, merely a kid really, like Jo. The demon-bitch had gotten her kicks from making them do things- “She must have been pretty pissed when you ordered her to possess a corpse.”

“Which brings back to mind,” Snoopy easily changed the subject, “I want you to have this,” and produced a casket, opened it for Dean to see:

The Colt.

To say he had mixed feelings about this thing would have been an understatement. On one hand it was a powerful, badass, awesome weapon, on the other hand, it made his stomach twist like the very first time he saw it in his father's hands -knowing John would take the fight to the demon now, thinking they both wouldn't come out of it alive.

Well he had been half-right.

“I see, I don't have to explain to you the significance of this weapon,” Snoopy deduced from his silence or from the reluctance to take it.

The talisman was one thing, but that Snoopy trusted him with something like the Colt? Dean took it, barely registered the weight and the balance, the elegance -unusual for a firearm that old. “Why not use it on Lilith?” he kept it professional.

“Father warned me not to use magical weapons against her, or anything but my powers. He said it would have unforeseeable consequences if I killed her with the Colt.”

“Sounds vague.”

“Vague enough to recommend, you do not use it on her either. It may take another year, but one day, I will be strong enough to find her, pin her down and kill her.”

Snoopy was vague himself on the how he got stronger, no matter how many times Dean had asked. So he didn't ask again. He knew by now it wasn't a question of growing into it -no, Snoopy had to do something specific to get stronger. Or as Dean started to suspect, something he wasn't ready to do yet. “But it works on all other demons?”

“Yes, but it only works when the demon wears meat. Therefore also on the hell hounds.”

“I thought they are all on your side?”

“Originally they were all loyal to Lilith, served her to collect souls-”

-yea, Dean knew that, he gestured Snoopy to skip that part-
“-a few of the old ones are too twisted to respond to my training methods. But those follow commands very poorly and were useless to her too.”

“Uhu,” he replied and tried out how the colt lay in his hand when he aimed. “What if I'm made by a hostile demon in their natural form?”

“You run.”

“Up, up and away?”

“The more powerful ones you should be able to loose in the Meadows, yes, as usual.” Snoopy crossed his arms in front of his chest – he did that now since he wasn't consciously cuddly anymore. “But Alistair has created a few young, strong demons that are barely powerful enough to pass through the Dungeon, they are the ones I want you to be protected from. They are young and hungry enough to find you anywhere. If you have one of those on your trail you need to stay in the Dungeon. Find your cell and let it take you.”

He took a good look at Snoopy, checked if he was joking, “Why?” there had to be another way.

“You're protected against it,” the kid promised, “But they wont be able to tell. They will think you're easy prey and start to play with you and you have to let them.”

“Sounds like a blast.”

“Exactly, you remember what happens when you engage emotionally with a prisoner, or anyone in the Dungeon?” the kid asked a rhetorical, “The Dungeon doesn't allow that, it separates, that is it's nature. The young ones are too eager to withstand the desire to torture and they would enjoy it so much, they'd loose control and get swallowed by the Dungeon and thrown into their own cell.

But only after they got their kicks from torturing him. “I think I will just stay away from them, talisman or no talisman.” He trailed the snakes with his thumb again. It was really beautiful, “Hey, do you know that there is a movie where they have one just like this?”

Snoopy knew, but he preferred the book. The original German edition. Nerd.
A little training on how to get around turned out to be even less than a little training. They got it done in one afternoon.

Dean had all the theoretical knowledge already: The lowest and the highest parts of hell were the most real – therefore harder to manipulate. Because these parts were stuffed with souls and demons who brought reality with them. Therefore the closer one came to the middle, which from one side was emptied meadows and from the other, emptied cells, naturally reality thinned out; as only the squatters lived there -low density of demons and lower density of souls -low density of reality: easy to make your own idea of reality count.

He already knew how to use the shortcuts there – his only problem had been that even a low density of demons meant that sooner or later he ran into one. They hadn't exactly believed him when he claimed he was already spoken for and that their prince wouldn't be too happy with them if they sampled the goods. They laughed in his face.

Now they bowed before him. Well, before the talisman. Still, opportunistic assholes.

“You have an outstanding talent for subjecting hell to your reality,” the kid complimented him again, because Dean had found a way out of the volcanic wasteland they had been wandering, by growing a full forest around them and burning it down to cloud them in a smoky fog, hiding a city of skyscrapers.

“Trick ‘s not to think too much about it, just keep moving,” he said and opened a door to a building with the mindful purpose of getting into a pillar.

Got it. This one looked like an truss tower. Climbing it would be a bitch, but as a corporal being a little legwork was unavoidable.

Snoopy looked up, huffing a laugh, “I know,” he replied a bit belated, “I just never met someone who caught on to that so fast. Even when I placed you at the outskirts of the Dungeon, you were working your way to the surface at a good pace. Another hundred years and you would've made it to the Meadows all on your own.”

“Hundred years?”

“Only in the pillars up is really up and down is really down,” Snoopy repeated himself, “Without access to them hell is a vast labyrinth. Why do you think demons are scared to be sent back here? It's like falling from space right into an avalanche – supposed they can dig themselves out so far to get moving, they have no idea where they are, which side is up or if using magic will alert someone stronger than them to their position.”

“But some demons have access to the pillars, right?” he asked and started climbing.

Not since Snoopy blocked them out, he explained. Now, only his forces were able to use them and only by direct command. Which explained, why this pillar for example, wasn't littered with leftover souls, hanging there like forgotten leaves on a tree in late winter.

Next stop were the Meadows.
“That blows.” He was opening and closing a door now for a good hour and it wasn't doing what he wanted. Dean didn't see why he had to learn that at all, he was getting around in the Meadows just fine!

“You almost got it,” the kid was appeasing and shit, “It just takes a little bit more time and focus.”

“You don't do that crap with the envisioning your destination, you just think of it and open a door.”

“Yes, but I've been doing that since I was seven and it took me a year to learn it, so quit whining!”

“What about the spit-doodling?”

Snoopy crunched up his face like he didn't know what Dean meant, before it dawned him and he said, “That's magic, you will never be able to do that.”

“We won't know if I don't try.”

“I know. Hell's magic is not the same as Earth's magic, you are alive, you're still part of Earth.”

“But so are you.”

“I'm not going to explain the finer points of demonic initiation to you, just because you want to avoid the topic at hand. Now imagine the pure asphodels.”

“It doesn't work!”

“You're not trying!”

“I can try till I'm blue in the face,” he pushed his index finger in Snoopy's face to accentuate his point, “They still are going to be too nice!”

“What?”

“The flowers, they are too nice.”

The kid wanted him to open a doorway to the pristine outskirts of the Meadows. Where souls had left no impression yet. It looked like a blooming field of asphodels -hence: The Meadows.

Snoopy palmed his face.

“Told you.”

“No, Dean! The fact is you didn't tell me that you think they look nice!”

Ooops.

“Okay,” Snoopy collected himself and took a deep breath. “Next time you tell me your vision makes you happy, okay?”

“Happy is-”

“Dean-!” The kid was biting his lip and glared, very warning-ly.

Dean saw no fault on his side. He wasn't to blame Snoopy sucked at this.

“Fine, we will try something else,” Snoopy deliberated, “Maybe more symbolic and more down to the point.”
“Something like that?” he waved his hand like he had seen Snoopy do it and made it so that the door was decorated with an ugly brown flowery wallpaper, which was just the side of mind-numbing that he wouldn't give it a second glance and hideous enough to hold attention if one happened to give it a second glance. And the flowers were asphodels -symbolic enough for him.

“Yeah, something like that,” Snoopy answered dry, his mouth half open. “You changed the Meadows.”

“Maybe we should give magic a try, huh?” he slapped the kid's belly lightly and opened the door to the closest thing to unspoiled nature one could find in hell.

Breathing in fresh and salty air, he had his eyes closed and didn't notice the doorway to vanish after Snoopy stepped through. But he felt the kid fidget beside him.

“Enough hedonism,” the sourpuss cut the moment of enjoyment short, “Now find a well and get us to the Sea of Swallowed Dreams.”

“But that's the farthest point from here.”

Snoopy turned his eyes to the heavens, long-suffering, mumbled to himself, “Children and fools...” before he turned to Dean, “Yes, that is correct and completely moot as there is no actual space in hell.”

“Then what do you call all this?” he waved at the endless fields.

Snoopy turned on his heel and started walking.

Dean jogged after him, “Hey, you wanted me to become educated about hell and now you heave a weary sigh when I question stuff?” how was that fair?

Snoopy nodded and then shook his head, “Maybe it's better if you don't know too much, you could start to think too hard and ruin your perfect game.”

“Dude, you're not supposed to say that.”

“What?” wicked smile, “Perfect game?”

“I will wash out your mouth with soap if you jinxed it now.”

The kid grabbed him hard.

“What!”

“There,” Snoopy, who still fist ed his shirt, nodded ahead.

Oh, there was a precipice.

Snoopy let go of him.

Dean looked down at the bottom of the well. A good ten yards drop, “What do I do now?”

“Make it expand into a pillar.”

“Just like that?” Wasn't it supposed to be hard to open pillars in the Meadows?

“Sure, just like that,” Snoopy shrugged casual and overall did a terrible performance. The prince of
hell, and future king -if Dean had any say in it, was a lousy liar.

It wasn't hard. When Dean stared long enough into the clear blue water, it seemed farther and farther way and soon he was able feel the tides, like time had stepped up, or he had slowed down for it.

He just took off and dove in head first.

As soon as he broke through the surface he felt air on his face and then gravity tilted and made his stomach flip like at a wild rollercoaster ride. He couldn't help a little whoop of joy and sank back into the waves, pushing himself against them as he trod water and watched Snoopy resurface next to him, shake his hair free of wetness.

“That was cool. Can we do that again?”

This time Snoopy actually laughed, even though he shook his head in denial.

School was over, the real life began. Snoopy wanted him to be able to command the hell hounds, which, he said, was not as easy as scaring demons into submission.

It reeked in the hound's den. Dean had been here before once, but he had gotten sick and the beasts hadn't wanted him to stay anyhow.

Today it was less crowded, more darkness, less glowing eyes, but the smell? It was just the same. Mostly it was the cloying sweet smell of old blood, blood from the hounds' wounds and their meals. How these beasts were able to sniff out their master and get all exited, howling loud enough to alert half of hell, it was beyond Dean's comprehension, but he had little time to wonder-

One of the smaller ones had jumped him, gotten on his hind legs and put his forelegs on Dean's shoulders, breathing wet in his face-

“I hate you so much,” Dean would have said if he hadn't been busy holding his breath. He didn't dare to turn his head away and expose his throat to that head that was all teeth and spikes. When he felt it nuzzle his chest, he risked a quick glance down and saw it had turned into a Great Dane slobbering even more than before.

As usually Snoopy had turned them into something cuddlier than their natural form.

A wet patch was left on Dean's chest when the dog finally got down and pushed against his thigh.

The slobbering beast barked at the other ones who crowded Snoopy and a horrifying realization dawned:

He was now wearing Snoopy's blood.

They were about to welcome him as happily as the kid-it was too late to run, they already pressed close from all sides, licked his hands, the bigger ones nudged their snouts under his arms or strained to nuzzle his throat!

“Relax-”

“If you say, they just want to play, I swear to God-!” Frozen in place he tried to remembered they never actually hurt Snoopy. Gnawed on him, played as rough as the kid did, but all in all pretty
friendly.

Of course he also remembered how one of them once had gotten a little too friendly with Snoopy and Snoopy hadn't stopped him. Actually when it had been over the kid was a little more flushed than roughhousing entitled him to be. Embarrassment, Dean had decided then for his peace of mind. What he had seen had been Snoopy getting his ass humped which had made him flush in embarrassment.

Now he wasn't so sure about that anymore.

So when one pushed his snout between Dean's legs, he felt entitled to cry out, “Help!” That beast almost had made him topple over.

“Boys-” Snoopy called out softly, “-aramesh’hal.”

They all backed off.

Formed a perfect circle around Dean and watched him, smiling.

“Oh god! That's creepy.”

“Hm?” Snoopy asked, as he broke through the circle, scratched ears and petted necks here and there.

“Dogs are not supposed to smile like that.”

Snoopy snorted a laugh, “They are not dogs,” he reminded him.

That actually made it only creepier, that they had been demons and before that humans once. His skin itched from all the slobber and the smell was now all over him too. “I need a very long shower.”

“We're not done yet.”

“Oh, I'm so done. I can't even tell you how done I am. You can stay and let them poke your ass all you want, but I'm done.”

When he moved they started to wag their tails exited.

“They're not going to let me leave, are they?”

“Make them,” Snoopy left him hanging.

Okay. Firm, but gentle, they weren't demons, inducing fear didn't work all that well on them. He stepped forward and focused on the over-sized golden reiver in his path, “Arameshal,” he told the monster-pup.

It wagged it's tail only more happy and barked at him.

A hurromphing sound at his back gave away, Snoopy had been literally holding his mouth closed not to laugh too loud, “Very good, Dean,” he managed huffing, “but it's actually 'hal, not 'shal and you only told them what good doggies they are,” the kid was openly laughing at him. “It translates to peaceful mindset, but it's not the words, you know? It is body-language and intonation. When I said it, they understood that they had given you enough love already to leave it at that. Now they're not so sure anymore. They can tell you’re scared and they love you, so they wont leave your side until they're sure you're okay.”

A trap, he had walked right into a trap. “You knew that that would happen!”
Snoopy's mouth spread out into a grin matching his creepy dogs'.
Chapter 18

Just because Dean was now linked to Snoopy's blood, the damned souls did not treat him differently -if anything they trusted him faster, especially the kids.

There was this half-feral little girl he liked to visit and feed with the chocolate Bobby had sent him. Barely out of toddler age, she always started to twitter in some Asian language and told him all kinds of things he didn't understand. Today he hadn't even brought her anything, but she had hugged his legs and told him about something up in the sky with so much enthusiasm it made his heart ache. He sat a little bit with her, listening and nodding until suddenly she clasped his cheeks in her little hands and said, “Con thu’o’ng ba.”

She had said that so many times, Dean had actually figured it out by now, “I love you too, Sweety,” he told her and smiled under her grubby little hands.

Then he blew up his cheeks and she clapped her hands against them, drumming funny sounds and giggling about the silly faces he made. At that age kids found the kinda thing hilarious and soon she was laughing so happily it attracted the first demon.

That was the reason, why a week ago, he wouldn't have dared to push a soul into pure happiness. Attract attention to the little girl. Snoopy had told him early on, that any soul in the Meadows could get pulled down for torture, at any time. It was what demons did when they had nothing else to do.

“Fuck off,” he told the black-eyed demon.

It was wearing a decayed little boy, shrunken brown skin and unhinged jaw. Dragging himself through the knee-deep, brackish water, the demon advanced. Tilting his head to the side, coltish, he actually opened his mouth to ask, “We can share her?”

Only now aware of their company, the little one squealed terrified and crawled on Dean's lap, hugging his neck hard. Her little heart jack-rabbiting against his shoulder, she held on to him for dear life.

“Let me have her later?” the demon bargained, “I don't mind waiting my turn.”

“I would rather kill you, than waste time repeating myself,” he made the thing stop dead in its tracks.

Diving into the water like the snake it was, the demon fled.

A week ago it wouldn't have taken him serious at all. It would have fought him for the girl and probably won. Dean had gotten his ass kicked by weaker demons, or been scratched up by Acheri'i's who were not much more than angry spirits really -the winged rats of hell.

The little one finally let up on her try to strangle him and now peppered his cheek with wet kiddy-kisses, repeating her I-love-you's like a melodic prayer.

“I know, Sweety. It's okay.”

When she had calmed down a bit, he took her by the hand and went off to explore the Meadows. Usually she pulled him into a direction and wouldn't even notice when one meadow blended into another. The purer the soul, the easier they slipped through the cracks.

He was still figuring out how that worked, how little kids ended up here anyway, but what he knew
for sure, was that no one knew better hiding places than the little ones. If you wanted to get an eye for the nooks and crannies of the usually wide and open spaces of the Meadows, a three year old was the perfect guide.

It always disturbed him how easily she let go of him when he left. That was just not normal. He himself had a harder time turning away than the kids. Knowing that any time a demon could come and get them...it didn't help that some of these kids probably weren't kids at all, just souls that for some reason reverted back to childhood. He wanted to stay with them, protect them.

A gray sky covered the flat roofs of this mud-walled city. The little girl ran between dye vats -pools like oversized watercolor pans, and she tipped her hands into the water, painting her skirt with hand-print spots. She came over and told him a long and high-pitched tale and moved her hands and threw in a few I-love-yous, before she ran off again, ready to climb one of the vats. She was pretty good at that, well coordinated for such a small child. Not once he felt the need to get up and help her.

It wasn't time to say good-bye yet. He had nothing else to do, he could sit here all day and night, while Snoopy was off to his secret mission.

One day she would forget him, just like that. But Dean didn't care. Nothing was forever and right now she was happy.

And because Snoopy understood that, he would make a good king of the damned. He would change things when he had full control. One day the demons would be banished from the Meadows, and this little one would be safe.

A sudden burning sensation on his right side irritated him. Not just an itch, Dean's whole right side had flared up and then the sensation was gone.

He had no idea what to make of it, but he took it as a warning. “Sweety!” he called to collect her.

They left, found a meadow less open and when Dean sat her in a closet she looked so happy as if this was the best game and said once more, “Con thu'o'ng ba,” before he closed the cabinet door.

The flare in his side went up again and it didn't really hurt, it was just unpleasant, like a minor heartburn. He touched his ribs and it went away, but-

Taking a good look around, just to make sure, but yeah, he was alone. Snoopy wasn't in sight anywhere, so whatever he heard, must have been

Dee

Taking a good look around, just to make sure, but yeah, he was alone. Snoopy wasn't in sight anywhere, so whatever he heard, must have been

Please

in his head.

He expanded the stairs of this meadow into a pillar and took the first exit with a white door.

A blank art gallery manifested as access to hell's equator, but when he started to search for a door, the walls remained blank and the room expanded into a labyrinth of white partition walls...

“Oh, quit screwing around!” he told hell and kicked down a wall, making them all fall.

Which left him in an enormous empty hangar. Great.

His worry was getting the better of him. He needed to focus, unconsciously touched the talisman.
When he felt the serrations of the dark snake under his fingers he remembered how he was usually able to tell the door to Snoopy's room from other doors here and thought why not?

If he made the snake on Snoopy's room appear, the door would follow suit. His eyes fixed on the floor at this thought he saw it there, in form of a ring handle.

When he pulled, a seamless hatch appeared. Not even thinking twice about it he climbed through into a much darker room.

Snoopy's room.

Empty, safe for the toed-off boots on the carpet, and light spilling from the tiny bathroom.

Where the smell of blood and urine greeted Dean, and Snoopy:

Beside the dirtied, bloody sink, barefoot and bleeding from his nose - shivering and gasping.

“Hey-?” he alerted the kid, before he sank to his knees to take a look-

Gaze sluggish from pain, Snoopy replied, “Dean?”

“What happened to you?”

Snoopy was clutching his side -his right side, where he bled his torn silk shirt through- and shook his head. “I didn't mean for you to see me like this-” he gasped out.

“Well, you called?”

“I didn't call you,” he argued weak.

“Sure you did,” what the hell? “I heard you.” Enough of this nonsense, he pushed Snoopy's arm a little to side to get a look at how bad the wound- “Holy shit...”

That wasn't a wound, the peek he had gotten, had made him flinch back.

That was-

“I'm gonna be fine.”

Fine? Kid had a fist-sized hole in his ribcage! Not a wound, a hole, a deep, gaping, torn hole! “I hate to tell: You don't look fine.”

“I've had worse. Under normal-” Snoopy's breathing became labored again, “-normal circumstances I would heal myself in a matter of seconds.”

“And what's keeping you?” -kid was white as a sheet and looked like it was a matter of seconds before he would bleed out.

“I can't, Alistair did this. But before he ripped my liver out, he-” another gasp, “… and Snoopy shut his eyes, pacing his breath, mumbled, “I'm gonna be fine.”

Dean noticed he had been stroking Snoopy's hair and stopped, but really he was scared to touch the kid anywhere else. Ripped his liver out. The kid needed a hospital - scratch that, a faith healer with real mojo...shit, shit, shit.

“I'm going to be fine,” spilled from cracked and dry lips.
“You're gonna die,” he corrected the kid.

“No, I'm not,” Snoopy stayed stubborn, pasty, but stubborn. “I can't die in hell, not in my domain, there are safety measures. I'm going to live,” he said, like it wasn't such a good thing at all and wheezed like he tried to proove himself a liar. “It just takes more time-ghaw!” his teeth clicked as he bit back a scream.

Dean gripped Snoopy’s shoulder while the kid breathed through his agony.

“It's not what he did to my body,” Snoopy pressed the words out -wouldn't shut up if he really was dying, Dean guessed, “He tampered with my powers - can't get into my mind, so he does any kind of damage he can – knows how to make it hurt, it's what he does-twist and turn things, cut into the quick instead of simply de-clawing, he makes it bleed and grow and bleed, again and again, carve them into a new animal, but not me-! He will not do that with me, I'm gonna be fine.”

“Okay,” he agreed and watched in horror as fat tears ran down Snoopy's cheek.

The pain came again and rendered the kid gasping and finally speechless when it let up.

Snoopy stared straight ahead, waiting, a stubborn strength keeping him conscious, a strength that Dean found a lot less desirable than the kid's other good traits.

His tears had dried and suddenly he asked,

“Dean?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you-?” he sounded calm, “Are you staying?”

“Sure.”

“There would be something you could do.”

“Kay. Anything.”

Snoopy turned his head away, maybe because that was the only part of himself he could move, but it looked like he wished he could vanish, get away from Dean's touch.

“I mean it,” he told Snoopy, “Whatever it is.”

“It's nothing too bad, it's just-...”

Whatever it was it wasn't just.

Like Snoopy was not just too badly hurt to keep talking. He was also ashamed. Like what happened to him was somehow his fault.

That demon had done a number on him.

But Snoopy wouldn't be Snoopy if he just rolled over. He almost sounded normal, when he told Dean,

“First, you could help me clean up and get to the bed – I thought I could do that by myself,” his authoritative tone slipped, “But that was before I realized, I can't heal.”
Dean made quick work of the shirt and when he started to cut off the pants, Snoopy said, 

“I lost-”

“Yeah, I can smell that,” he interrupted the kid. “It's no problem.”

He didn't want the kid to move too much, because he really didn't want him to black out. So he got him dry, not really clean, but it would make do until Snoopy got better.

Contemplating logistics for a second to decide -kid was not just a tall fucker, also not as thin as he looked- if carrying him would not put more strain on the wound than helping him walk. Dean was pretty sure, he would manage to pick Snoopy up, but “Do you think you can stand?”

Snoopy didn’t answer, instead he took a deep breath and his pupils blew up to fat dark pools. He looked at Dean and nodded.

They got him settled on the bed with no trouble, but as soon as Dean let go and turned around he heard Snoopy cry out in pain.

He was back at Snoopy's side in an instant, even though he couldn't do anything but put a hand on his shoulder. He hoped it grounded him somehow and didn't make things worse – some people couldn't stand anyone's presence when they were hurt, made it worse, Dad had always sent him out-

“I'm sorry,” Snoopy had locked eyes with him, “I should have more discipline.” His hand – the one that wasn't holding his own insides in, found Dean's hand and held it there on his shoulder.

Dean didn't know what to make of his words, but Snoopy's actions made much more sense: his presence wasn't unwelcomed, whatever Snoopy focused on to endure this, Dean wasn't disturbing his focus. So he stayed where he was.

Only moved when Snoopy's shivers got worse – got him a blanket and tucked him in tight. Every muscle of the kid was strained. Dean could see how he tried to keep the gasps on a minimal level, but that struggle cost him only more...“Seriously, is there no spell, or anything?”

Baring his teeth, Snoopy took a moment to answer, “There is something, but...”

“But what?” he lost his patience, “I said anything,” if he wasn't able to help, he would get someone who could.

“It might not work.”

“Hey, if I was the one with the ripped out liver, I'd try anything.”

He didn't know why, but he could tell he said the right thing, because he saw Snoopy's resolve break, before he said,

“You could touch me.”

He had his hand on the kid's head. “I'm touching you.”

Heaving a breath and pursing his lips in a way that told Dean, Snoopy would've gone into great detail how that was not what he meant, if only he had the strength to do so. Instead he told Dean to, - without meeting his eye-,

“Take off your shirt.”
He did and the talisman fell heavy against his naked chest. That's when he got it, “Are you asking me to take on a part your pain?”

“What?”

“The talisman links us together, I felt it when you got hurt, do you think-”

“No.” The kid's eyes narrowed, upset, confused, “That shouldn't have happened...” he moved, like he tried to get up, “-the spell...”

“Hey, easy,” pushing Snuppy back, Dean stroked the exposed skin of his shoulders, trying to soothe him and because it felt like the right thing he kept stroking, over arms, shoulders and collarbones and with each stroke the kid's features relaxed until his eye lids were dropping for a moment.

Touch.

It was as simple and as complicated as that. Dean looked down at Snoopy, naked under the thin blanket and asking him to touch him, asking him to take off his shirt, to let him feel Dean.

That was usually not something he did, not even with hot chicks, not without an orgasm to put a proper name on it. Dub him a jerk, instead of a needy bitch.

This would be different. Very different. But it didn't matter, he had meant it when he had said Anything.

He took off his boots, tugged the blanket loose enough to slip under it and plastered himself against Snoopy's unharmed side. He even found Snoopy's hand and laced their fingers together.

“Good?”

The softer breaths and the bearable grip on his hand, told him enough.

Snoopy mumbled, “It's...”

-seriously the kid would never shut up, not ever-

“...hell...I'm not used to feeling it, all of it so...hollow...better, Thank you.”

Dean had once caught him talking in his sleep. Aramaic, though.

Snoopy did not fall asleep. But he was quiet and still and that gave Dean way too much opportunity to think. To feel, warm and needed and good. His chin perched on Snoopy's shoulder, his eyes traced the kid's nose, up and down and up and down -Snoopy had a big nose when one looked too long at it. And a cute little mole right beside it.

The kid turned his head and met Dean's eyes and made him wish the ground would open and swallow him, so that Snoopy didn't see how much he enjoyed this. He felt like the worst kind of pervert.

But when Snoopy shifted and let go of his hand, only to grasp him by the neck and line up their faces, Dean expected to get kissed.

Not to get stared at, by naked want and something else.

It was the something else that won out, a gentle need to say, “Thank you.”
“Are you okay?” he wanted to check the wound, but that couldn't be, right? that that little bit of cuddling would do-

“I'm better,” Snoopy said and he looked at him, but his eyes were clouded over again, memories, not pain. He shifted, his nose-tip nudged Dean's and his breath ghosted over his lips, as he spoke, eyes cast down, “Once hell has you, it's hard to remember, even when you remember what it felt like: not to know loneliness, not to know pain or fear, just safety and love and being so close you don't realize yourself as a separate person.”

Dean knew what Snoopy meant, “You remember your mom?”

“No, not my mom,” his eye-lashes fluttered, “But I remember what it is like to have one. Sometimes it makes me see things.”

“What things?”

“Nothing,” Snoopy lied and focused on the spot under his eye where Dean's freckles were most prominent, “Just wishful thinking.”

With a deep sigh, Snoopy turned away, got up and left to take a shower. He was healed, at least physically and Dean really expected him to come back for more TLC.

But he didn't.

It felt weird and at first Dean shrugged it off. Put the feeling down to his own pathetic need to be more than he was.

But then the kid kept him at arm's length for the days to come.

The longest they talked was when Snoopy questioned him thoroughly about what he felt through their connection, that he had heard him call out for help.

Not that his own questions were answered, but Dean got a pretty good idea how unhappy the kid was about his spell going awry and linking them together stronger than intended. If he could, he would have reversed it, Dean was sure of that. But blood-magic was tricky like that. You could make it void, but never rebuilt it then.

Dean was glad Snoopy decided that their too strong link was better than none at all. Especially since he didn't see the harm. He liked getting an alert when Snoopy was hurt, or in danger. He was sure it would prove vital one day.
Chapter 19

It did prove to be vital, just not the way he imagined.

Next time the sensation flared up again, he didn't find Snoopy in his room, or at any of his hiding places.

He wasn't at the Clementium (which was kinda pale when Snoopy wasn't there to make glow by the power of his nerdiness), nor the mental hospital, which's wall were decorated by occult writings of countless tenants, all drawn to this place that conserved memory.

Nor was he hiding in the Meadows. That Dean was sure of, because he knew by now that the denizens of the Meadows were aware of Snoopy's presence in their circle. If one asked them the right questions, they were aware of many things.

So it was the mid regions of hell Dean searched frantically, daring down to the borders where the empty cells spoke warnings – little signs that people had an idea where they were and tried to make others stay away. Somebody had written red beside a door, They are Here

and on the other side

Do not come in

Before he would've went through, he felt the pull of the Dungeon and stopped.

But it was Snoopy, so he went anyhow.

He hadn't been here since before he had the talisman, not since Snoopy had secured the mid regions of hell against Lilith's followers.

It wasn't so bad. Well, it was bad because it was hell and he saw the worst things and had not time to stop and help, but, it was bearable.

Searching more and more cells, Dean soon realized that the only way to do this was to try it like in the Meadows.

To his complete surprise a long haired, nasty looking guy, sitting on his cot in stained boxer shorts and nothing else, stopped long enough to chew on his own flesh, to tell him, No he hasn't felt the presence of the young prince in a while, but he sure would tell his majesty, Dean was searching for him, if he happened to pass by.

So Dean called it a day and returned to Snoopy's room. Where he tried to catch some sleep. But the burn wouldn't let him and sleep in hell was less a necessity anyhow. More an epicurean thing, he thought remembering Snoopy's haughty 'insults' and his small smile when Dean acted like he didn't get them and then it started to hurt in earnest.

Which was bad – if Snoopy was so out of it he wasn't able to consciously block their connection, not at all...
She approached him as he searched the highest of the mid-regions, just beyond the Meadows. A completely flat mossy grassland, it's horizon swallowed by fog and the rivulet that cut through so smooth it couldn't have no current.

That demon, looking like Janet Leigh -in *Touch of Evil*, not in *Psycho*, vulnerable in a way. At least that was the impression she made last time Dean had seen her at a 'meeting' Snoopy held.

“Hello dove,” she said and sauntered closer, hands buried in the pockets of her power suit, “You're hard to find, Dean.”

Was that a British accent? He could've sworn- “And you are?”

“I am the humble servant who was sent to collect you,” she said smooth. Everything was pretty smooth about her, even the way she was eyeing him, taxing him, while she informed, “The young prince has defeated Alistair and got himself severely wounded, he wont let anyone come near him, save for the consort.”

“The what?”

She smirked, “*You*, precious. He sent me to fetch you, as he is currently unable to move.”

He could've sworn the Janet-Leigh-demon hadn't been a brit, but maybe he was confusing her with another demon.

Most of his doubts about her allegiance dispersed when she opened up a pillar.

They climbed down to the Dungeon, there they had to move on per foot, so to speak. After all, it needed some hardcore magic to open portals like the one Iscah had used to push him from the Meadows into Alcatraz. Maybe that demon wasn't as strong or as versed in the arts as the late general had been.

Or and that seemed more and more likely, Janet didn't want to attract attention.

Because the shortcut by magically enhanced door the scream queen was about to use to enter the Rack – that was the same level of magic Snoopy used.

Dean didn't think, he just reacted, fell back a little. Found a door that should have been locked and slipped through, before the demon turned around to beckon him further.

If Alistair really was dead there was no one to fear for the prince's forces – so why did Janet not use her mojo when she picked him up in the Meadows? Why act like she didn't want to attract attention to her? Why only feel safe enough now when they were about to enter Alistair's realm?

“Dean?” the grating British accent called out for him.

It had found this cell. He backed off deeper into the shadows of the crack house and he drew the Colt.

Dammit! the Colt was magic too. Of course he could lie in wait and kill this one, but the shot would be heard and felt through all of hell. And as deep in the Dungeon as he was, Dean would need time to move up. When one was running, hell started to get funny. Up was not necessarily up anymore. Killing this one, would leave him with four bullets – who knew how many of Alistair's demons had waited beyond the border?

“Dean!!” not so smooth when it screamed, short and furious.
It was close. There were 'people' in this cell, most just decoration, but in the Dungeon a demon shouldn't be able to tell the difference that easily.

Dean hid and prayed he didn't underestimate his opponent.

“What do you think this is?! You little trollop! **Hide and Seek**?! Your master calls, you show up! This is how hell works, bend over and say bloody thank you! Show! Your! **Face**! Or I promise it won't be my hide tanned for tardiness!”

Under the dirty rags, he had pulled on, Dean stayed perfectly still. He had the Colt ready, if it really was able to tell him from the other figures on the rotten mattresses, it would be dead before-

It chuckled.

Right behind him.

But then,

“He made me,” it said calm, smooth, “Bloody Winchester;” and disappointed, “Smarter than he looks though,” talking to no one but itself.

He didn't hear it leave. Like it simply vanished. Which was perfectly possible if it was using magic like Snoopy did.

Dean didn't trust the silence at first, but after fifteen minutes of breathing in the cold smell of burnt plastic and human waste, he dared to turn around.

Picking himself up from the rags, he felt like an idiot. Almost walking into a trap like that?

But that was nothing compared how stupid he felt when he took the first elevator up and walked into a slaughter house – not a slaughter house-slaughter house, but one from a seriously deranged slasher flick.

The elevator door closed behind him so final, he didn't even try to pry it open.

Crap.

He had never been here, but it felt...it felt different, there wasn't the pull of the Dungeon, but instead a natural weight, like gravity. Shiny, solid, warm. It felt like Earth.

Dean was 100% sure, that he had walked into the Rack. Probably not per accident. He had to get moving, now, before the demon that rode the Janet Leigh lookalike found out he was perfectly stupid enough to walk away from the first trap to stumble into the second.

At first he was unsure how to get around here, but after the first plastic curtain covered passage lead from the slaughterhouse with it's cooled down blood and flesh smell into a kitchen with a warmed-up blood smell, he remembered, that the Rack didn't need to be as restrictive as the Dungeon. Souls were rarely left alone here and if, they were strapped down.

From the kitchen he took a tunnel that lead up -in the vague hope that up would mean up. The dank passage made another turn and-

At the end, where there seemed to be something like outdoors, it appeared like someone stood there.
The contrast of dark tunnel and bright light at its end made the rope that person hang from blur.

Dean kept walking. It got warmer with every step, the air from outside mixed with the wet one in here, and brought with it the smell of human waste, and more subtle, the taste of constant pain.

He tried not to look - just keep taps on her in the corner of his eye - but it wasn't hard to tell, that she was strung up on her own intestines.

Careful, he took a peek outside at first. Putting up with being near the tortured soul. She watched him, he could feel it. Outside was a primitive marketplace of sorts, swarms of flies buzzing loud. And there were demons. In their natural form, which made the Colt-

“Aaw’ouu,” the soul made a sound and when Dean saw her face, he regretted that reflex, even though he knew then she really tried to talk to him – through her gag of goory bits that probably were parts of her own body.

She turned her eyes up like from a seizure and then down to him again and then up, always up, until he got it. Something up there was bad.

He would've said Thank you, but instead nodded. He didn't know if he could trust her, but in his experience there was a surprising amount of selfless kindness going around, even in the deepest circles of hell.

Using the broken cover of the canopies, he made his way along the building and to find the next door getting him away from the staring sky. The demons didn't see him. They were busy eating vermin off the victims of scaphism or pouring more honey and milk into forced open mouths.

The next room he found was a pretty archaic torture chamber, but like the kitchen: empty of damned souls and demons too.

As empty as the next room and the next and the next. It all felt empty, yet still Dean found it next to impossible to manipulate this part of hell. Because someone else made their idea of reality count – it wasn't for nothing that this place was called Alistair's realm.

Before he walked through the next door he touched the talisman and focused, not on getting up, but getting somewhere with fresh desperation. That should get him closer to the Dungeon, right?

A wide, dark hall, industrial. Different, for sure, but he didn't feel the pull of the Dungeon.

He almost went on without stopping, almost walked past the steel table at the far side of the hall. Where a small boy? Kid? was strapped down. Dean couldn't tell for sure if it was a boy, it was too mutilated from the waist down.

Eyes, wide open, bore into him, begging him silently to help.

Awful, deep wounds littered the little body. If this was real, the boy would've died already. But it was worse than real. It was forever, there would be no end to his suffering, not until Alistair's torturers made this kid into a demon useful for war.

The boy let out tiny gasp. Then shivered from pain and held his breath again – the kid wasn't able to breathe, not without adding to his pain.

Dean couldn't move on. He couldn't turn his back on the little boy not when he knew that all he had to do was getting the little one out of here, up to the mid regions, where he was able to bend reality so that the kid healed.
Improvising a thigh holster from rags, to tuck the colt away for simple draw, he had both hands free to unlock the crude cuffs and cut considerably quick through the leather restraints. Which at the little boy's ankles were overgrown with inflamed skin.

The kid whimpered.

“I'm sorry.”

Staying perfectly still, the little boy seemed almost relaxed compared to before, Like he knew Dean only meant to help him. His eyes were alive, like souls in the Meadows only were after you've shown them some care.

Dean cut through the last restraint and swallowed. There was no way to pick the kid up without hurting him badly.

He shed his shirt and covered the boys torso so that he did not touch the gaping wounds directly, so it evened the strain a little bit.

It didn’t work, as soon as Dean picked him up, the little one started to scream. Earsplitting desperate screeching screams.

Shushing him he got moving – got a few steps far before the kid started to wiggle like an eel. He pressed him closer, any more damage he did now was nothing compared what the demons would do if he left the boy here.

One tiny arm unwound from his grasp and now Dean was screaming. The kid had scratched him - blunt nails still, nothing like the archeri, but the force behind it?!

He crouched down, to shift the boy in his arms without danger of dropping him and caught a glance of his eyes, when the kid's head whipped around like possessed:

He wasn't scared, he was furious.

“Hey!” he shouted at the kid and actually made him freeze for a moment.

The kid studied him.

“I'm just trying to help you,” he let his tone count when it was pretty unlikely the little one understood him.

Kid wheezed more than breathed, but he was calm for now, looking Dean in the eye.

It hurt, not being able to tell the kid that he was safe, but he would get him out of here and then-

The boy's eyes had sought out the ceiling, starting to- “Gospo-”

Dean muffled the shout with his hand. The kid had tried to rat them out.

“Ow!” And now bit him!

The mere second his grip on the kid slackened was enough and the tiny thing attacked him in earnest.

Dean had trouble getting away. And when he got some distance between him and the kid, it still tried to come at him, like a broken nightmare, crawling, hissing...
Suddenly it backed away. Whimpered, cowering. A foolish moment Dean thought it was now scared of him. Before he turned around.

Two demonic creatures, definitely not wearing a corpse, flanked Janet Leigh.

She snapped her fingers and the pain he had thought was Snoopy’s flared up again, strong enough to make his knees weak. He bowed, but kept his head enough to turn away, keep his right side, the side where he wore the Colt, out of their line of sight.

Her eyes had flipped red -that eliminated all doubt it was the same black eyed demon who served Snoopy. “Darling,” it taunted, after it had tortured him enough physically, “Still here? What gives?” it sauntered closer, all smug. “Someone smart would have run like the devil was after him, when I’m after him, you understand? Name’s Crowley by the way.”

The two muscle-demons moved a little bit too smooth for Dean’s liking. They were not just muscle.

“Oh, I see,” the smug bitch stared down at the little one scratching away on the concrete floor, unaware, “You skipped out on being smart. You had to pass Go and collect a little damaged soul, bleeding heart you are. I see why” it paused and grinned, “Snoopy is wagging his tail for you.

Brilliant petname you came up with, made listening in on you lovebirds almost worth my while.”

Someone liked to hear her own voice.

“A bit narcissistic though, our Snoopy, falling for a lad with a hero complex, tsk, tsk, tsk,” it shook it's head.

Dean kept his eyes straight, but drowned the voice out, deepened his breaths and cleared his mind.

“What would Daddy say about that? Think of it, what would either of your daddies say about your star crossed love? I mean the John I knew was at best a functioning moron, but he would have seen Snoopy is worse than most of us. Even if he knew who your Snoopy really was-”

The exploding sound of the shot, broke right into crackling thunder, silencing the bitch forever.

Dean couldn’t blame them for being stunned, he had drawn so fast, he hadn’t felt himself move. Shot from the hip and turned to run. Their surprise gave him the headstart he fucking needed. ...
Chapter 20

The exploding sound of the shot, broke right into crackling thunder, silencing the bitch forever.

Dean couldn't blame them for being stunned, he had drawn so fast, he hadn't felt himself move. Shot from the hip and turned to run. Their surprise gave him the headstart he fucking needed...

Pushing at doors, walls, anything he could get to move he felt a chill. That was the first time he felt cold down here in Alistair's realm.

Not even the slaughterhouse had been chilling, cool yes, but not pushing into the bone.

He tried to find the chill the again, the whisp of-

Got it.

On pure instinct Dean shut his eyes.

There had been no door, but shutting his eyes should do too. He opened them to a pitch black, chilly darkness and was flooded with relief. He had to be in the Dungeon. In a cell of someone scared of the dark.

Testing that theory he turned on the light.

It went on as easily as it should. The prisoner huddled on the floor, so Dean guessed the ladder up was the easiest way to get into the the next cell.

The communal cell of a 19. century prison, more men than bunk beds, he left it behind fast. Dark woods were next, snow on the ground and frozen earth beneath Dean's feet, he kept running. Steady pace, not too hurried, not allowing desperation to take hold. He wanted to find a way up, into the Meadows where...

Breaking his run down he thought about that and cursed: How the fuck was he supposed to know if the demons who followed him were old ones he would only be able to loose in the Meadows, or young, powerful ones, that would find him in the Meadows?

Dammit.

He saw only one solution. He was wearing the talisman, so his own cell should not trap him any more than any cell in the Dungeon. Snoopy said only the young ones would be tempted to torture him, if they tried, he knew for sure what they were.

Not his best plan, but fighting hostile demons in their natural form in the Meadows? Not really an alternative. Been there, done that, got his teeth kicked in and if Snoopy hadn't come to save him then...no. He had to play it safe.

He would let his cell take him. He just had to give into the pull, right? He closed his eyes and relaxed, it wouldn't be like the last time, he would know it wasn't real, it wouldn't feel real.

Hearing crackling burning wood from the fireplace he knew he was there.

“Don't get too close, Nathan,” her lovely voice reminded her son.
The fuck? the guy was seven years old and his mom had to remind him not to play with fucking fire, Dean thought, before Nathan walked by him almost at eye-level and he realized what he had been thinking, what size he was-Holy-fucking-crap!

He was in his eight year old body. Why-

“Dean, would you help me set the table?”

He knew this wasn't real, he felt it, but it had every detail of the Christmas dinner, down to the artsy retro aluminum Christmas tree sprayed with artificial pine scent.

“Dean?” she looked down on him, her doe-eyes making him ache and hate her almost as much as he hated himself.

He had not participated at the dinner. So he probably shouldn't now either.

Retreating to the window ledge he kept an eye one the happy family, who back then had allowed him to stay out of their celebration.

Kiddy-clothes nonetheless, he still had his talisman and the Colt. He tucked away in his belt.

It was only a short distance from where he sat to the hallway and the locked door to the basement. A door he had never used in reality, a way out of here now.

He waited and watched the snow fall outside, while Sanford cut the turkey and his mother repeatedly told her grandsons to mind their table manners.

Who named their kid Sanford?

But more pressing what took the demons so long?

The dinner went on and on and Dean started to wonder if maybe he already lost them here in the Dungeon, or maybe they hadn't been able to follow him at all – all bulk, no strength?

Dinner was almost done when Nathan approached him with a plate. That had happened, Dean remembered. Nathan -sent by his mom, had brought him pecan pie and sat with him on the ledge, chatting him up about childish things, until Dean had pushed the plate to the floor, making a huge mess of shards and perfectly good pie.

He didn't take the plate, but he also didn't push it down, he looked at the kid who reminded him of Sammy so much back then. So much he wanted to hurt himself -had done it once too, took a lighter and burned his hand and then stopped because he had been scared Mom would see it from heaven.

Nathan didn't look that much like Sammy, too old, too weedy, but he had this energy about him, restless, like Sammy. Cuddly too, encouraged by his mom Nathan had tried to be nice to him. Tried to talk to him, tried to share toys with him, wanted him to help built the new slot car track he got from Santa,...even now, before he got it, the kid couldn't shut up about it and Dean remembered, how a few days later he had broken Nathan's nose and given the little guy the scare of his young life. He didn't feel angry anymore, the pain of Sammy was too old to get angry at a kid vaguely resembling him.

“Hey, Nate, shut up,” the older one, Chad, tore Dean away from his walk down memory lane.
Nathan jumped off the ledge and ran over to the couch, jumping up and down like the hyperactive puppy he was.

“Sorry about him, he's a nag,” Chad used the chance to talk straight, as his parents and grandmother all were in the kitchen and unable to hear him use 'bad' words.

This had not happened that evening. Or had it? Chad had stepped in a few times, when Nathan had gotten on Dean's nerves, had treated Dean always like he was older than he was. Closer to Chad's twelve years, than to -as it was- his baby brother's seven years. Had it been a different dinner when Dean had pushed the plate?

“Stop it!” Chad told his jumping brother -obviously distracted by it, “You look like a retard.”

“Your face is a retard.”

Classic.

Of course now Chad had to retaliate instead of talking to Dean. In hindsight Dean understood Chad had thought he was cool. Completely nuts, therefore: cool -sixth-grader logic.

That was of course before Dean beat up his little brother.

Nathan and Chad hadn't been close, not by his opinion at least. They never played together, they had completely different interests and friends and used every chance to tell on the other. Yet what Dean had done to Nathan was too bad to ignore, even for Chad, who loved to torture his little brother when no one was looking.

No one, meant adults of course. Dean had seen it often enough. Like right now, as Chad sat on Nate's face.

Which in itself would've been kinda funny, if Chad hadn't been so much bigger than Nathan, if he knew when to cut it out, if Dean had ever cared enough to tell Chad to cut it out. If he had ever told him how glad he should be he had a little brother. Had someone who threw insults at him only to get him to play with him for once.

It wasn't real. He fixed his eyes on the snowflakes.

But then Nathan cried out in pain and against better judgment Dean's head whipped around.

Chad was kneeling on his brother's neck, making him completely helpless and had his hand was between Nate's legs. He squeezed the little boy, so he whimpered, and batted his thin hands away, pushing his knee only harder against the frail neck.

“Pleas's'op,” Nate begged and whined higher from the pain when his brother with pleasure twisted-

“Stop it!” Dean called out and was off the ledge, before-

It wasn't real. And it hadn't happened. He would've never let that happen. No matter how dead he had been inside!

“What's going on?”

Chad innocently stared up to his mother, his little brother a whimpering ball beside him.

It was so inevitable, Dean wasn't surprised one bit, when Chad lifted his finger and pointed him out, “Dean did it.”
His mother focused on him, not on her lying skunk of a son or her crying kid, no, she looked down at Dean with so much pity, shaking her head, asking, “Did you, Dean?”

From child-level she was even more beautiful. A mom like from a TV show, surreal, even back then.

“Did you hurt Sammy like that too?” she asked serious. “Did you make him run away?”

He knew what she was.

He knew the real her would've never said such a thing. It wasn't real.

But did that matter, when he couldn't run away, when he had to let it happen, when he had react, play along so the demon got it's rocks off?

“I never hurt Sammy.” -interesting how he sounded mortified without even trying.

“Oh, you're talking,” she crooned like the real one never had, “That's good, really good. Maybe we should call your dad. He will want to know what you did to make Sammy run away.”

He was shaking. He wouldn't have been able to speak if he had tried to.

She crouched down to him, eye level, her beautiful eyes so sad, “Did you touch him here, Dean?” her hand sudden and big on his downsized dick. She palmed him, grabbing him by the arm too, so he couldn't escape. “Did you hurt him?” she asked, stroking her thumb softly up and down his length. “It doesn't have to hurt. I will make you feel good,” she promised.

He ground his teeth and let it happen, if that was what it needed to make the demon slip up, he could brave a little molestation. He wasn't really eight years old. He would pour himself a stiff drink when this was over and repress what it felt like to have a grown woman molest his unresponsive genitals.

“Doesn't that feel good, baby boy?”

It felt mostly uncomfortable and hot, in a definitely un-sexy way.

“What do you think, was anyone ever as nice to Sammy as I am to you, Dean?” She slipped her fingers between his legs, rubbing his balls and the crack of his ass, “I sure hope so,” she nodded stroking his thigh soothing, “Do you think the man who broke his neck made him feel good before he did it?”

No! No one did that to Sammy!

She drew him closer into a hug, “It's okay, Dean, shhh,” she rocked him in sync with how he tried to push her away.

They had killed him! Quickly. They didn't-!

“It's okay, I'm sure you would've helped him. If you had been there. He probably cried out for you.

But you never came to save him. He was all alone and scared. He thought you were angry at him. You told him, didn't you? I'm sick of you, Sammy.”

Sobbing into the demon's shoulder he felt something in him break and suddenly she was gone.

He slumped to the floor, grown up and heavy. Shaking and crying. Alone in his empty cell, as empty as he was.
It took him a long time to get up and get moving. His face felt numb and her words circled in his brain with the images they planted there, the sound, the clear memory of how Sammy sounded when he was scared, when he was hurt, when he skinned his knees and Dean couldn't make it better, couldn't take away the pain fast enough.

He wandered the Dungeon what felt like an eternity.

And strangely enough, all the prisoners caught in their pain, made it better. Remembered him, like Snoopy had pointed out once, that he wasn't dead yet.

That wasn't exactly a happy thought, but it was responsibility in itself. He wasn't dead, he had some fight left in him and he owed it to all those poor son's of bitches who did not even have that anymore.

He almost made it out of the Dungeon.

That he spotted the second demon right before he would've opened a pillar, sucked, but it was a blessing in disguise.

If the thing had followed him he would have been fucked.

He knew he should allow his cell to take him. Lure the demon in.

That would've been the smart thing to do. But he did not have the strength to go through that again. What he tried instead was a complete Hail Mary. In his defense, when he tried it, he thought the worst thing would be that it wouldn't work.

Well it worked.

He had spit-doodled the sigil of the Morass on a drain cover, opened it and jumped.

He had figured, the Morass would be a little like the Meadows, crammed with souls, easy to loose a powerful demon there or if it was -which it was- another horny youngster, the Morass would make him get stuck.

That far everything was as right as a rivet.

But he forgot that no living thing was able to prevail in the Morass.

Which meant he was probably dead now.

And Snoopy could not come here and help him, if he even considered Dean was dumb enough-okay he probably considered that. Kid knew him well enough now. He could send a demon...if there was someone strong enough left in his ranks, which to Dean's knowledge wasn't the case.

He was the only one who could get himself out of this mess.

Whenever the thought resurfaced that Snoopy could be dead, that that was the reason why Dean hadn't been able to find him, he pushed it down. Because when he had that thought he found no logical reason to keep trying to get out of here. And he tried. Just because he was dead, didn't mean he would roll over.

The Morass wasn't real. Everything just felt, but had no impact:
The storms felt like they sanded off his skin, his flesh, his bones. But he counted not one scratch on his naked body. His clothes though didn't make it.

The crumbling caves, their boulders felt like they were were crushing him, but he moved through them like through smoke.

The monastery, flooded to hip-height, with it's angel figures and a current that wasn't in the water, it goaded him inside where it drowned him and he stared into the dark water, pierced by monochrome light, stared with open eyes and breathed water in and out, feeling it push into his cells and bloat him, he felt himself decay. But when he was washed up on a shore, naked and numb, he touched every inch of his skin to be sure of what he knew already, that he was unaffected. He had let go of the Colt though.

His skin was off-white, everything black and white now, shades of gray, and time had lost all it's meaning. It was terribly easy to move on and bear the dull pain and the uncertain step on these moving stone plates, cold under his bare feet. They moved and tripped him and opened up under him, let him fall.

He fell into darkness. Closed his eyes and crashed hard into glass-ice. A bright icy wasteland, howling at him like he had disturbed it's peace, which he probably had, for the Morass consisted of demons. He knew that now, or had felt it from the start -time was a slippery concept here. He knew nothing about how long he was here and he remembered little about what he was, but it was plain as day, that everything around was sentient.

Everything was demonic, yet nothing tried to possess him. Maybe it was the talisman, or the demons here simply had forgotten how to incarnate. Like Samhain, who needed heavy magic to reduce himself to a corporal level, who was so close to pure energy that fire bonded with him, consuming him...Fire.

Snoopy.

Dean had not thought about him in a long time. But he remembered him. Snoopy had given him the talisman, had laughed with him and snuggled close in the early mornings when Dean was half-asleep. Sleep. He had slept once. Before this place had taken him, he had known sleep and peace.

Maybe it was this thought that made the ice desert demon so angry that it spit him out into the a void.

No air, no lights, no gravity and the air in his lungs exploded them, the water in his cells made them swell, his blood bubbled and his heart cramped and he felt himself freeze and liquefy at the same time, which was one of the more unpleasant experiences Dean had had so far and yet, because none of it was real, his eyes were intact and after a while he saw the stars far away, in the darkness of space.

Drifting between solar systems wasn't so bad once you got used to being a broken thing with perfect sight. The view was ever changing, and always the same, beautiful colorful lights far far away. Distance so vast it echoed in his soul and wiped out all conscious thought.

So when a black patch became bigger and bigger and sucked up all of space, he didn't think much by it. Or of the voice he felt on his skin like a question, a test, a touch of affirmation.

He remembered the pillars and how to travel through them, but he didn't know what his body did when it moved. He didn't know what this figure was that dragged him along. He didn't know what fear was, but he remembered that it once had been the appropriate reaction to not understanding what
happened.

Sitting on a soft surface, he watched as hands washed his body with a warm wet cloth. It came away black, but his skin underneath was still wrong, it wasn't white as it was supposed to be, it had color like the hands that washed him.

Like the face that looked up to him.

He knew that face. It's concern had given him the talisman, had given him blood and protection and life.

The one who washed him was the reason why he was breathing. Why he was alive.

“Dean?” uncertainty, still more a feeling than a noise to him, “Are you there?”

Pushing the tip of his dry tongue up against his teeth to try it out at first, he croaked out, “'eh Snoopy.”

And got himself hugged hard and toppled off the bed, into the kid's arms. He hugged Snoopy back and it felt good, it felt so good he needed to cry a bit.

Snoopy let him cry out, before he put him into clothes and pushed water and food at him and chattered his ear off with questions and explanations of how, when, who...It felt so good to hear the kid talking to him and Dean answered when he could, but Snoopy knew most of it anyhow, knew about the red-eyed demon Dean had killed and that he lost the Colt.

Which now lay shiny and whole on the bed right beside Dean – a thing Snoopy jumped to explain, before they got to the point of how Dean ended up in the Morass:

After Snoopy had interrogated the demon that fell from Dean's cell into its own, he had met a dead end. The demon that had followed Dean into the Morass had faded away there, no one had known they had gone so deep. But Snoopy was able to locate the Colt, figured Dean would be close by. It was pure luck, that after Snoopy had searched the Morass, he returned to the pillar at it's bottom and found Dean at the second deepest point of hell. Pure luck the maelstrom of the Morass had taken him so far.

Snoopy asked him again and then interrupted himself, making sure, Dean was up to strength...

“Dude, I'm fine,” he said, mostly to see the little crease of worry appear between the kid's eyebrows...There it was. “I am,” he repeated, but the thing was, if he was fine, he would've probably shrugged off Snoopy's hand on his shoulder. Probably. Before all this, sure, but things had changed, were changing for some time now. He took a deep breath and pushed those thoughts away. “You wanted to know how I ended up in the Morass,” he remembered Snoopy.

Who nodded and opened his mouth.

“I used magic,” Dean pulled the bandaid off. One of the band aids, the other would have been the answer to Why he fled the Dungeon.

“Are you sure?” Snoopy asked most neutral.

“Yeah, I spit-doodled.”
Snoopy did that thing where he tried not to show how much it bothered him that their blood-link had affected Dean so much: He only took his hands off Dean and folded them in his lap, nice and orderly. Like harmless things. “Why did you do that?” he jumped right to the next question without lecturing Dean on trying out magic. He was calm, deliberately so.

“Because I'm an idiot,” Dean gave the answer that would most likely rile the kid up.

And really, Snoopy took a sharp breath through his nose, lips pursed and head dipping down. But then he turned to Dean, looked at him. Looked like he wanted to hug him and then aborted that move so harsh, Dean winced in sympathy for the need Snoopy stamped out.

The kid stood up, full height, straight shoulders. “It would be best if you rest now, here where you are safe. Just because it seems like you killed Crowley, doesn't mean he is really dead—”

He?

“-he managed to fake his death before,” Snoopy finished his sentence and started to pack.

Maybe it was the literal hell he had been through lately, or just that this was the third time Snoopy was about to pull an exit Dean only tolerated from his dad, but he snapped,

“You're not going to just leave me here!” They had just found each other again.

“Where I go, I cannot properly protect you,” Snoopy answered, his back turned to Dean.

“Hey,” he stood up to get Snoopy to look him in the eye, “I get it that you're pissed at me—”

“I am not pissed, I'm worried,” the kid lied smoothly.

“You are pissed at me,” he said blocking Snoopy's way. “And you're not just pissed at me since we're linked together. You've given me the cold shoulder ever since Tinkerbell ran.”

“Who?”

“Don't play dumb now! You're freaked out because you like me more than you planned to like me.”

The stubborn set of Snoopy's jaw said the opposite thing to his nod and then he even said, “You're right.”

Which was not what Dean expected. He had expected more denial and now, well now he had nothing left to say but the truth, “You know I get it, I'm a weak spot. A bigger one than I knew before this bitch lured me into the Racks -but even before, you tried to make up for it and somehow made it worse. You know the smart thing would be to cut me loose—”

“You're not,” Snoopy argued stubborn.

“What?”

“You're not a weak spot,” he repeated so softly, so wet with emotion, like he knew exactly how much Dean hated to be one. “I don't know what you are and you're right, I tried to put an order into what is between us and failed.

You share in my power in ways I am barely starting to comprehend. But that doesn't scare me, nor does it scare me how much I care about you. You make me stronger than I’ve ever been before. You got it wrong, you're not a weakness I indulge. You're the greatest asset I acquired in this war. No amount of demon blood could have healed me like your touch healed me.
But touch has it's implications, for both of us. And while I know I enjoy it, I...” Snoopy swallowed, “I don't want to take advantage of you.”

 Seriously? That was sweet and all, but, “Kid, I'm perfectly able to say no when I don't want someone to touch me.”

 Snoopy glanced at him from beyond those bangs and shook his head tense. “You weren't able to say no to Lilith.”

 “Well, you're not Lilith.”

 Snoopy swallowed again, unable to argue with that.

 Dean had nothing to add. Why mess with perfection?

 But of course Snoopy had to, “I have no experience in equal relationships and even the others...It has been years since I had someone close. When I came off age, Father did not allow humans to keep me company anymore. I don't know how to rate a friendship like ours, I don't know...” he shook his head, speechless.

 “We will figure it out.”

 “I'm not so sure about that.” -Snoopy sounded like he was close to tears.

 “You think I'm not scared to mess up?! I've never let anyone as close since -”

 Snoopy looked at him expectant.

 But Dean had swallowed the name already.

 “-since your Dad died,” Snoopy ended his sentence.

 That broke a joyless laugh loose, “No.” He could only shake his head, but not look Snoopy in the eye anymore, “He was by far not the first one I didn't save.”

 Instead of saying something, Snoopy reached for his hand.

 Dean let it happen, even though it was awkward -a too small gesture, that meant too much.

 “Let me come with you,” he asked Snoopy, “I can help.”

 The kid turned away, but nodded, “I am sure you can, but you need to rest.”

 “I'm-”

 “The Morass had you for almost three weeks, I have no clue how you survived that with your body and soul intact,” Snoopy countered his argument before it saw light, “You need to rest and I want to stay with you, if that is alright?”

 Three weeks? Shit. “I guess you must have told Bobby a very convincing lie why he didn't get any letters. Because I don't see him here.”

 Snoopy nodded, “I claimed a communication lockdown. I guess we have two more days before his fragile trust in my word wears thin and he makes good of his promise to come at me and tear me new orifices; -several.”
Chapter 21

A letter didn't do it. Dean should have known; after he started hunting in earnest as a teen, Bobby always threw a fit when he didn't hear from Dean in regular intervals of at least once a month. So writing him was the top priority first thing in the morning.

Maybe he also should have known that Bobby had smelled bullshit three weeks ago. But he had been a bit tired still, not fully functional and at the time it seemed smart to stay true to Snoopy's lie.

Not smart.

The demon delivering the letter, came back immediately, with the message, that if Bobby didn't get face time in the next two minutes, he would march into hell and kick everyone's ass -the prince's included.

She looked terrified. A good look on any demon.

Snoopy wasn't around, so Dean had to make do on his own. Ransacking the small refrigerator of Snoopy's room he gave the demon a bottle of human blood and instructed her to take it to Bobby and teach him how to reach Dean through it.

“But, sir?”

“What?” it was a perfectly safe way of communication.

“The blood must come from a death sacrifice,” the demon tried to lecture him.

“Says who?”

“It is common knowledge, sir.”

That tone, Dean could only shake his head. “More like common bullshit,” the amount of blood needed wasn't for nothing just as much as a human could safely give. Killing wasn't needed, it was just a bad habit of demons to bleed people to death. “I hope for you, you’re not as sassy with Bobby Singer. He is known for his Sumerian exorcism, you know the one that sends you straight into your private little cell in the Dungeon?”

She flinched so hard, her eyes turned black. “Yes, sir -orders have been clear:” she stammered, “To be at my best behavior for Mister Singer.”

She vanished.

Knowing Snoopy, he probably had bound her to be unable to protect herself from Bobby. Dean wondered if Bobby knew why the demon-mail-girl was so terrified of him.

“...and then Snoopy found me in the Morass. Seems like this whole deal of Nothing alive can prevail was seriously exaggerated.”

...
“Bobby?”

“Boy, you have more dumb luck than anyone I’ve ever known.”

“Sorry ’bout giving you a scare.”

“Well, I didn’t know how bad it was. Knew that freak was lying to me, not too hard to figure that out – he came in person.”

“Yeah, he is a terrible liar.”

“That and I figured he only showed up, because he was searching for you. I’ve been thinking about that some time now and we have to consider it a real possibility.”

“That you can walk out of hell, ya idgit,” Bobby helped him along. “There is tons of lore of the living getting into and out of the underworld in once piece. Tricky though, one false step, one look back at the wrong time and you're done in.”

Dean knew about that, even knew how -theoretically. He only let Bobby finish, because he had no idea how to say it, without sounding like he had gone native.

“Am I boring you, boy?”

“No, Bobby, it's just...if it was safe...” dammit, there was no way around it, “The kid is not keeping me here against my will. If I wanted to, I could leave at any time.”

…”

…”

…”

He thought he lost Bobby then,

“You really believe that?”

“Yeah, I do and I know what you're thinking-”

“I think you're lying to me, dammit! What did you do, Dean?”

Shit. Massaging the facts had been so much easier on a piece of paper. “I didn't make a deal,” he offered his one saving grace, but then Bobby would know it wasn't the whole truth, so, “It's more an arrangement.”

“What did he want?”

“Bobby-”

“What?!”

“Just for me to stay here, keep him company. He doesn't want my soul, hasn't even asked.”

“What does that mean, company, what do you have to do?”

“Not much. It's like I told you in my letters, I help him with digging out ancient spells, sometimes I
get to boss around demons and we talk, we play cards, we eat the chocolate you send. He is just lonely. I told you what the damned souls are like, it's not the same with them. And we still don't know why Lilith tried to kill me, so it's safer for me here anyhow,” but mostly he stayed because he believed he did a good thing.

“And when are you cashing in on your deal?”

“It's not a deal. As soon as the war is over he promised to bring back Dad.”

“He promised.”

Yeah, put like that, it sounded a little shady. Like Snoopy was stringing him along. “What do you want me to say Bobby? That it's too good to be true? Well it's only from my side. From where the kid stands his whole life sucks ass:

He got snatched from playing with Legos and turned into something not-quite human. Raised for war and then when the war was there, the one giving him orders all his adult life dies and he is left with no plan and half his army defecting to the enemy. So can you really blame him that he wants a little comfort? Wants someone around he doesn't have to force into submission?”

“Why would he have to? He's selling you piss for peach tea and you swallow it. Does your brain take a time out as soon as John 's involved?!”

“Not that you need to know, Bobby, but I don't swallow.” That should buy him two heart beats before-

“What is wrong with you?! You know better than making deals with demons!”

“I do,” he realized, “I know better now. Bobby, I—” he hated to do this over the 'telephone', “Lilith didn't just find me to kill me. She tried to make a deal with me first, my soul to bring back Dad. And you're right, I didn't even think about the consequences, I just said yes.”

He heard Bobby exhale his grief. “Dean—”

“It was interrupted before we sealed it. And I know better now. I've seen hell and it's hard to describe, but what I've seen here, not just the bad things, but the possibility for something better. It's bigger than me, or Dad, or anything any of us ever did. I can't mess it up. I'm not staying because of a promise, I'm staying because—” Snoopy thought it was— “it seems like the smart thing to do.”

Bobby did grumble about a little after that, but he believed him. Maybe because it was the truth. Dean hadn't known until now: He wouldn't sell his soul to Lilith, not anymore. Not even if she sweetened the deal with Mom or...

No, not even if she brought Sammy back.
Chapter 22

The pen got flung into a corner, followed by a heavy sigh.

The cat raised her head about it - Dean didn't even raise an eyebrow about that, let alone stop zapping through the channels. The routine was well practiced by now:

At noon he helped Snoopy carry stacks of books into the kid's room and since then heavy sighs and the frustrated grunts was all Dean heard from over there. Till now:

“I'm done.”

“A'ready?” was barely five pm. Snoopy usually liked to work until the hounds started to howl - which meant midnight and was the coolest line Dean learned so far in hell. Probably because hell wasn't all that cool.

“No,” Snoops mumbled, “I mean I'm done, I found nothing. This whole day had been A. Complete. Waste. Of time,” he smacked his lips vexed.

“Oh, don't say that, you got your nails done.” A fact that Dean would milk for that it was worth: Deep (not very deep) inside the prince of hell was an emo chick and now he donned the black nail polish to proof it.

“Naw;” Snoopy made a sound he learned from Dean, “The lacquer is unevenly applied.” He looked at his hands, making claws of them. Then he looked at Dean.

He knew that look. “Nope. I'm not going to paint your nails.”

Snoopy grinned -a whole day of frustration forgotten- like the happiest puppy in the world and came over to bounce himself on the bed right beside Dean. Bagheera fled – the bed was too small for two royal pets and His Puppy-ness.

“I bet you're good with any craft you try,” Snoopy smirked.

Dean was not impressed, “Your Cosmopolitan-psychology doesn't work on me.”

The kid watched him zap, more accurately, he watched Dean's hand on the remote. Watched him until he shut the TV off.

“You have nice hands.”

“Ain't gonna let you paint mine either.”

Snoopy shrugged, “Wouldn't suit you anyhow, they're too manly.”

And now he would feel like a shit, if he pointed out Snoopy got girly hands -which he got. Huge, girly hands.

“I can palm-read, ya know?”

“Really,” he was a little bit proud of their accomplishments, only a month ago the kid hadn't been so short and zippy; to inform him of this little fact would have needed at least ten minutes and big words like *chiromancy*, and flowery descriptions like *girdle of venus* - Come to think of it, Dean decided he
knew too many palmreaders.

"Wanna see?"

Snoopy was up to something, had to be. Clue number one was, that palm reading was bullcrap, but what really gave him away was clue number two:

The sparkling mischief.

Not wanting to be a spoilsport Dean shrugged and held his palm out. He was so going to regret this.

First Snoopy just held his hand in his big paw, traced the heart line with his thumb and Dean started to suspect this was nothing but a ploy to get them to hold hands and really:

Snoopy's fingers laced with his, so that his palm was still up and open, but in no way any palm reader would-

The kid leaned down and licked him.

"Dude!" struggling didn't really help, the kid's fingers held his palm open.

"Hold still," Snoopy took a break from slobbering all over him, "I can't get a clear reading on the lines."

The kid seriously was tracing the three major lines with his tongue and only then let go of Dean's hand.

Freak, Dean thought while he wiped his hand on the bedspread.

"I would be careful whom I'd be calling a freak, if I were you," Snoopy's face would soon cramp from all the grinning, "Because now, Dean I know each and every your dirty secrets."

"Yeah, sure," his hand was still damp.

"The most embarrassing thing you did to get laid."

Doing the hustle in nothing but her pink panties – but hell, it had been worth it to shake his ass for a minute, Rondha-

"Rhonda Hurley tied you up, gave you your first titjob, then sat on your face and later," Snoopy grinned wide, "she fingered you and would've fucked you with a- Ow! -?"

The kid seemed actually shocked that Dean had punched his arm. "Watch out, mindreading is dangerous business."

"But that's what palm reading is about, you agreed," Snoopy was sulking.

"You're a natural mind reader, palm reading is bullcrap."

"It's not," Snoopy mumbled.

"Hey! You don't get to sulk – you licked my hand and invaded my mind, I should be sulking!"

"Palm reading is not ...bull crap," trying the words out like they were distasteful, the kid lurched into full lecture mode: "The physical contact opens the subject to the reader and to explain the traits applied to dermatoglyphs takes their mind off their usual thought process, which ends in somatic
revelation because—"

“Like I said: Bullcrap!”

“It's—"

“You just said it yourself: The traits are applied, what is a fancy way of saying they are made up. The lines don't mean jacksquat. You just licked my palm because a little hand holding does not embarrass me enough to break my mind open.”

The kid shrugged.

“Excuse me, I didn't hear you?”

“You're right.”

“Sure I am, I'm older.”

The kid gave him the bitch face.

The silent treatment wouldn't hold very long, in his experience Snoopy would rather forgive him than shut up. In about five seconds the kid would pester him again. 1-2-3-4-

“Soooo? do you always like to be dominated or was that-Ouch!”

“Guess again.”

The kid rubbed his arm, but please, it had been barely a tab, just a reminder that Dean would push back when someone with superior powers was screwing with him.

“I'm sorry,” Snoopy sounded rueful, “It was just s'pposed to be a joke. I catch thoughts through passive reading all the time,” he said carefully, because so far he had avoided the topic. “I mostly try to ignore them. They're just bits and pieces, they don't come with context—"

“I know how it works.”

“You do?” confused puppy.

“I'm not illiterate, ya know?” In the last months he had done more reading then in the last five years – it was boring in hell, and of course knowledge was power, here more than anywhere on Earth. “Figured you used passive mindreading, how else would you beat me at every frickin' card game ever invented.”

“I cheat,” the kid dead-panned, wrinkly forehead and pursed lips and all that, like Dean missed the obvious again, like it was painful to Snoopy to see him struggle.

“Wasn't that what I just said?”

“No, I cheat, I don't listen in to your thoughts, that would be unfair.”

What? “I don't get it.”

Snoopy rolled off the bed and found a pack of cards, “Call three cards, random.”

?? What?- Ohh...-Oh you gotta kiddin me, “Four of Hearts, King of Spades...Ace of Diamonds.”
The kid shuffled and this time he slowed his movements, so that the sleight of hand -when he moved the cards Dean called to the bottom of the deck, was easy to see. Then he shuffled them to the top and dealt them face up. Must have memorized the deck too, beforehand. Damn.

“I was taught cheating to the full extent of your ability is the only true way to play poker,” Snoopy stated.

He got hustled, by a kid. “Can't argue with you there. But to your full ability would mean you use every snippet of thought you can hear?”

“But that wouldn't be fair. And it was much more fun watching you trying to control your thoughts.”

While Snoopy manipulated the cards right under his nose. Still, the con? A work of art, a simple sleight of hand worked to it's perfection. “Liam taught you that?”

Snoopy nodded.

Liam had watched out for Snoopy when he was about nine years old, shortly after the stoned hippie chick quit -the one whose name Dean didn't remember, but looked like Barbra Streisand, so he'd dubbed her Funny Girl.

First had been Matthew, who had at least some experience with little kids, then curvy Jennifer, who had none, but was very maternal by nature, then Funny Girl, who had treated Snoopy like a baby doll and coddled him, before she lost her nerve and left. And then Liam, a two bit musician, father, grandfather by the age of thirty-five. A hustler, a part time criminal, a full-time grandfather before and after his deal; a man who spent most of his life as a drifter. Yet still every time Snoopy talked about him, it couldn't have been clearer, that the kid had idolized the man. Not so much the rebel life that he had lead, but Liam's kindness, his spirit and resourcefulness.

He was also the last one who really had treated Snoopy like a regular kid.

Elizabeth and later Mike had started to prepare him for his life as a leader, a prince, a warrior.

Dana, Jamie and Keith had been nothing more but company, friends -with benefits in Jamie's case.

And now Snoopy had him. A ragged hunter, who was probably more socially awkward than the kid who grew up in hell.

“What are you thinking about?” Snoopy studied him innocently. Like figuring him out wasn't as important to him as making conversation, making Dean feel comfortable.

“I still can't believe that you never had a drink in your life, I mean not even a beer. I was just thinking, when I was nine, Bobby didn't bat an eye on me finishing his beer, sneaking a gulp of whiskey...neither did my dad.” At ten Dad got him drunk a few times to teach him how to adjust for the lack of coordination in a fight. “I think the first month down here was the longest I went without a drink since fifth grade.”

Snoopy shrugged, “Well, Liam was as skittish about the topic as you are. He knew, that I was drinking demon blood. That it effected me like drugs would. But he tried to treat me normally, without playing it down. A tightrope walk, as you see.”

“Yeah, but -as far as I understand- demon blood is like uppers, right? You get hyper? super-focused, feel like you can rip apart the world with bare hands?”

“I don't just feel like. I can actually rip into the world with bare hands,” Snoopy clarified.
“Yea now you're just bragging,” he kicked the kid down a notch, “What I mean is, that sounds like the complete opposite of getting pleasantly buzzed.”

Snoopy's eyes narrowed playfully, “Are you trying to talk me into drinking with you?”

“No. Yes?”

“You could have just said so.”

“Well I thought with the whole being on call all the time, it wasn't an option. But if you're game, then hell yes. I hate to drink alone.”

“I wouldn't have noticed.”

Phfff. The fifth of whatever crap he found, was just to stay in shape.

...
“Well I thought with the whole being on call all the time, it wasn’t an option. But if you’re game, then hell yes. I hate to drink alone.”

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Phfff. The fifth of whatever crap he found, was just to stay in shape.

At first they planned to hit the pub in the Meadows Dean usually got his booze from. It was shady, packed with people, loud and on the wrong side of warm – which meant it smelled of baked truckers. But that was the Meadows for you, always either too warm or too chilly, never truly nice.

A cold one should have been the right remedy for that. It certainly was for Dean, but Snoopy...

...Snoopy had taken one sip of his beer and made a face.

“You don’t sip it,” he raised his voice above the noise, “You drink it like a man.”

“You mean like her?” Snoopy snarked.

Dean turned to the barfly in question. “Yeah, exactly like her.”

The kid tried again and scrunched up his nose in aggravated agony.

“Okay, we will have to ease you into it,” now that made him sound like one of those douches who got underage girls drunk on wine coolers, but desperate times:

“Hey Finn,” the called out to the barkeeper, “One appletini.”

That made a damned soul pause. The guy's face pulled a Seriously?

“For him,” he pointed Snoopy out, “Not for me.”

Finn glanced at the kid, from his nails to his cat-like eyes.

Snoopy smiled back.

“Sure-?” Finn addressed Dean, “that it’s not two appletinis?”

“Ha, ha, very funny. I didn't know it was open mic night.”

The green abomination was served without further comment.

Snoopy sniffed it, poked it, sniffed his wet finger – Dean didn't know if to be embarrassed or highly amused.

Finally the kid sipped-

and spit it back into the glass, “Oh God!”

The shout out had Dean almost choking on a peanut.
“That's worse!” Snoopy exclaimed and faked a wounded look, “Why would you do that to me?”

“I'm sorry,” he still got a part of the peanut stuck to the back of his throat, “I didn't know it was that bad. But the good news is,” he had to take a swig of beer – but it didn't loosen the peanut, “There is hope for you. Finn!”

“Changed your mind on the appletini?”

“When did you turn into such a smartass,” he told the barkeeper off.

“Somewhere around the age of three, if you believe my mother.”

“Oh, she was probably just trying to be nice-” he was getting kicked in the shin by Snoopy, lightly, but persistent.

He made the same face he made when Dean didn't want to pet the hounds.

“Is there something I can get you,” Finn got impatient, “Or did'ya just call me over to have audience when you eye-fuck your boyfriend?”

Snoopy's gaze turned dark, “Johnny Walker Blue,” he snapped at Finn, “Two glasses, leave the bottle.”

“Oh, Snoopy,” he voiced his amazement as soon as Finn turned away, “I get all tingly when you take control like that.”

Snoops snorted a laugh.

“But you gotta have to stop reading my mind.”

“I didn't, you like whiskey and that is the only kind I know.”

“Liam?”

“Elizabeth.”

Snoopy did actually drink some of his beer, but probably just to get rid of the appletini-aftertaste.

If the artificial smell of the stuff was anything to go by one gulp of beer wouldn't wash that away, Dean mused.

“Please, get rid of this,” Snoopy told the barkeeper, pushing the cocktail glass away with a delicate gesture.

It was funny with Snoopy, no matter how sweet he was, if he turned harsh against a damned soul just once, they usually remembered it forever. Well, most of them -but then Father Ned probably couldn't tell that the kid had given him a temporary lobotomy first time they met.

“To Elizabeth,” he raised his glass to meet Snoopy's, they clinked and before Dean could say anything,

Snoopy had downed the whiskey like a shot. He coughed only slightly. But his eyes got watery and his ears rosy and the flush spread.

Biting back a laugh, Dean told the kid, “Now that one, you would've been allowed to sip.”
“But” Snoopy sounded hoarse, before he cleared his throat, “That was how Elizabeth did it.”

“Wow, from the look of her I would've dubbed her a wine lady, but okay,” he nodded his respect.

Snoopy refilled his glass and sipped it gently, rolling the swig of liquid around in his mouth and made a thoughtful face.

Dean had the growing suspicion that the kid was goofing around on purpose. If, then that was fine by him, “You like?”

Snoops nodded.

They drank for a while in silence. Snoopy copied him in the aspect of finishing his beer in between.

Finally commented that it did get better after a while.

Dean didn't enlighten him to the fact, that his taste buds only got numbed by the whiskey – because then Snoops would've maybe noticed he had developed a slight slur.

A slur just too cute to ruin by awareness.

Listening to the kid's chatter, Dean realized this was the longest he had ever stayed here. Usually he drank his beer and got the hell out. Because something about this place made him itchy and killed his buzz.

Snoopy's presence had only delayed the effect for a while, so it couldn't be a hell thing. “Hey,” he cut the kid off, hand covering the glass, “Take a little break. Why don't you stand up for a moment, just to..Yeah, that's what mean.”

Snoopy had gotten on coltish legs, not yet truly unsteady, but with the laggard self-consciousness of someone who had never before felt so pleasantly numb. “You'wer'right,” Snoopy's slur wasn't really bad, but for someone who usually was so finicky about his speech? “-ss completely dffe'ent from demon blood.”

“Good different?”


“Ho-kay,” somebody needed a few crackers. Dean barely got up in time to steady the kid, because Snoopy had keeled over giggling.

“I feel warm all'over,” Snoopy leaned into him, “Is that normal?”

“Yea, unless it's running warm down your leg, thats-”

“I'knew you would ssaysomethingstupi-” mouth snapped shut, Snoopy frowned. Then, “Am I ssl-...I'm slurring.”

“Hazard of the trade.”

Snoopy stood on his own two legs now that he became aware how drunk he already was.

“What do you say,” he wrapped one hand around the kid's neck, to guide him, and the other around the whiskey bottle's, “We try out the pool table. Let's see how you're kickin' my ass now.”

“Depends on,” Snoopy forced his heavy tongue to work, “What we'a doing on the pool table.” He
snickered.

“Cute.” One more sip of whiskey and the kid would start making jokes about balls and sticks.

Of course Snoopy did not kick his ass. Pool was Dean's game, he had only let the kid win the few times they had played to set up a future hustle. But not tonight, tonight wasn't all fun and games, he watched the kid's game to determine how well he adjusted for his intoxication:

Good enough. Considering that he got even more childish after he sobered up a little and started to poke Dean telekinetically whenever he was lining up a shot.

If he had used the stick, or even his finger, it wouldn't have bothered Dean so much, but the telekinesis, “Hey! Cut it out!” he lost his nerve and used a tone a little too sharp.

“Sorry,” Snoopy said.

Great, the kicked-puppy-look. “No, it's...I'm sorry, it's not you. It's just this place-” it had gotten worse in the last half hour. And the whiskey didn't help anymore, not one bit.

“It's the music,” Snoopy offered.

He didn't get it, “There is no music.”

“Not here,” Snoopy nodded as slowly as a bobble head dog, “But there was music in reality. It is taken out, a missing piece in wholesomess, souls like you's are sensitive to a disturbance like that...What?” he asked why Dean was biting his lip.

“You said wholesomess.”

The kid rolled his eyes at him, but the grin was permanently plastered on.

“It begs the question, Professor Snoopy, what a wholesomess is?”

“You are a wholeso-wholesomess,” Snoopy needed two tries to get it out, mostly because he grinned so hard.

“Oh, I can't argue with you there,” gave the kid a point for actuality and two points for great insult style. “What'ya say Snoops, we find us someplace with music.”

“That would be my place. Or your place.”

“Your place.” It had two beds and he was not sharing with a drunk puppy. He didn't wanna know how handsy the kid got with his inhibitions drowned in booze.

Their way to the pillar lead through a windy forest in autumn, close to dawn, wet air crisp and tart, it reminded Dean of apples, but real ones not those that made up the first part of a 'tini.

“I could zap us there,” the kid wore out his lingo and before Dean really realized what Snoopy meant, his speech center had reacted:

“No, no,” never again, and surely not after half a bottle of whiskey, “You're not using magic while you're drunk.”
“I'm not that drunk anymore.”

Snoopy was probably right, but, “I am.” And his dignity wouldn't survive if the night ended with the kid fine and him hugging the toilet. All the whiskey he drank and had not felt in the pub, caught up with him now in the fresh coldness.

The upcoming storm ruffled Snoopy's hair and took Dean's breath away. Dry leaves rustled over the ground and somewhere far off the roar of a bike cut through the late peace.

By the time they made it to the pillar, the wind had driven out the heat in Dean's skin and maybe in Snoopy's too, because the first thing the kid did when they were back at his room was adjust the room temperature up.

The second thing was to put on Foreigner.

And not just any song, no, “I wanna know what Love is? Subtle.”

Snoopy laughed and snapped his fingers to switch to Bad Company. “Better?” his toothy smile turned the question into something else.

And Dean suddenly felt like he needed to be much closer to the kid, “You're a regular goofball, ya know,” he felt the guitars thrum through him and it added to the buzz of feeling Snoopy's body heat, “I should rename you Goofy.”

“What's it with you and the dog names?”

“I really dunno,” he could only shake his head, because he didn't. It just fit.

The moment where Snoopy looked down at him, them barely not touching, it ended and that was good so. He didn't want to lead the kid on. He wanted...he had no idea what he wanted.

They broke out the cards and traded the bottle, Dean taking more generous gulps than he probably should have. Yet still he caught Snoopy cheating each and every time. Slapping his hands and digging out cards from the kid's sleeves and from under his leather clad leg, Dean maybe got a little too handsy, a little too close.

Maybe it was just In-a-gadda-da-vida playing in a loop for too long, that always did things to him – but when he was bent over Snoopy again, searching him for those missing cards, he paused there. Looked, not really seeing, not really feeling -too drunk, just there, a breath away-

He kissed Snoopy on the mouth, felt this soft small mouth, took a lip between his and brushed their faces together as he released it again.

He felt calm, he wanted to do it again, but before, he just wanted to check if Snoopy was okay, if this wasn't too much or wrong or too right-His brain wasn't working very well at the moment, but he could tell from the kid's patience, that one:

It was okay.

And two, Snoopy was probably much less drunk than he was.

Dean kissed him again. Pulled him closer and touched him down, to feel the vast difference to having a girl to touch: Wide shoulders, plain chest, narrow hips. He let his hands linger on those
damn soft leather pants that felt warmer than skin. Snoopy moaned for the thing Dean had done with his tongue and he couldn't help but smirk. He still got it.

He wanted to say something, but when his lips moved away, Snoopy's big girly hands grabbed his head and he got kissed some more.

Until Snoopy let go, guiltily and licked his lips waiting – for what? Dean hadn't exactly sent any stop-signals. He pulled Snoopy closer, who tilted his head away, to ask,

“Are you sure?”

“That I wanna move this to the bed?” he told Snoopy, “Me myself? I'm undecided, but my knees are damn sure.” The angle they were kneeling pressed against each other was awkward. Because Dean was smaller. But that was a fact he pushed deep into his own Sea of Forgotten Things, like thoughts about a future that was further away than two seconds.

Snoopy untangled from him, which wasn't that easy, because the kid had gotten bold and had wriggled fingers into the holes of Dean's jeans, feeling up bare skin anywhere he got it. That had been nice, he should probably take a few layers off, would have if the way to the bed hadn't been such a challenge already.

They fell, tangled, Snoopy came out on top, framing Dean's face for a moment before he got back to kiss him. The rush of pressure made it hard to do anything but react passively and count all the good things he felt done to him.

A body of harder angles and harder planes, no softness but in the kid's eyes. Dean had done stuff with guys before, but not this. Never like this.

He had no problem with demanding partners, to get shoved, have his hand pushed where she/he wanted it -but this?

The kid devoured him, all the while as he treated Dean like he was fragile, like Snoopy reminded himself to pull his strength. That wasn't necessary. He was drunk and rock hard and anyone who looked at him like that could bite him bloody for all he cared.

“Not made of glass, ya know,” he told Snoopy to go for it. So they would get off some time soon. What he got, was more sweet kisses and soulful looks and the kid's bony hip rutting against his dick. Blunt nails caressed his skin and he lost himself in that sensation a little bit, mouth going slack against Snoopy's, shutting his eyes and squeezing the kid's butt a little bit to get him to set a rhythm.

Snoopy did and finally, writhing together they got somewhere and after another loop of In-a-gadda-da-vida, they both had jizzed their pants and Snoopy wrapped himself around him ready to fall asleep.

Dean was too drunk and blissed-out to move or even argue.

It had stayed pretty innocent. And sticky uncomfortableness aside it was the least awkward morning-after one could imagine.

Over pancakes and black coffee Dean finally understood what Snoopy had meant when he had
talked about good sex. But, and that he would not tell the kid, it wasn't just a rare thing in hell. Dean was able to count the instances where he felt the afterglow of good sex at a shared breakfast on one hand, with one finger. This lazy intimacy, it was the most reassuring and sweet thing Dean had ever shared with someone.

Which made what came next only worse to watch.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

We had to break this CH up into three parts because it is really long. So if you want to read it in one go, I should be finished with the third part by friday next week.

Thank you, and enjoy,

Bee

He got better and better at finding Snoopy, like a sixth sense he just knew where to look and this time it told him: below the equator. A part of it he had never visited before, which was probably for the best, because it was crowded here.

He didn’t notice at first, because he had been staring up at the stained glass ceiling of the mall's dome, until his mind caught up that real malls might be crowded, but not malls in the mid regions of hell.

Especially not crowded with different demons.

The last time a part of hell had started to behave out of character Samhain had been on the loose. So Dean did the smart thing and went with the flow, and limited his sightseeing to minimum. Though one had to admire the stained glass in the passage he took to find somewhere less crowded.

Which he didn’t find.

The sun blinded him for a moment and the scenery changed, but that was all. It was exactly the same in the ancient Akkadian streets – bustling demons, busy as bees.

The heat beat down on him and he willed the streets to end in a city, by a temple. He felt that Snoopy was up somewhere, but up was a problem in a flat sandy desert. If he hadn't company he would've used a sandstorm to change the scenery. But storms gathered attention.

Especially the variety of demons freaked him out. Everything and everyone was here:

As smoke or in meatsuits, or taken on a natural layer of hell with spikes, claws, tanned skins -their own or somethingelses, dead eyes and ripped faces.

Finally reaching the top of the pyramid -ziggurat, not a pyramid, a ziggurat, Dean, he heard Snoopy in his head, making him a little bit paranoid about the kid's mindpowers again. He went inside and made it into a stairs labyrinth. Like the one in the movie with David Bowie, what was it called, the-

A demon had jostled by him and almost pushed him into the void in the middle of the stairs. “Hey!”

It stopped and turned around.

It was big and fugly and Dean would have taken it serious if it didn't answer with:

“You talking to me?”

“Yeah, I'm talking to you, DeNiro. Watch where you're going. Your fat ass almost knocked me off the stairs.”
It stared at him like it contemplated to bite his head off -which wouldn't have been that hard with a jaw of that size. Then it shook it's head, “Any other day, whore-...” another head shake and it left him standing.

That was odd. Not only that it decided not to kick his ass. Those who called him names usually didn't care who his ass belonged to. But that it seemed not to have the time to kick his ass – very odd.

They didn't just look busy, they were busy.

Not even under full battle conditions Snoopy's demons had been too busy to kick his ass.

Braving gravity, Dean stepped off the stairs to make the world turn so they took him up instead of down. He needed to find the kid.

Soon the stairs spiraled up and walls were thicker – more a castle than the fake prop rock from the labyrinth. The walls richer decorated and lit with chandelier. Also, the demons he encountered all went into the opposite direction from him – unnerving shadows slinking by him and a few beasts growling for him to make way.

A dark, hushed cathedral was the first room he came to and when he looked behind him, he saw he had stepped out from the entrance to the crypt.

He was sure Snoopy was close by, because the demons here weren't busy at all. They flanked each entrance, like they were carved from stone like pillars.

They didn't blink, they just let him through, conveying an acceptance and calm he didn't know from demons.

He had the feeling -one he always had in churches, that he was interrupting something, but he spotted Snoopy, bathed in light by the altar, so he dared to come closer.

He wasn't interrupting anything.

The low altar served as a fitting platform and the demons kneeling to Snoopy's feet were pinning up the hems of his pants.

Dean was greeted with a silent How do you do? Then Snoopy stared down at the demons to his feet again.

They had dressed him up kinda lush, jet black on dark chocolate brown, silver embroideries. The kid sported a cloak-like coat, which would've been hilarious, if it didn't look so cool. All in all Snoopy emanated power and was dressed to fit that.

Also the materials were more sturdy than the flimsy stuff Snoopy felt at home at, sturdier even than the cotton of his battle-hoodies.

That and the goat skull embroidery on the kid's vest -the scapegoat was Azazel's heraldic animal, that all spelled trouble.

“So,” Dean tried to play it casual in front of the help, “What's the excitement?”

Snoopy drew a long breath, still emanating power, but now also restlessness. “The disciples of Ishtar offered their alliance to me.”

“Cool.”
Snoopy swallowed and avoided eye-contact.

“Not cool?”

“They are not exactly the easiest demons. Many factors have to be considered.” -never a good sign, when Snoopy's explanations were delivered in stilted portions or when he unearthed his haughty vernacular, “They are used to individual power and once were chosen by Ishtar on their thirst for freedom.”

“Ishtar? Wasn't that one of Lilith's names in...in Babylon?”

“No,” Snoopy shook his head slightly, visibly not allowing himself to let go and lecture his heart out.

He explained sedate:

“By the names Inanna, Ishtar or Astarte was the female personification of Asteroth known. Father's true child, by flesh and blood. Asteroth was hermaphrodite in life, most nephilim are. But as a demon, when he took a body, he preferred men. They usually took their life after Asteroth left them,”

his nose scrunched up in disgust, “It was part of Ishtar's charm-”

“Wait a second, nephilim? Does that mean-?”

Angels were really real?

“Father was a fallen. Not that he ever mentioned the fact,” Snoopy's eyes met the demon who had stood and nestled with his belt.

The demon bowed his head and tried to make himself invisible.

“I think,” Snoopy addressed Dean again, “he never spoke of it because he didn't remember it anymore and like you so cleverly pointed out once: Knowledge is power. If you don't have it, you better fake it.”

He didn't know if that was a hint not to keep asking in front of the demons, but if, Snoopy would have to be more blunt, “Yeah. So this Ishtar-?”

“Was very powerful. Crossroad demons were Asteroth's invention, among other atrocities. He gave them his red eyes. He also perfected the demonic initiation of small children – all his disciples were his long before they died and entered hell. Like I was father's before he took me to his side. Only that Asteroth would have never accepted a fully male child, like me.”

“He is dead, right?”

Snoopy nodded, “Lilith has killed him a long time ago. Were he still alive he would be the only other competitor to the throne strong enough to take her on. Another reason why his disciples have taken a neutral stand so far.”

“Don't wanna be caught on the losing side.”

“That and they have a hard time to decide who they despise more:

Infantile, power-hungry, crazy Lilith?

Or the male, unfledged perversion of everything they pride themselves to be? Not to forget I killed their prodigal sister, Ruby. For me it was years ago, but they are ancient. For her sisters it's like I killed her yesterday.

It took more than just a demonstration of power, for them to consider me worthy. It was my will to
compromise that won them over. Their offer is not a simple act of submission. To agree to it, will bind me too.”

“Like in a deal?”

“More like in marriage.”

_Marriage_?! Terrific. But, “And who exactly are you going to marry?”

“All of them.”

“All-... So you're getting a complete harem?”

Snoopy gave a joyless laugh, “Your idea of a lady of the harem is the accurate opposite of a disciple of Ishtar.”

A literal marriage in hell – Dean wasn't going to try and joke about it again, not when he saw, that Snoopy was barely holding it together, “And you think this is a good idea?”

Snoopy batted his eyes away, controlling his breath in a way that made Dean always unsure, if the kid was upset or angry or sad. “You have nothing to worry about,” he finally answered, “Our friendship will not be affected in the slightest by this arrangement and they will not even take notice of you, as they will consider you a human slave.”

“Interesting to know, but totally not my point. I wanted to know if you are okay with marrying them?”

Snoopy's attention was elsewhere for a second, because the demon to his feet seemed to be done and she tried to make herself scarce. Tried as in moved and then cowered, her meatsuit's hands flat on the ground, bracing her against an unvoiced pain.

Dean physically felt Snoopy's powers bear down on the small thing. But the kid hadn't moved a finger and when he turned to Dean, one had to know him well to hear something was wrong.

“Are you asking, how I feel?”

He shrugged a Yes.

“I was taught to view sacrifices, like this one, as an honor.”

The kid's dead voice would have been an answer on it's own, but what did that even mean, whose sacrifice? His, theirs? Were they even sacrificing anything? Snoopy sure sacrificed something or he would not be so- whatever he was like, demon audience be damned, Dean had to know if Snoopy was going to be okay. “Yeah, that really tells me nothing, especially not how you feel about the whole gig.”

Snoopy took a deep breath. And for the first time he seemed to relax a bit, or at least not grow more tense. “They will offer me their blood as a token,” he said, his nose twitching, “They were nurtured by Asteroth's blood who was of Azazel's blood who on his part fed me to make me his. Their blood is the closest I will ever get to taste Father's blood again,” Snoopy shook his head, eyes at the floor between him and Dean, “If had eternity to explain how I feel about that, it wouldn't be long enough.”

As so often with the kid, it was all in the tone. The words... -Snoopy had never talked details about being fed demon blood by 'Father'. But the tone said he didn't miss it, he...well he didn't miss it, any other interpretation Dean wouldn't even try on, but there was another thing:
“If they are like Azazel's granddaughters? Doesn't that make you...” with grandpa being Daddy to Snoops... “Their uncle or something? Isn't that a little bit incestuous?”

Snoopy's lips stretched a smile over his teeth, before he lost it and coughed a laugh that resounded from the far walls of the empty cathedral. Grinning hard he shook his head about Dean, telling him, “You're impossible.” He snickered, loosening the hold he had on every demon in his reach, for first time since Dean found him here -still they didn't dare to get away. “And I was wrong,” Snoopy nodded now, “They will notice you. You better keep your mouth shut. No jokes or they will try to kill you before you are able to deliver the punchline.”

“I will mime the mute eunuch,” Dean promised. “So when is this wedding of the century going down?”

“Now.”

“Now?!”

“I am at war,” Snoopy deadpanned, “I have little time to spare. The ceremonial orgy is going to take most of the night.”

Ceremonial orgy? Not that Dean had attended many weddings, but he was pretty sure upstairs' wedding-orgies didn't exist outside of porn.

“You can stay and watch if you want,” Snoopy offered, adjusting the strap of his cloak-coat. “Just don’t let yourself get drawn in.”

Dean was about to say that he wasn't that wild about playing the peeping Tom in a demon-orgy, let alone possibly get drawn in, but then it occurred to him that Snoopy had never asked him if he wanted to stay for any of these rituals before. The kid would never outright ask him to stay, no matter how much he wanted him there. “How do I do that? Not getting myself drawn in?”

Snoopy stepped down the platform, waved the tailor off and came close – he smiled in a way like it hadn't escaped him, that Dean didn't even acknowledge the possibility to leave him alone. The kid nestled with Dean's rumpled jeans jacket and told him, “Their wiles are the wiles of hell and as you can resist the Dungeon, you should be able to keep to yourself tonight too.”

Dean dipped his head down to look at Snoopy's sneaky hands on his chest – the kid was telegraphing uneasiness like mad.

“You don't need to stay,” Snoopy had to point out, “I'm going to be fine,” he smiled to sell it.

But Dean wasn't buying. “As fine as you are after close encounters with Alistair?” he whispered for only them to hear.

Snoopy swallowed and didn't dare to downplay the thing again.

“I will stay with you,” he made it clear and suddenly had Snoopy hugging him, squishing Deans nose with his Adam's apple. Sometimes their height difference just sucked ass! He patted the kid's back and squeezed him one last time, before Snoopy let go and looked at him. Heaving a little sigh, wet with emotion, that remembered Dean he should have kept his mouth shut.

The last thing the kid needed in a ritual with who-knew how many demons was to be emotionally vulnerable.

“Follow me,” Snoopy told him.
On their way out, Dean couldn't fail to notice, how the guards moved perfectly in sync, towards the altar.

Where the two demons were caught by Snoopy's will.

They were almost out of the door, as panicked screams broke from borrowed human throats.

The guards were doing something to those two, but Dean couldn't see-

“Are you coming?” Snoopy asked, standing in the entrance of the cathedral, which opened to a dark pasture, rolling hills, black and blue in the starry moonless night.

It wasn't that he cared what happened to the demons and he knew why it was necessary -they had witnessed a moment of weakness, had heard too much, were too minor for further use, but nothing was minor when it had knowledge- he knew all of Snoopy's reasons. What bothered him, was that Snoopy didn't voice them, the kid always rattled off his reasoning, double-checking if Dean was getting it, was getting him.

He got close enough to study Snoopy's face, the locked in panic he already suspected there.

“It's not going to be nice what you will see tonight,” Snoopy finally started-

“Don't worry about me,” seriously, after everything, the kid was so unsure? “You do what you gotta do, alright?”

There was the smallest smile, a saving grace, a fuck-it to whatever may change tonight.

That's the spirit, Dean thought and clapped Snoopy on the back. “Lead way, kemo sabe.”

...
“It's not going to be nice what you will see tonight,” Snoopy finally started-

“Don't worry about me,” seriously, after everything, the kid was so unsure? “You do what you gotta do, alright?”

There was the smallest smile, a saving grace, a fuck-it to whatever may change tonight.

That's the spirit, Dean thought and clapped Snoopy on the back. “Lead way, kemo sabe.”

It had the moist feeling of a late night in summer when darkness had cooled down the air and dew built on the grass tips. He knew now why Snoopy hadn't dressed in silk for once. The trip to the wedding site alone called for a cloak. But Dean was used to the chill. It was a hell thing.

They walked and they walked, behind every height another hilly plane and Dean started to suspect the kid wasn't in a hurry to get there and get the knot tied.

Fine by him.

... His first thought was bells but then it suddenly grew impossibly louder, closer like from right under his feet, but with the absence of the vibrations that such heavy bass should have produced and he was sure it wasn't bells, not even muffled ones sounded so dark. Wasn't drums either.

He chanced a glance towards Snoopy who seemed oblivious to the ringing.

Great, now he was hearing hell's bells in his head.

With every step they took, more chimes seemed to join in and the glockenspiel started to sound more -but not quite, musical, with a disturbing undercurrent of urgency. Losing the beat every so often Dean's heart started to feel like it stopped and constricted, trying to keep up or slow down with the bells/drum- Seriously, what the hell was that? It did sound metallic, but also not. Couldn't something in this stupid place be normal for once?!

He tried to pace his breaths and calm his nerves, but the irregular clinks and taps gave him the feeling of tapping feet of hundreds of invisible people coming closer from all sides. It was impossible to stay calm. Well, unless you were Snoopy, who had the same silent inward focus as when he was reading. “You hear that too, right?”

“You mean the calling toll of Stonehenge? Yeah,” Snoopy nodded like it was so damn normal he didn't even know why Dean asked, “It's supposed to be heard through the mid-regions of hell, till down to the Dungeon. You can probably hear it in the Meadows too.”

So he had been right, it was hell's bells, “Stonehenge...The-” he made a circle gesture and Snoopy nodded. “It makes a sound?”

“That is what it was built for,” Snoopy explained, “Among other functions. It must have been an impressive structure on Earth, but here in hell it has a completely different history. Over the last thousands of years it has dropped to the singular point of hell's equator, which makes it one's of hell's centers.”

“I'm not even going to ask why hell needs multiple centers.”
“Not that it needs them, they just are. There is the center of mass at them bottom of the Sea, or the central flow of four-dimensional space-time, or-”

“You're going to marry in minute,” Gawd that tappering got on his nerves! “Maybe you should give me the hellish sciences lessons later.”

“Yeah, okay,” Snoopy bit his lip.

Dean kept watching the kid and because he saw him listing the centers in his big head anyhow:

“Alright, go on.”

“There is also the fluid center of soul-specific density, opposed to the stable center of demonic gravity, the Cage is the center of hard potential energy, the singularity loop of the oldest pillar is something like a center too-”

“I changed my mind, don't tell me. Not now, not later.”

Snoopy laughed a bit. But sobered up way too fast and resumed his terribly indrawn silence.

The combination of a silent Snoopy and the arrhythmic beat of hell gave him the creeps, but he really didn't know what to say to make this easier for the kid. It wasn't rocket surgery that this wedding was a risk and even if it went down smooth...marrying demons? Where the fuck should he even start?

Yeah, he was pretty sure, if he opened his mouth he would only make it worse.

Soon the silhouette of the stone circle became visible, black against the starry horizon, with a tiny orange flicker illuminating it from within and it took him a little bit to realize it wasn't what he was seeing that unnerved him, but the fact that the clinking beat became softer the closer they got.

He stopped for ten seconds and listened, but no, it wasn't fading, it simply got less audible the closer one came -what the fuck?

He jogged to make up ground and fall in step with Snoopy again, trying to ignore the soft fidgety tunes. And that was when he noticed the demons.

First he smelled the crowd, before he even saw them, thick masses in darkness – the smell of sulfur, but not of rotten eggs, no, the sharp, warm smell of ignited sulfur matches. It became almost corporal, like a texture felt by his lungs.

He turned around and found that they already had entered the crowd of demons, that wasn't an illusion, he actually breathed in demonic smoke.

-something solid touched his arm and he whipped around. It was just Snoopy, beckoning him further, deeper into the gathering of creatures, corpses and smoke -some of the smoke so black it swallowed light and some illuminated, but all of them making way for their prince.

The kid parted the mass of demons and they approached the towering stone circle of fifteen feet height. Even Snoopy looked small, slinking between the rough stones inside the circle where all sounds fell mute.

Tracing the smooth surface of the stones on the inside side of the circle with his fingertips, Dean was able to feel the sound fleeing like warmth sucked out. Wow, this whole experience was like a bad trip and he started to ask himself if it was Snoopy who hosted this wedding. Because he didn't exactly look uneasy, but this level of creepiness wasn't really his style. And-
He turned to the sound of claws scratching over stone, followed by a mad giggle. A flash of movement slowing into an Acheri coming closer and then sweeping a clumsy curtsy in front of Snoopy.

It was so silent within the circle, that Dean was able to hear bare feet mute on the sandy ground. More Acheri, scurring between the inner circle stones -as high as a two storey house, it made him think of them, more than ever, as rats: Tiny things, shabby and vicious. But easy to control.

Which was what Snoopy was doing right now, if Dean wasn't totally wrong, because Acheri usually didn't behave so coordinated.

“I hate to break it to you,” he told Snoopy and noticed he inadvertently whispered, “But your flower girls probably ate the flowers.”

It was barely lit enough to see, but he knew Snoopy had smiled at least a little before he said, “You should be quiet during the ceremony and remain crouching or kneeling. But close by me so you don't get mistaken for chattle,” he nodded towards the Acheri.

Dean got it, kinda. Not all of it: Snoopy dubbed them weak-minded and mostly useless, which begged the question why they were attending the wedding, while the rest of hell had to wait outside.

He followed Snoopy, who lighted four more fires, adding to the one that burned already behind the biggest stone-thingy in the inner large circle. The innermost circle was made of lone stones, smaller, only about seven feet high.

The kid pointed out a place beside the large erect stone in the center and Dean settled there. Wasn't to far off from one of the fires, which should keep the Acheri off his case.

He watched Snoopy circle the inner stones, reaching for their tips. And by his touch they started to ring.

Each stone touched, it produced soft tones, a fleeing and returning sound, like standing waves amplifying or canceling each other- no, not just like: The whole thing had to be actually resounding, generating standing waves that rose the dust the ground into thick clouds, glittering yellow by the reflecting fires, danced in the resonance, wafted into shapes and dissolved and took shape again.

Snoopy had taken his place in front of the large center stone and he waited.

They were magnificent. The way they formed from dust and light and sound, it had more of the arrival of angels, than of the slick way demons usually forced themselves into existence.

Not that Dean cared much for angels or unicorns. But these demons they were just...different.

Not two of them looked alike and yet all of them:

Impressive in a way that was hard to point out. But it started with their similarity to the kid, their humaness and ended with what they didn't share with Snoopy -no coltish youth, but age that rivaled the stones they had appeared in front of.

Demons always were a little uncanny, even the minor ones -jeez, even damned souls weren't normal. But these demons didn't give off this feeling of just-not-quite-right. They owned their skin, like it was their own, like they were human, more than human, like they commanded the ground they were standing on and ruled the sky above their heads.
What Snoopy had told him about the one who had seduced him as a teen, made much more sense now. This Ruby had been just a picture to Dean then – Snoopy had shown him a painting of her in titanium armor, a human face, beautiful, dark, pensive. But Dean hadn't got it when Snoopy had said she had been so alive, because he had told him in the same breath, how even her warmed skin was nothing like the skin of a human, what made her alive was only her blood...Snoopy had drunken so much, he had overdosed and killed her by accident.

The way they held themselves, Dean could tell, they never had been broken by anything. They didn't smell like other demons either, more salty than rotten. They had not been broken by hell, but honed by it, like weapons, like Azazel had tried with the kid-

Who now stepped forward to greet eleven demons. Each nearly as strong as he himself.

This was madness. Why did the kid take such a risk? They could tear him apart, they-

One, a little to right from where Dean sat, she stepped forward.

And bowed.

Snoopy bowed his head to her too.

Neither said a word, they only looked at each other.

Gawd, the silence was killing him-

“Vacant bodies, as per your request, Nagid,” she said, rolling the r's and stretching the i's and maybe Dean noticed the tiniest tone of annoyance.

He didn't know what she was annoyed about, her body looked just fine under that black and red warpaint and the cloak with the collar that would've made Dracula jealous.

Snoopy had let his gaze consider all of them before he nodded again and said, “Thank you, for observing my requirements.”

“Your loss,” said one, whose face was so emaciated, her veins bulged unnaturally dark and her lips were blue, stretched into a thin smirk, “You don't even have a faint idea how sweet my souled body would've bled for-...” she paused, staring straight ahead.

A barely audible shuffle of bare feet had interrupted the sassy skeleton, but her eyes didn't follow the movement.

“Acheri?” she asked, slightly amused.

Not unfriendly, not mocking – it was so fucking strange to see a weird looking demon and feel her warmth, like she had something grandmotherly. A thin woman in a Halloween costume rather than a deadly demon. Dean was so weirded out, he almost missed all of Snoopy's explanation:

“...my gift to you.”

The relaxed silence whipped into a stone-cold silence and Dean had the feeling the ladies were not happy with their bridesmaids. Well, he had tried to tell the kid.

After another long moment of silence, then suddenly one of them broke the circle and went to leave-

“Imbolc,” the kid called after her.
She turned around. Central, where the horseshoe shaped circle of the tallest covered stones had it's opening, she stood, light on her from all sides and Dean really saw her for the first time. Overlooked her before because she seemed pretty normal compared to the others. Her attire was a little similar to Snoopy's, dark royal colors, unadorned, functional, it was all so sedate about her, even her expression, that her placid face alone made a statement: The natural bow of her lips already looked like she took offense of something. No need to enforce that with actual expression.

“Please stay,” Snoopy said, spoke to her, like he spoke to Dean.

But that didn't seem to be enough. Why should I? Her unmoved gaze asked clearly, even though she hadn't moved a muscle.

“They are what I have to spare,” Snoopy offered, “My army is wasting, my powers depleted. I could have come empty handed-”

“Meahte hadde lest from aen scathe!” she spat.

Bitch, Dean thought very very quietly by himself.

“Insult is the last I meant them to be,” the kid remained relentless in his courtesy. “They are my only true possession and they are yours. I intend to honor our unification by giving our shared goal my all, my everything.”

“Preti spaech,,” she said, not even cooly, just not in the least impressed. “Hast thou mara thanne thes - thou canst don aweg ye offal. Abowt so...” she kept looking Snoopy in the eye, kept staring him down, as she waved her hand and -under their short screeches of fear, snuffed the Acheri out.

Killed them. Not just banished them. The telltale flashes within the tiny demons told Dean she hadn't been playing around, she simply had turned them to dust.

“Now that, Imbolc, wasn't insulting at all,” skeleton granny admonished.

Imbolc glanced at her fellow disciple with the same calm defiance she seemed to view anything with. Then she considered Snoopy with a short appraisal, before she nodded and strode back to her stone.

Dean took it back, not a bitch – a calculating warrior. She had weighed the kid, provoked him, and Snoopy:

He hadn't shown fear, or anger, or anything but quiet acceptance.

Even though he hadn't had a drop of demon blood in days. Which meant, that probably any of them, but Imbolc for sure, could turn him too into dust like that. Dean just wondered if they knew that, and if-

“Du trittst vor uns, machtlos?” the plate-armored blonde with the face of a doll asked. At least Dean thought she asked something, German wasn't his favorite language.

“Thou haddest learnt syns Ruby,” Imbolc contributed before Snoopy said anything.

And another one, the one with the bone colored claws and the snake on her shoulders, spit, “Ruby var vek. An tovd to Lilith.”

None said anything to that and Dean wasn't sure he got it, but if, that was a pretty strong accusation and someone probably should have said something about it.
Only they weren't the most chatty crowd, so they just stared at the snake lady, some angry, some-

“I regret the demise of your youngest sister,” Snoopy spoke up, “It was a waste. As were the
centuries of your order's relegation. I understand many of you had no desire to step up under Father's
rule. Those who wish to take responsibility will be granted such and those who wish to retain their
autonomy will see their old rights preserved.”

Dean got the feeling they weren't listening to Snoopy. Not that he understood fully what the kid
sermonized there, but it seemed like he talked about their future, shouldn't that be of interest? Unless
of course, their hungry stares meant they never had been interested in a shared future anyhow.

No, he was just paranoid. Snoopy wouldn't walk into a trap like that. Dean pressed his back harder
against the stone and let it ground him.

“...furthermore-”

Snoopy got interrupted-

“I don't see why all of us need to stay here,” said the one, who was masked like the Red Death,
“Can't Imbolc and Oya do what they do best and kill him quick? I would rather shed this decaying
human sooner than later.”

For a moment Dean felt like time stood still and he suppressed the need to reach out for the Colt.
Eleven of them. Snoopy would be dead before Dean shot so much as a third of them.

“You agreed to join, Sekhmet. And the prince has our word,” argued the one with her whiter than
white skin painted by fresh blood in a Rohrschach-pattern.

She had spoken softly and now slithered closer. Mostly naked, very inviting, very feminine. This
close to Snoopy she had to tilt her head and expose her throat to look at him.

A throat that caught the kid's full attention for a second, before he licked his lips and gave her a
condescending smile.

“More than your word,” he told her, “I have your need.” Looking down at her, he let his disgust
show for a full second. “We wouldn't be here, if you could unite your powers through anything else,
but through me. So stop wasting my time with poses and threats and come to business.”

She pushed her chest out, a sweet twinkle in her disturbingly human eyes. “Spoken like a true king,”
she complimented him.

“Gesprochen wie Azazel's Sohn,” the blonde added something less praising. Or not, Dean couldn't
tell, German made anything sound harsh.

But Snoopy didn't mind the blonde at all, his eyes had fixed on Rohrschach's lips-

Her lips, she was biting bloody at the moment.

The kid grasped her fragile head in his paws and without preamble kissed, sucked the blood from her
mouth, while she first pushed his coat off and then ripped his shirt from his body and then his
pants..for something that looked more than a fight than foreplay, it was very well coordinated, as in
that he managed to lick her blood off her skin, while she got him naked and-

Okay.
Time to look away, because Dean just gotten an eye-ful – no, no, eyeful was a bad choice of words when it came to a horse-size-dick.

In the corner of his eye, he saw, how Snoopy picked her up and pushed her against the flat stone. …
Chapter 26

In the corner of his eye, he saw, how Snoopy picked her up and pushed her against the flat stone.

First she gasped, then she cried out and after two more thrusts into her, the kid let her slide down and stepped back.

Her coarse breaths puffed white into the empty air between those two and Dean risked a look - because, that was quick.

But Snoopy hadn't come yet and neither had she, if the way she reached out for him was anything to go by:

Not just a move: an alluring undulation of her whole body, designed to fit her against him, around him-

But the kid pushed her away. He wiped the smeared blood on his face off, with the back of his hand. A crude gesture, weirdly so, cruder than the sex, cruder than the bite wound on her neck.

The demon was left shivering and wanting, while Snoopy beckoned the next to come to him.

She was probably the most impressive one. Like Imbolc she had chosen a body that perfected the human shine, only that her black skin was graced with gold dust, paint and jewelry, black silk dress...less a dress than a formal robe, easy to discard.

Which she did now, advancing the kid and then keeping her distance. And Snoopy mirrored her, respectful, like he hadn't been with the first.

She produced a small knife, so sudden the glint of metal made the hair in Dean's neck raise.

She cut herself at the throat and allowed Snoopy to taste. Stroked his weeping dick and grasped him by the base, made him whimper and push against her-

prompting her to shove. There was a short clash of power, neither of them letting go, or giving an inch. The white of her eyes had vanished and Snoopy had bared his bloody teeth – and then they were kissing and Dean saw she had come out on top:

Snoopy rutted against her belly and devoured her, alternating between her mouth and her neck.

Her dark hands a strong contrast on the kid's butt, she put bruises into his flesh.

This time he was left wanting, as she stepped out of their embrace. But he let her, he didn't try anything.

Not because Snoopy was afraid, Dean understood, but because it would have been a sign of weakness. All this was about power and so far the kid had held himself well. There was a balance.

The question was, what would happen if, just once, the balance dipped in favor of the eleven demons? Would the fact that they wanted something from him win out against the demonic nature to possess and destroy? Somehow Dean doubted that.

But the kid didn't show any fear:

Free and easy, like he ran around naked with a bouncy hardon every day, he approached Dracula
next.

She offered the kid her already bloody hand, palm up.

He gave her a perverted version of a hand-kiss, lapping blood up like a dog, but she didn't seem to mind. Under the wild paint her face softened and after he had licked her hand clean, her hand stayed on his face, stroked his cheek. Snoopy leaned into it.

A shiver ran down Dean spine. It wasn't a nice shiver. The kid had said they hated his guts and now? Now they were playing nice with him and did better than any demon should be able to?

She undid her hair, a dark flow down her shoulders, and she let Snoopy touch it. Invited the innocent reverence he would've showed a real lover and Snoopy fell for it. It was like she had sucked up all his brutality.

He seemed entranced.

The others started to move in on the pair.

The black silent one helped Dracula shed her clothes, while Rohrschach had come up behind the kid and had pressed her naked body against him, her boobs squished softly against the small of his back and he arched into the touch of her tiny hand...

Dean felt the hair on his neck rise and in the next second a shadow blocked the glow of the fire to his left for a moment.

A red figure, a fiery corona about her. Red Death had stolen herself away from the orgy to scare the shit out of Dean.

Sekhmet, if he hadn't heard it wrong: Feared and worshiped by the Egyptians as a goddess of war. Bloodthirsty to the point of madness.

A real winner. Sweet. Of all of them to take notice of him...

She took her mask off and he was surprised, for her bitching before about her body supposed to be decaying, she looked-

Real nice.

She remained silent, like she wanted him take her in with his eyes, her golden skin, soft looking cleavage. The red cloth partially transparent, catching light, making it seem like she was on fire-

He pushed this image away – of his mom, of how he imagined her to have died, how Dad had last seen her.

“Come with me,” she asked tender – like she hadn't suggested the kid's quick death only minutes ago, like she wanted to take him away from this place, from hell with all its hollowness, echoes, memories...

He swallowed and doubted his next move was smart, but words alone? “Sorry, sister, I'm not part of the package,” not backed up with showing her the Colt, words alone wouldn't do more than make her laugh.

She didn't look like the weapon threatened her, but smiled and argued, “Not what I was told,” she glanced over to Snoopy.
Maybe it was some kind of whammy, but for a sec, she had him doubting, if maybe the kid had offered him- No. “Yeah, well I wasn't told I can't shoot you,” he put it in round terms. Of course he didn't even dare to breathe then, his finger on the trigger, if she tried anything-

“You don't want to shoot me.”

And for the moment when she knelt down that was true – he didn't do it. He didn't want to. She was close enough he could smell her now, she smelt as good as her voice felt:

“You want to die choking on your own blood, a soldier's happy end, a death of honor, like your father.

Lay your crude weapon down.

Fight me with bare hands.

Make him proud.”

_Do not laugh, Do not laugh_, he bit his lip, chewed on it and finally manged, “Honey? I dunno what you see in my head, but I promise you, no death by a bitch like you, would've made my dad proud. In fact, he would tear me a new one, 'cause I haven't pumped you full of lead a'ready.” He felt himself smile and thought, Oh shit, she's so going to kill me now.

She didn't. Time expanded. And she didn't kill him.

She eyed his chest, the talisman there, sighed long suffering as she rose to her feet and told him - tenderness be damned-

“There had been a tribe of my worshipers, where males were not taught to think of themselves as human, but beast. Your brother there, remembers me of them, but you?” her nose twitched displeased, “You are of his blood, but you are brittle, unresponsive, useless. After this night he will not bear sentimentality for you anymore. We will be his family.”

What? Okay he got the whole mistaking Snoopy for his brother thing -because of the bloodspell. But wasn't she-? Yeah she was exactly the same who had wanted to leave and have Snoopy killed instead of going through with the wedding. Wow. _Fickle much, sister?_

She left without hurting him for his thoughts, but she seemed a little frustrated about it.

Snoopy was extra sweet to her as she sank in his arms. Parts of his declarations carried over, “…wouldn't have offended me … you had come … me in the body a lioness.” As the others gave them a little room, the kid's voice was better audible, “I share your appreciation for animals. Maybe next time?” he licked his lips, eyelids heavy and instantly returned the smile that had spread on her face.

A feral smile, none of the gentle temptation she had tried on Dean, but the kid seemed to like it just fine. His big hand buried between her legs, he wasn't doing much yet, waiting like a puppy for a treat.

She pushed her forehead against his temple in a catlike manner and whispered something to his ear,

Next thing he wrestled her to the ground, face down, and mounted her from behind. She struggled, only so long until he bit her nape -not as a warning- he ripped a piece of skin from her neck, before he locked his jaw on her throat. All the while he fucked into her so brutally it would have broken a human girls spine.
Dean had to turn away.

It shouldn't have bothered him so much. It was just sex and Snoopy was an adult and they were just demons, they could take it...some of them probably enjoyed it. Maybe that was what bothered him. For these bitches, the fucking was a little inconvenience paired with dirty entertainment: slumming with a human to get the job done. While the kid...

Dean looked over, at the writhing mass of bodies, the snake of the snake-lady only one more limb winding around others and he thought that Snoopy was losing something of himself in there. That was how deals were made, parts of a soul chipped off but they... they did even more – they filled the empty place with their poison.

He would've really liked to put those thoughts down to his own melodramatics, his weakness for voices like Red Death's with her threats.

But anyone who had found the kid in the midst of this bloodbath, would've noticed his struggle to stay afloat. Would've seen him fail and drown in them and be so open his eyes pleaded for mercy, for relief and not. For more and more and more and it never to stop.

The witchy red-head with the short sharp claws was so obliging to slice Imbolc's strong thighs open and soon the kid's head was between them, while he still fucked the snake-lady...

...until they finally had him on his back and the blonde -lean thing without her armor, climbed him and rode him good and hard.

A torment in disguise, because the screaming sobs it ripped from Snoopy's mouth wouldn't stop, were only smothered into whimpers when skeleton granny fed him thick black blood from her mouth.

Oya -the imposing black beauty- she came up behind the blonde, grabbed her hair, forced her head back and slashed her throat. Blood splattered down in a wide stream on Snoopy and he pushed himself up and latched on the opened throat.

At first Dean didn't make any of it, the orgy had been pretty bloody so far, but then...first Snake-lady, then Dracula got on wobbling feet and retreated.

Away from the kid drinking their sister dry while one of their own held her in place.

That was not part of the plan, he realized, before the telltale flashes and the thunder roared from within the dying demon's meatsuit.

Read Death attacked and was struck down by Imbolc -knocked out for good. Others tried to flee and stopped outside the innermost circle.

The whole thing had been spinning out of control so fast, Dean only got his ass in gear, as the first of them ran straight at him and ran into an invisible wall. He was upright and had the Colt drawn, but that was completely unnecessary – he stood in the line of the five covered stone structures, where they couldn't pass for some reason.

She -the claw-tipped redhead- she wasted no time with him and buried her claws in the sand to her feet.

Incantations spilled from her lips.
Four more others had started to do the same, in a circle, trying to break out.

Among them Rohrschach. But she was seized by the two traitors, Imbolc and Oya. Their larger bodymass and surly manner deceived the eye:

Rohrschach gave them a good fight – Dean saw the sand and dust rise from the clash of power and the stones sang like struck. Flashes and wind came up and four stopped their incantations and came to help their sister.

Snoopy didn't mind any of them, he was busy pinning Red Death with his powers against the next flat surface – upside down, unconscious, head lolling. This done, he sank to his knees in front of her and for a moment it looked like he was about to kiss her spiderman-style, his whole bodylanguage relaxed and soft, as he slashed one side of her throat. He was like the eye of the storm. Calm, he finished her off and swatted skeleton granny's attack away, like she was an annoying fly.

Then two things happened at the same time, so Dean wasn't sure he if he hadn't missed them both:

Rohrschach had been handed over to Snoopy. And Imbolc and Oya had taken a stand to shield him from their remaining sisters.

Other than Red Death, Rohrschach was conscious as the kid drank her, she fought him, roared and cursed and her powers ripped at his skin. Her demon-smoke charged in and out of her body. But the more she struggled, the calmer, the more inescapable the kid became. A darkness muted their fight. And that was when Dean saw it – the glint in Snoopy's eyes, a sparkle of yellow, before they drowned in shadows.

But then a flash and a scream ripped the air. Oya's black skin illuminated from within by flashes and Imbolc held her up, but Dean didn't see who had attacked her-

Until Imbolc withdrew a triangular dagger from her sisters back and let her fall.

Imbolc had killed her.

He didn't know why and he also missed the part when Rohrschach died and with her her sister's struggles.

They walked, enthralled, one by one to their death.

Let Snoopy drain them and kill them.

The kid's eyes were clear and Dean would have thought he imagined them to flip black, or the yellow before that, but...they weren't normal now either. The hardness in Snoopy's eyes made Dean's stomach twist, made him sick like nothing he had witnessed in the last hour.

After only Imbolc remained, still alive, Dean was surprised when she didn't come to Snoopy to let him kill her.

That she had been controlled by the kid from the beginning, like her sisters were controlled by him at the end, that was the only logical explanation for her behavior, the only one Dean had come up with at least.
But it seemed he had taken a wrong turn somewhere. Because she picked up her coat and shafted her dagger, preparing to leave.

Snoopy was still kneeling between dead bodies, at ease and brimming with power.

She paused before she reached the opening - the opening of the only incomplete of the four circles – which would've made it the hardest to form it into a devil's trap, but also the most unlikely... she had laid the trap, he realized only now, when she had pretended to take offense about the Acheri, pretended to leave, she had stopped at the opening and had trapped her sisters and herself with the kid.

But that couldn't be, Red Death had crossed the line, unless-

His pondering on how and when, had to wait, because Imbolc had turned to face Snoopy,

“Thou undoest se band.”

Dean wasn't sure, if that had been a demand or a question, but he was sure that the kid wouldn't lift a finger to make it happen:

His mouth twisted into a short grimace, maybe a smile - anyway, it looked ugly on Snoopy, sad and cruel. Still, he nodded when he finally answered, “That is why I chose you, Imbolc: Your never-dying hope. It lends a warrior strength, but it is a weakness for a demon.”

He wasn't mocking her, just stating cold hard facts.

If she was surprised that he didn't let her go she didn't show it. She considered her fallen sister with something like fondness, her sister, who she killed by herself and asked, “Hwat haddest thou beden Oya?”

“A dignified death,” Snoopy answered, tone as polite as in the beginning, “I am sure she was pleased it came by your hand.”

“Ond Ruby's deeth?” for the first time her voice sounded moved, not upset, just as emotional as someone who opened up because nothing was left to loose. “Twaes mydra,” she accused the kid.

Who dipped his head to the side, like he didn't want to argue, nor agree, “She tried to turn me inside out, it was me or her. But I have to be thankful for her lesson:

It is always me or you,” he stood up, “With each and every of your kind.”

Imbolc didn't seem scared yet, just sad. “Thou canst ne quellen all se ghastene att hel.”

“But I can try,” he took a step towards her, “And I'm starting at the top of the food-chain.”

“Thou art madd,” she stated, tone something similar to frightened.

“No, I'm not,” the kid insisted. “I'm just human, it comes with dangerous irrationality.”

Her chin tipped up, her eyes fell on Dean, where he huddled at the side of the stone, trying to go unnoticed - outside her reach, where Snoopy had placed him. She wasn't looking at him in search for a way to use him as leverage - she knew she couldn't get him. No, there was something else in her stony gaze, something that flowed into her voice and made it stern, “Ne knowst thou doest,” she told Snoopy, “Yit thousands aef yeers -werk an spell- breken as se waven att thyn stoburn herte.”

Whatever that meant, it meant something to Snoopy because he twisted his head in the way Dean
had seen him do it when what he read didn't quite make sense to him. “You know Father's plans for me,” he said, like he couldn't believe it.

She nodded, “Ic knowe.”

If that was true she held all the answers Snoopy was missing.

It had to be true. That was why she wasn't scared for her life.

Snoopy pressed his lips together and nodded, letting his head hang for a second, before he told her, “One more reason why I can't let you live.”

The fight was shorter and more brutal than what Dean had expected. She almost got away -thrusting her dagger into one of the large stones, fracturing the stone and thereby the spell that held her in-Snoopy was forced to kill her quick. Didn't chance to bleed her.

She went out under the kid's stretched hand. Caught like a common demon and snuffed out as fast as she had done it to the Acheri.

It was strange, not that Dean felt sorry for her but...Snoopy sniffled sharp and rubbed a little of the drying blood from his chin. He collected her dagger along with it's sheath and searched for something within this massacre.

Until he found pants -not his, but someone's.

Dean still tried to figure out what upset him about watching the kid looting corpses – because seriously, in hell? That was an everyday thing to do.

But then the kid just left.

He wasn't using his powers, only left per foot, so Dean had no problem to catch up with him, but what the fuck was going on?

The demonic wedding guests had dispersed, they were mostly alone and Dean wanted ask if Snoopy was okay, but, something tied his tongue.

Maybe that the kid hadn't uttered a word yet. Had acknowledged him with a look, had even adapted his pace to Dean's, but no word.

He watched the kid from the side for a while and noticed how much taller he really was when he held himself this way: Like he was walking towards his next kill.

Whatever was going on, at least the kid wasn't married to a bunch of demons now.

Though Dean was curious when Snoopy changed his mind about it, or why he never told him about plan B...oh-of course.

Dean couldn't help but snort a laugh. There had been no plan B. The kid hadn't decided to kill them because of anything that happened during that orgy. Killing them had always been the plan, “You never even considered to pal up with them.”

Snoopy turned his head towards him for a second. “No, of course not. They were demons. There can be no covenants between men and lions.”
Quoting the Illiad. Neat. Made one wonder if old Homer also wrote something about using pawns. “You lied to me.”

If Snoopy caught on to the tone he didn't seem to see a reason to really say sorry, because all he said was:

“Your mind is open for any demon to read and sometimes you wear your heart on a sleeve. If you hadn't been scared, they would've suspected foul play.”

Dean didn't say anything to that or anything at all until they made it up to the protected parts of hell.

To his suite instead of Snoopy's room.

There, in the soft lighted cleanliness where the kid -barefoot and bloody- looked most out of place, it was Snoopy who broke the silence first:

“If you don't mind, I will take a shower.” He looked at him, guarded, like he knew Dean was observing his every step.

“Oh I don't mind – I recommend it.” And he dearly hoped that feeling would go away as soon as he wasn't in the same room with Snoopy anymore.

Dear hopes aside, the surge of panic hit him full force as soon as he was alone.

He sat on his bed and listened to the water in the shower, trying to shut his ears to his instincts that screamed WRONG at him.

Angry with himself he tried to calm down, ashamed too, because he was pretty sure, that the kid could read him mentally freaking out, even through closed doors.

*Everything's fine. He only lied to you, don't be a pussy.*

By the time the kid was back, Dean had calmed down to give monosyllabic answers and not to think too embarrassing thoughts.

He was informed that Snoopy had to leave and use his new-earned powers in battle. He would be back in a couple of days.

If he was short and commanding with Dean, that was to be excused. Kid was as high as a kite on demon-blood, considering that, he was perfectly civil. He would be fine after he had blown off some steam.

Everything would be fine.
I just wanted to thank you for all the nice comments and even though my schedule didn't allow to answer any, I read all of them to Jo and it inspired him greatly. He is deep in our next novel-length piece of work and having faithful readers who love the drama he skillfully spins, -for Francis to grace with sensual details and at last for me to trim into shape (as he calls it), this love gives him the strength to stay focused. Which makes my work so much easier. Therefore, again, thank you and don't feel neglected when we don't answer, for Jo is forbidden -unless he did his homework first and I on the other hand have serious difficulties not to gush about the story so much every sentence makes a spoiler.

On a final note, I am to tell you, Francis gave the okay that if one of you would feel like recceing this story somewhere outside of AO3, it would be welcomed. But no pressure there, he just wanted you to know it wouldn't make him feel uncomfortable to stumble upon our work on a different site - which is a huge step for him. *cough*controlfreak*cough* -no I'm kidding, he is just protective of his work and of us, especially Jo.

Bye, Bee

It was not fine.

The kid had locked him in.

Not anything Dean tried worked. Even magic. Spit, blood, his own blood. Nothing. The only existing door wouldn't open for him, others couldn't be created and none of his calls made it outside.

After two days he got hungry. He knew it would pass, but it made him furious anyhow!

Stupid Son Of A Bitch! Locking him in like a dog at a kennel.

At the fourth day he was too worried to be angry.

But that passed too.

So yea, when -after more than a week- the kid showed his stupid face again, Dean was livid with anger. Stifled by about two percent worry.

“What the hell! Were you thinking! Locking me in??”

Worry hadn't lasted the first good look he got on Snoopy, who looked perfectly fine. Not a hair out
of place. Actually he looked a little bit too fine. Downright preppy, sounded it too:

“Honestly? I thought you would be safer that way."

That's it, I'm going wipe that smart look off his face-he thought, but it vanished all by itself:

The kid's eyes became hard and Dean knew his mind was read, because Snoopy was shaking his head about him, somewhat disappointed and really fucking condescending. “I can't have you wandering about when I turn hell upside down. What I did was dangerous.”

“Yeah, why? What were you doing??” -he was really curious what kind of stupid stunt the kid pulled!

“I cleaned out the Racks. They are, for now, a demon free zone.”

Alistair. The kid faced Alistair, alone. His Moby Dick.


Dean watched mute, how Snoopy walked over to his bedside table, cleaned out a glass, fixed a drink.

Oh, he was still seething, but he didn't even know where to start. He felt as helpless and useless as since he had been locked in, because even now nothing he said seemed to reach the kid.

He wasn't even sure he was talking to the kid.

That thing, that came close and offered him the glass, it wasn't the Snoopy he knew.

Though he had known.

He had had a lot of time to mull things over and he got it by now, the kid had lied to him already before he got high, had played him, had hugged him and made him feel so damn important and protective that the demons didn't think twice as to view the little prince as weak, for only a weak child would bring his worried useless nanny to their showdown.

The drink he didn't accept, was put aside with a shrug. Snoopy looked down at him very patient and explained,

“I know you don't want to hear it, but you have to stay here. I'm not done yet. There are demons in the Dungeon Alistair and Lilith would recruit should I ever loose control over the pillars. And after I have killed those,” he went on conversationally, “I will be away to Earth. Lilith can't keep hiding if she doesn't want to loose the last of her army—"

He interrupted the kid, “Why did you even bother to stop by?” just to see if he could get a rise out of him.

“I need a few hours rest, and I want to sleep with you.”

Dean swallowed down the uneasiness, because the kid couldn't mean it like that. Couldn't think that he would agree...but even if he just wanted to cuddle, “You know what, why don't you go fuck yourself? I'm not your blow-up doll.”

“You are here—” was ground out between bared teeth, “-solely to keep me company when I need it.”
And he had to be locked in for that? What was next-

“I understand you don't like to be confined to your room, but I explained to you: It is necessary. You're just being stubborn and childish about it and I don't have time for that.”

Dean was scared and he had every fucking right to be. The kid had always been able to tear him apart with a thought, make him do anything he wanted him to do -that he hadn't stressed the point for while now, didn't mean Dean had forgot, so yeah, he was scared. But being scared shitless had never made him as cautious as it should have. What made him back off and give in, was that he knew Snoopy felt how much he scared Dean right now. Only he didn't care.

If the kid didn't care about that anymore, there was little chance he would care about any struggle Dean put up. “So how do you want me? On my back or on my knees?”

Snoopy's nose twitched.

Well at least he still had the power to annoy.

“Quit it,” the kid told him to, “You know exactly what I want.”

Dean didn't know for sure, until they had settled on the bed, both fully clothed, not touching, not even that close and kid batted his eyes down, wouldn't even look at him.

This intense hard stare finally gone, Dean realized he hadn't been the only one who was angry.

But for the love of god, he couldn't tell what he did to deserve this unspoken wrath. If it even was something he did, or if the kid simply made a mistake when he chose him and now realized Dean wasn't worth the effort of faking good manners.

He spent the next hours with this growing pit of burning sadness in him. Unable to make things better. Unsure if he ever had had a chance to do any good. But he wanted to, he wanted to reach out.

A few times it seemed like Snoopy was asleep, even breaths and shut eyes and all that. But Dean wasn't sure. The kid didn't look asleep. He looked like he would snap his teeth at anyone who would try to touch him.

When it was finally over -Snoopy had gotten up like he had been awake the whole time; dark energy never resting and he had left without a word- Dean cried. He cried his eyes out like a little kid. He felt drained of everything good. Every delusion of the last months, of responsibility and hope and doing good enough for once, they all just crashed. How could he have been so stupid? Why was he always so stupid?

Next time the prince stopped by for a nap, Dean wasn't giving him attitude.

He was a good little prisoner. Even though he felt it more clear than the last time, what actually happened to him as the kid got some sleep:

The life was sucked out of him.
It wasn't hysterics. The talisman burned like a frostbite on his chest. Dean knew black magic.

He thought about taking it off. But that wouldn't have been any different than an outright refusal to let the kid sleep with him and use him as a battery charger.

The sentimental part of him liked the idea intact, that the kid would stop if he asked him to. And as long as he didn't say No, there wasn't really any force involved, right?

They could talk like civil people. He could ask for something reasonable.

Like sending a message to Bobby. It was almost two weeks now, he just wanted to tell him everything was fine, he didn't want Bobby to worry-

“He doesn't worry about you.” The kid put on his hoodie and was about to leave.

But, “What does that mean, he doesn't worry about me?”

Snoopy's eyes narrowed, not unfriendly, no: pitying. He took a breath, to explain, “I am almost in full power, that comes with the ability to make people do things. Make them forget something for a while.”

“You messed with Bobby's head?”

“Subtly so, yeah.”

“You gave him a fuckin' lobotomy,” his voice hitched against his will, “like he's some damned soul you can reset any time!?”

Annoyance. “Did you hear me when I said subtle?”

This son of a bitch broke the only person Dean had left and then was annoyed with him!!?

He didn't notice he was shaking until his shoulder were grasped.

The kid bowed his head to him, looked him in the eye, placating, “It's fine. In a few weeks, when this is over, he will remember you again.”

Dean wanted to shove him off, he really wanted to, but right now he had trouble not to hyperventilate.

“You can trust me, I wouldn'-.“

“Trust you?” he wheezed high-pitched. Was that supposed to be a joke?

Obviously not, because the kid let go of him, lips pursed into a disappointed frown, shaking his head telling him again,

“I don't have time for this.”
Chapter 28

It was five days before Dean saw him again.

“I want to leave.”

He had a theory. It rested on the fact that the kid had never tried to force this -whatever this was. Dean was pretty sure by now that every time the kid had been nice to him he had just been grooming him, make him give something by his own free will. So whatever this was, whatever he took from him when they lay side by side, maybe it couldn't be taken by force, maybe not even by coercion. Maybe. It was a big maybe, but Dean had nothing left to loose. “You said I can leave at any time. I want to leave, for good.”

The prince had cast his head down, eyes on Dean's feet. Like Snoopy would've done, like the kid who got teary eyed when Dean thought of him as a monster.

It was a perfect disguise, but Dean wasn't going to fall for it again. He was ninety percent sure, that trying to leave would get him killed. Ten percent: the kid didn't care enough to kill him. Every second the haughty sneer didn't show, those ten percent shrunk a little bit closer to wishful thinking.

The kid shuffled his feet and nodded. Then he rubbed over a tiny smudge of dried blood on his upper lip and nodded again, “You can leave,” voice small, “I'm sorry for scaring you last time. I should've explained it better, what I did to your friend. You will see it when you're home – he is fine. The memory is just blocked, not damaged.”

“You saying Sorry, doesn't change a thing,” even if Dean would believe it for one second, “I'm leaving and I'm not coming back.”

There was a tiny nod. He agreed. Or maybe he was just playing on time, waiting for Dean to chicken out.

Well, he wouldn't, he was going through with it and he was about to pull off the talisman, when-

The kid stopped him.

His hand on Dean's wrist was ice cold.

Dean mustered up as much authority as he could find in himself to remind the kid, “You said, I can leave.”

Another curt nod and his wrist was released.

But then the kid shook his head, pushing his chin up, towards, “The door is open. I trust you will find your way to the Wyoming gate on your own. But you need the talisman until you opened the gate and stepped through.” He rubbed under his nose again and manged to sound a little forlorn, “On Earth, melting it down should be enough to make the spell naught.”

This close to the kid, he saw that the blood on his lip had trickled from his nose, had to be his own.

Kid's shoulders were hunched when he said, “Goodbye, Dean,” and turned to leave first.

“Where are you going?”

The kid actually stopped. “To battle,” he explained, voice a little dull, “There are demons who have
not been aware of me until now. And now that they are, they have started a rebellion. Same old, you know.”

“You think that's smart? You don't exactly look your freshest.” Sure the kid was still giving off power, though it didn't seem to become him, more like it ate him alive.

The kid just swallowed and set his jaw stubbornly.

“You can't sleep without me,” Dean put the cards on the table.

Kid's shake of head affirmed, “Not after what I did to myself, no.”

“You damaged your soul.”

“I'm fine.” And the hard eyes were back in play. “I will get by, I will find another way to rest.”

“You mean you will find another poor son of bitch you drag to hell and convince to stay with you.”

“You wanted to leave,” the kid spit at him, “So leave!”

“And let you string someone else along-”

“There is no one else!”

Dean watched as the kid chewed on his lower lip like he could bite down on what he said, on what he felt, on what he needed to say:

“I don't know how you keep me human at this point,” he spilled. “You shouldn't be able to do that...not even someone with your soul, though it's powerful, pure, it's more than that...you're completing me.”

“You can't force me to stay and I'm not staying.”

As always with the kid, the tears came fast, and didn't make him shut up, “I never wanted to be someone who forces you to stay. I know what I did to you in these last weeks, I know it like it had been done to me. But you would've tried to leave sooner if you thought there was a way. And I'm not sure I would've let you, then -when I was...”

“High?”

A flash of shame and then denial, the kid looked him in the eye when he said:

“I'm not trying to excuse what I did, I just want you to know I'm sorry,” he breathed, shook his head, “You didn't deserve how I treated you. I know you don't trust me much right now, but I want you to believe me that I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...” he shook his head and lost his nerve, couldn't look at Dean anymore.

Didn't mean to use him? Make him feel again like the worthless piece of shit he had been most of his life?

He believed Snoopy. Maybe he just wanted to believe it. That it was the demon blood that locked him up and scared him and treated him like property. Maybe grasping for hope was weak and a mistake, he didn't know.

But he knew if he left and found Bobby to be fine, he wouldn't be back in time, he would loose the kid for good.
So operating on hope maybe was an extremely foolish risk, but what did he have to win if he left now? His soul intact? A chance to see Bobby one last time – if the kid had lied, then it wouldn't do any good to get to the old man. Bobby wouldn't even let him through the front door, not knowing who he was...No, as always for him, there was little to win and everything to lose if he only so much as took one wrong step.

“If I stay, I want to be free to move around again and I want you to undo what you did to Bobby, I want to write to him again.”

Snoopy chewed on that.

“What's the problem?! It's not like I'm asking for a frickin' pony-”

“Don't you think,” he was interrupted, “I wouldn't have undone already what I did to your friend, if only I could? Do you think, I don't know I went to far?”

“You said, he would be fine.”

“And he will be, he is. What I did to him is like subtle magic. Only time or the close proximity of a soul like yours would undo it.”

-but poking at it with magic, would do more harm than good. The thing was, Snoopy made perfect sense. But still Dean had nothing to go on but faith, had to trust his word.

“You wont know I said the truth, until you see him,” the kid summed it up, “You will not stay, you can't trust me. Just leave.”

And leave the kid alone? No way. After the whole wedding massacre the one thing Dean trusted the kid least with, was the kid himself:

“Don't tell me what to do.” He shrugged off his jacket. He wasn't going anywhere, “You're not the boss of me.” Kicking his boots off, he walked over to the bed and planted himself there. “You look like crap by the way,” he informed the kid while he made himself comfortable, crossing his arms in front of his chest, “Bad enough so I wouldn't kick you out, if you crashed in my bed for a few hours.”

For once Snoopy didn't argue with him. It was a fucking miracle, that the kid just came over to curl up beside him.

As soon as he shut his eyes he looked so fucking vulnerable, one had to see it to believe it.

Dean thought about rolling to the side and reaching out, touching Snoopy's hand -the one that was a tight fist on the sheet.

“Don't,” the kid put an end to this thought. Not fully opening his eyes. Like he was too tired or didn't dare to look at Dean, as if he had to explain himself then.

No worries there, Dean had enough dramatic dialogue for one day.

He had enough, period.

Resting his eyes a little, he was sure he wouldn't fall asleep. Not as long as Snoopy gave off vibes of wrapped tight unrest.
He woke up, when the mattress bounced back slowly as the kid left the bed. He watched him adjust the sheathed dagger.

And only much later wondered what the kid needed a demon-killing dagger anyhow.

The answer came in the crash landing three days later. This time Snoopy was still bleeding from his nose when he showed up and the bleeding didn't stop anytime soon.

Dean patched him up.

Kid was cold, feverish. But not sick, just...something else. Something that probably wouldn't be cured by chicken broth, only by more demon blood.

“What happened to your DB?” Snoopy asked, nose stuffed with tissues.

Dean happened to Dean's TV. “Anger management practice,” when he had felt the kid getting wounded, but couldn't find him. Couldn't do anything but come back to his room and wait. Again.

Snoopy took the tissue plugs out and asked, “Are you-? You're still angry at me.”

“No. Put those tissues back in.” It was hard to be angry at someone who had the kicked puppy look down to an artform, though with the bleeding and the bruised-perhaps-broken fingers it was more the trampled puppy look. “At least it's over now.”

... “It is over now, right? You used it all up and you're not going to get that high any time soon? Right,” his tone made sure he didn't want to hear anything but a yes.

Snoopy nodded and ducked his head away.

“Don't nod like that.”

“Like what?” Snoopy asked small, like he really didn't know like what.

“Like there is a but. There is no but, you're done. I mean look at you, you're running on fumes. You need a break. We take a vacation,” he proclaimed.

For all good that it did.

He glanced up to the silent kid who wouldn't argue, but didn't agree either. Great, stubborn, silent sadness. Fucking terrific. “Okay, what's the but?”

Snoopy blinked, weak -yet stubborn, shaking his head, “Look, just because I am operating on low level power doesn't mean I can't hold myself in a fight-”
“Yeah, that's what the dagger is for, I figured that out. But you're almost back to normal, which means you need to sleep like a normal person. Or haven't you spent the last two days on Earth, where time actually wears you out?”

Dean saw, that if he could, Snoopy would've denied that to be the truth, but couldn't because he knew that Dean knew, because Dean had searched all of hell, after he had felt the kid get hurt.

A frustrated sigh it was, instead of denial.

“What's so important it can't wait a few days?”

“The second I stop killing, Lilith's followers stop being scared of me. Already they suspect my powers are waning. As long as they are so scared of me, I can turn them around. One of them will tell me where she is.”

“And then what?” The Colt and Imbolc's dagger were magic and therefore useless against Lilith. The kid would faint if he tried his powers right now. Of course he could attempt to kill Lilith with the stubborn stare he inflicted on Dean right now.

“I don't wanna argue,” Snoopy stated tired and reached out for Dean's knee, for the rip in his jeans, for his bare skin -with his cold fingers and then he said, “I want to sleep with you.”

“Dude, be more verbally specific, 'cause I'm getting some real mixed signals here.”

Snoopy withdrew his icy fingers and smiled -for the first time in a long time- and leaned his head against Dean's belly.

The kid was so heavy with exhaustion, Dean was sure, he didn't have to fight for him to stay. At least not the next four hours.
Chapter 29

When he did fight the kid, he was prepared. They were back to passive mind-reading, so Snoopy hadn't had a chance to see it coming.

He let the kid cash in the usual four hours of sleep -looked worse then last time -no physical injuries though; when Dean untangled from him as soon as he stirred and got up before he did, Snoopy didn't find that strange at all.

Dean made a beeline for it: Picked up Snoopy's clothes, from the lush white rug, where they had fallen, when he had helped the kid strip to his underwear and get comfortable.

Snoopy looked adorably sleepy, propped up on one elbow, while he watched Dean doodle with spit on the wooden chest at the end of the bed.

Dean put it all into the chest. The clothes too. One more thing to slow the kid down, because not even Snoopy liked to parade through hell in undershirt and flame pattern boxer briefs – no matter how fitting it was for the prince of hell.

The kid frowned. Sleepiness pushed away too fast, he got pale and asked,

“What did you just do?”

“Ensure you take a break.”

He was able to see the exact moment when it clicked in the kid's head, that the Dagger had been among the lump of clothes and gear.

His long limbs telegraphed his exhaustion with every move, but Snoopy got up fast, his knees hit the carpet beside the chest and he fumbled with the latch, finally got it open-

It was very empty.

“Earlier, I put the Colt in there too.”

The spit-sigil almost dry already – but of course that didn't keep Snoopy from throwing his head around, eyes frantically searching for the nearest powdery substance, he could use to make it visible.

“I made the spell from scratch, so good luck with reversing it.”

“What-did-you-do?” -Snoopy was pretty shell shocked about Dean messing with the most powerful weapons they had.

“I hid them.”

“You-”

“Somewhere safe. Isn't it cool that even here in hell there are so many safe places you could search a lifetime-”

“Where-!” the kid had to take a breath -still pale around the gills, “Tell me where you put them!”?

“After you took a break. Three days.”
“This is not funny, Dean,” the kid told him from there on the floor, glaring up towards him like he was two seconds away from setting him on fire.

“Damn right, ’s not funny. The pace you're going at, you could get yourself killed. Or worse.”

“I need answers! I-”

“Tough. You're not getting any without the demon killing dagger,” he gave the kid a shrug that spelled, Sorry, and attacked the topic before the kid could even think of it:

“You could power up, of course, -binge on demon blood, but somehow I think you wont. I mean I wasn't there, but how hard was it really to do it normally again? Not to drink every demon you got your hands on?""

Snoopy rose to his feet and invaded Dean's space, “I'm not an addict or a squeamish child,” he made it clear that he didn't need no intervention, nor a spanking. “I was taught to use the blood as a weapon and I use it as such! Don't mistake your fear for mine. I knew what their blood would do to me and I drank it because it was necessary.

I reduced my use when it stopped to be a necessity. When the dagger met the same needs. Now - without it, I have no other means but the blood.”

Oh, the kid was threatening him already. That didn't take long. “You're bluffing.”

Snoopy's nose made those twitches it did when his last nerve was pulled.

But hey, it wasn't Dean's fault that the little prince had no pokerface.

The kid shook his head annoyed about Dean and told him, “You can't want me to prove you wrong. Tell me where the dagger is, or I'm leaving without it. Right now!”

“Like I said, you're bluffing.” The kid wouldn't drink his fill, not so soon after he almost scared Dean away. Scared himself too. So much he was unable to do anything now. “You're not going anywhere.”

He saw it in Snoopy's eyes – the caged in desperation, a little betrayed, a whole lot more guilty.

But that wasn't what this was about, “Look, I'm not out to punish you for locking me in. I'm doing this because you have to take care of yourself, you have to slow down a bit. Only a little bit, please. Listen to me.”

Snoopy let his held-in breath go and turned his head to the side.

That was way too easy, Dean thought,

-just as the kid came a little closer. Which would've been okay, to be skin on skin with Snoopy had never bothered him as much as it bothered him with most guys, but then, the kid pressed against him. Not only physically. And he kept going until he had Dean backed against the wall.

His body jammed between the wall and Snoopy, the feeling was most elusive. One had to know that this was what it felt like to have your mind read.

Okay, the kid wanted to play it that way:

*Listen to the wind blow, watch the sun rise,*
runnin' the shadows, damn your love, damn your lies

And if you don't- “Problem?” he asked about the frustrated snort Snoopy gave the replay of Fleetwood Mac in Dean's head.

The kid was just angry enough to stare intense, but not to say outright, that he could go deeper. He could get his answers.

But not without hurting Dean. Not now that he was back to normal:

Couldn't do it easy. Wouldn't do it the hard way.

Even though Dean was the one with his back to the wall, he was pushing the kid into a corner here and Snoopy looked desperate enough to push back.

Dean's memory found it necessary to remind him that in the past the young prince of hell simply had killed his second in command when she kept secrets from him.

A sharp intake of breath betrayed Snoopy had heard that thought – he shook his head in denial, like he wanted to say it wasn't the same thing.

It wasn't, Dean knew that. He knew Snoopy wouldn't break into his mind either. Not by force, but he would try-

“You're right,” to reason with him, voice small, “I was bluffing. I can't believe it,” kid backed off a little, only to lean in again, touch Dean's arm sweetly, “But without thinking I just have resorted to threats, scared you, again. I know I'm not in a good place, but I need to finish-”

“Don't.” He could only shake his head. “Dontcha think I can't tell that you're talking out of your ass? That you would say anything to get me to see things your way. You're so tired you don't even notice how messed up you still are!”

The kid shook his head, as if Dean didn't get it and this time he did back off.

Swayed for a long second like a tall tree, kept shaking his head. “I know how messed up I am, I know there is no going back and that is why I can't slow down. I need to find Lilith, I need to kill her, before-”

“Before what?” seriously -aside from the crap, that Snoopy thought this was his last chance to go at it, that he had to power through- what made things so urgent now? In the beginning Snoopy had always talked about a year, or two, before he could take on Lilith.

A little sigh betrayed the kid's exhaustion and instead of answering he found the wall for support and leaned against it, shoulder to shoulder with Dean.

How could Snoopy not see that he was in no condition to fight? Dean had thought John Winchester was the only being in existence able to run on stubbornness alone-

“She prepares for something,” Snoopy explained, “I don't know what – Does things in the dark I have no knowledge of – I'm blind to her plans, all their plans! They all know so much more about me than I do-...”

Yeah, Dean could only imagine how scary and frustrating it was to be a chess piece and not even know which one.
“This should concern you too,” Snoopy pushed his shoulder into him as he turned to him, “I'm no closer to an answer what she wanted from you than I was when I pulled you out of her grasp! I need to-”

“No.” Kid tried to bargain again. Maybe it was a hell thing, if the king of hell was your father, you sure had to learn to argue your case. But not with Dean, “The only thing you need to is slowing down. Accept that you're human – I mean when was the last time you ate? You're not like them, you can break, you can die from exhaustion-”

“Like you really care.”

What? He pushed himself off the wall to face the insane person he was talking to, “What?”

“To you, I'm just a tool. You want me to bring your father back, you want me to survive this war because only then I'm going to be useful. You don't care that maybe I don't want to be useful – Maybe I don't even want to survive!”

For a moment Dean was too shocked to answer, but only for a moment, “Wow,” What a bunch of bullshit. He knew Snoopy and that wasn't him talking, that were the bare twenty hours of sleep spread thin over twenty-three days talking, “Just: wow. I mean, until now I didn't know that underneath all that attitude you're just a whiny brat.”

Snoopy became tight-lipped and teary-eyed and Dean saw he finally broke the last straw, because damn, they both knew the kid was anything but selfish, or whiny, or spoiled. He had survived growing up a captive to a demon and hadn't ran as soon his captor died, he stepped up, but this- to get his momentary weakness thrown in his face by the one person he trusted, that was enough to send the kid running.

Dean blocked Snoopy's try to get up and away and they collided hard:

“Get out of my way!” the kid gave him one last warning-

“No, you're not going-”

-last warning, before he decked Dean with the elbow.

He should have kept in mind, that Snoopy might was too weak to use his telekinesis in the protected parts of hell, but he was still built like a brick wall – only by pure luck Dean managed to half-duck and trip Snoopy on his own way down.

Knocked the wind out of the kid.

Dean grabbed for him, got his arm in a lock and got kicked off by those freakishly long legs. Snoopy scrambled to make it back on his feet, only managed hands and knees, before Dean got him again, but-

-Fuck! his ribs hurt, thus the kick hadn't even been full force! And Snoopy pushed his bony head right at them before he unwound from him...

It was more a tussle than a fight, all in all. And maybe it was stupid, but their talk hadn't gotten them anywhere either.

Snoopy roared, furious and for the fraction of a second broke free, but Dean dragged him down again, put him in a hold and spent the next minute switching from one hold to the next, because the
kid escaped each and every -a mix of wiry power and unnatural flexibility.

Seriously, Dean hadn't known the kid was such a good fighter, more so, since Snoopy usually didn't need to rely on his body alone. But he held himself well, a little too well-

“Mhhuph” -his face flat in the squishy rug, Dean prayed that it only felt like his nose was flat now too and he slipped his arm under Snoopy's and twisted his hips to roll them over again. They rolled too far, but instead of using the momentum and catching him in a clasp, Snoopy collapsed against him. Shivering and drained of any fight.

Heavy hot puffs of breath on his neck, Dean didn't trust the motionless octopus for one second. And of course Snoopy moved again-

But only to kiss him – push his jaw open and lick into his mouth in search for his tongue, giving in easily as Dean pushed and rolled them to the side. Snoopy didn't fight him anymore, only held on him to kiss him deeper, open up wider and let Dean roam the hot wet insides of his mouth with his tongue and at first, Dean thought, Okay, one way to spend the time, but then he saw flashes before his eyes and felt something inside him give, saw clearer, a flash of the white snake that bit itself in the tail, of Bagheera in her cradle in the closet, of the sigil-

Dean shoved hard. It was the only thing he could do, even though it was to late – Snoopy had been in his mind. He knew the Dagger was in his room, in the closet, even on what shelf.

He was staring into Dean's eyes, his own so wide, it was beyond panic, it was the oldest and worst fear blown wide and become the sky.

And maybe the kid was still in Dean's mind, because he could swear he heard him with his eyes – like some people tasted colors – I'm sorry I didn't mean to I swear, I didn't Please I'm not going for it I will do anything you say Just please don't leave me Please Don't leave me alone -there was no push to it, no pull, no want, just pleading helplessness.

He cradled Snoopy a little closer, swatted the bangs from his forehead and kissed him there. “Will you shut up and go back to sleep now?”

Snoopy didn't go back to sleep right away.

The kid would have to be dead to actually back down. He pulled Dean closer and kissed him again, careful and grateful and so needy it actually met Dean's level of neediness.

And that was how they started to make out in earnest on the woolly rug in front of the bed.

Snoopy's big hand felt amazing on his dick. So did his mouth on Dean's nipples.

Snoopy on the other hand had a thing for having his tight little butt kneaded – made him go wild and decorate Dean's back with girlfriend scratches.

And they kissed. And how they kissed. Sure they had done that before, but obviously Dean had been too drunk to truly appreciate it. To take in account that the kid was half-dead right now and probably operating on two braincells-the prospect made his head spin:

“We're so going to do this again. Properly.”

“Huh?”
“Nevermind,” he nipped at those sweet lips again and coaxed Snoopy's tongue back into his mouth, feeling him so deep inside him, it was no wonder mindreading went both ways again, because he could swear he heard *I love you* before the kid unlocked their mouths and nuzzled his cheek and dropped out of consciousness.

Just like that.

Leaving Dean hard. And drooled on. With his right arm buried under Snoopy.

“I must have been an awful person in my last life.”

“Hmmm,” Snoopy agreed totally droopy.

“You're awake?”

“aht?”

“Don't bother,” he extracted his arm and gave his cock a few good, coordinated strokes, before he moved-

“Dean?”

Now Snoopy was waking up and already panicking, that he could leave. Under thick-heavy eyelids he glimpsed up to him and reached out-

Dean patted the grasping fingers away from the insides of his thigh -seriously how was the kid aiming that well? He was barely functional. “It's alright-”

“You're leaving?”

“What? No,” *Snoopy, I'm just trying to get off and, “I'm getting the blanket, I'm not going anywhere.”*

“I'm gettin' up...we ' sleep ' bed,” Snoopy promised.

“Sure,” Dean was sure the kid would only make it to the bed if he carried him. Therefore he tucked them both in where Snoopy lay, huddled together face to face.

He would've waited until Snoopy slept tight, to turn away and jerk off -because all that warm skin touching his, he had no chance his hardon would go down anytime soon. But Snoopy didn't fall asleep. He touched and pressed closer -his own semi nudged against Dean's hot hard prick, he stilled, his breaths evened and then stroked Dean's back again and pressed a little closer.

*Oh you gotta be kiddin' me*

He was one step away from losing his mind, but certainly his moral high ground, because he would grind himself against the sleeping guy- as Snoopy decided to wake up fully and ask,

“Are you hard again?”

His brain didn't know how to respond -not enough data, before Snoopy yawned and got to the next question,

“How long did we sleep?”
"You're screwing with me right."

But Snoopy didn't.

Well, in a more literal sense, Snoopy was screwing with him, after Dean told him he had had about two seconds of microsleep and Dean was not hard again, he was still hard.

They jerked off, fingers laced together, Dean came first and told Snoopy to keep going, which was just his favorite side of painfully oversensitive finish. Though it was a little weird to have a guy come on him – mostly because the kid spurted like a frickin' fire hose.

Snoopy lazily wiped his hand on the blanket, producing more icky wet spots and settled his head on Dean's shoulder. “Why did we not sleep in the bed?”

Okay, now he was screwing with him.

Snoopy's arm tightened around him, the kind of kitten-weak that came from a long sickness.

Not screwing with him, just completely bonkers. “Sleep in a bed? What's next? You wanna sit at a table or drive in a car? This is hell, Sparky. Hot is cold, up is down and crazy is program,” Dean had forgot that for short while, but thanks to micro-sleep-Snoopy he was now marching to the drum again.

“Okay,” Snoopy said, like Dean had actually meant they couldn't sleep in the bed.

And before he could clear that up, Snoopy sighed so deep and wet against him, that it could only mean-

-yep, he was asleep again.
It didn't take very long for Snoopy to revert to the cuddly puppy. Who knew everything better and chewed Dean's ear off with all his yapping. But it took a few days for it sink in how close he had come to becoming something else -permanently.

They didn't talk about it.

Didn't have to. Dean was able to see it in Snoopy's wakefulness, his calm vigilance.

The feeling of a miracle. Like being totaled by a semi-trailer and walking away with a broken collarbone and a bruised wrist. All Dean lost that night was his dad's car. If they hadn't split up, if his dad had been riding shotgun, reading, plotting their next move like so many times -like the demons thought he would- John would've died that night.

Dean remembered it from his close call, the feeling of getting away, it left one in a vacuum for a little while, where everything was meaningful and vivid. Even watching *The Voyage Home* with your favorite pets:

Bagheera lay on the kid's bare chest and Dean sat beside the bed, propped up against the nightstand, because since he spilled beer on it, there was a rule against drinking in Snoopy's bed.

And there they were again-

“`I don't get it,” Snoopy commented the fact that Dean took a pull on the bottle, “You're drinking *every* time they have screentime together, how is that a game?”

“Hey, I didn't make the rules,” if he had, he would've focused the game on Uhura, but Jo had laid down the law: “Every time Kirk and Spock are gay for each other, it's Miller time. That's why you don't play this game with *The Motion Picture*.” Ugh, worst hangover of his life.

Snoopy frowned, watching with deep concentration and finally shaking his head, “I don't see it, I mean yeah, they're friends-”

“You don't see it because they're an old married couple and Spock's memory is a little wonky, but trust me it's there.”

“They have just about as much chemistry with each other as with the doctor.”

“Yah, that's because they're married to the doctor too.” But for reasons unknown Jo didn't wanna see that, “It's the future, man, love in all shapes and sizes.”

Snoopy made his grumpy-cat face, the one that said 'Why not?'.

“Wait until the next one, there they go camping together and Kirk and McCoy will have to deal with their crazy brother in law,” God, Star Trek, you gotta love it - it was the most relaxing thing ever. “Oh! And,” how could he have forgotten that! “Uhura distracts the enemy singing and dancing naked in the moonlight.”

“Dude-”, Snoopy said, and

-my gosh, did that sound cute when he tried out Dean's lingo-

“-isn't she in her fifties of something?”
But badtalking Uhura = not cute, “Yeah she is, in this movie, and in the next, in her sexy scene she was in her late fifties. Your point would be?”

“No point,” Snoopy played it smart, but smirked a little.

“Nichelle Nichols 's still hot, by the way, being in her seventies now,” Dean made sure there was no doubt left about his devotion.

After a while -hospital scene- Snoopy grew a little frown.

“Wassup?”

“I think you should drink for the doctor too,” the kid voiced his reflections, “He seems like the kind of man who takes it personal to be left out.”

True, but, “You just want to get me drunk – Have you wicked way with me.”

The short huff made Snoopy's chest jump, so Bagheera didn't like. She left and suddenly Snoopy was free to roll and shimmy to the edge of the bed, until his cold nose nudged Dean's jaw and his ear and Snoops suggested that he could have his wicked way right now too.

Dean just leaned his head back and puckered his lips. He thought it would stay at a peckish little kiss.

But it started there. And went on until the the kid stopped, wrinkled his nose and said, “You taste like beer,” like that had to be said, before he could proceed to kiss Dean.
They kissed a lot more in the following days.

And never stopped kissing and snuggling when Snoopy picked up to rule the Underworld.

How did this happen? Dean was sure he had been mostly hetero before hell - or better: before Snoopy. And now, whenever the kid was laying one on him, he just melted.

At least his horniness did away with other pesky emotions he hadn't been able to overcome before - like the guilt he felt whenever the kid had reminded him of Sammy, made him imagine what Sammy would've been like if he had grown up...

Yeah, having a boner for the kid helped not to confuse him with his dead brother anymore. But it did totally not help when he was supposed to be reading and Snoopy stretched his long legs under the table, unwittingly rubbing his calves against Dean's.

Their legs stayed tangled. Jeez, why not get over it and hold hands like love sick highschoolers?

Kid himself had too much of hardon for the manuscript in front of him to notice what he was doing to Dean. He was just innocently enjoying their closeness.

Once one knew how it felt to have Snoopy all over you, have him kiss and pet and scratch - with those blunt painted nails... Dean liked that on girls too, not the red-claw donning vamps, but the tough girls with their short dark colored nails, lacquer painted on so thick their nails glided over sweaty skin like really nothing else and Snoopy's 'scratches' felt exactly like that.

Only that his hands were bigger than any girls.

Though right now they were only gliding over the burnished glossy gold of the illuminated letter, thoughtlessly cruel to Dean's tactile memory.

He took a deep breath and tried to focus on something else. This library came with Emeralites. Dean had always liked the soft shine of the green glass shade, it was practical and beautiful and he liked to play with the brass chain.

He pulled it:

Lights out.

Snoopy didn't even blink.

Was probably able to read in the dark with his freakishly beautiful hazel eyes of his. Not that shutting one desk lamp off made it really dark in here. Dean pulled the chain again:

Lights on.

And again:

Lights off.

And again:

Lights on.
And-

Snoopy looked at him. And smiled happily -like Dean was not the most annoying reading partner ever- and returned to work.

He should do the same. There was a riveting chapter ahead of him, so far the author had already lost himself twice in anecdotes about the life of the hero's great-grandfather's uncle, but he couldn't just skip that because there was the tiny chance that the loss of that guy's toenail actually had something to do with his great-grand...nephew's quest for immortality.

After two more paragraphs -old Gaheris had lost the toe due to infection and the author managed to wrap that into a pretty fuzzy metaphor for untreated concupiscence. He also stressed the inevitability of the downfall of men to the point where he questioned if to burn out all sensuality at it's first flare was futile anyhow and sin should be consumed to it's fullest...and then he had written a bunch of prayers and

Ewh!

That was blood on the next page. Which was the last page.

He looked for a second volume, but the other old scriptures belonged to the research for extinct flowers.

Snoopy's research, who sniffled when Dean disturbed them and raised their dust. But he was too engrossed to mind Dean's search, so:

“Dude, the guy just died before he wrote down the good stuff.”

“Killed himself actually,” Snoopy explained, “He finished it here in hell, writing on the walls of his cell in the Dungeon, using his blood and his feces.”

He groaned at the mental picture. Most cells smelled bad enough without...uarrgh. “Terrific. So I have to visit him to-”

“No,” Snoopy looked up, pushed a large encyclopedia to the side and handed Dean the notebook that had been buried under it. “This is the transcription I ordered, I just never had the time to read it.”

“Thank god.” -scratch that:

Teeny tiny handwriting, hundreds of pages of it. And of course, no line breaks.

He made it to page ten before a yawn made his eyes blurry and he lost the line.

Or the page. Had he even read this page yet? What the-...okay. From the beginning.

He never made it to page ten again. It wasn't his fault that his brain strayed and came up with questions like:

How was hair able to be floppy and spiky at the same time? Since his last haircut, the kid's head was a mess. Demon scissorhands had done a lousy job, seriously Dean could've done better with his hunting knife.

The kid was still cute though, even when he twirled the points of his hair -which was a totally girly thing to do- but Snoopy only did it when he was concentrating very hard-...

Oh God.
He was crushing on the kid.

Big time.

So much it wasn't even funny anymore.

Sighing his grief actually got Dean some attention:

“Bored?” asked Snoopy.

“No, absolutely not. I love the smell of mildew in the morning.”

“There is not a shortage of tasks,” Snoopy pointed out and then he pointed out, “You could pick something more adventurous.”

“I'm all ears, what do you have in mind?”

Snoopy huffed a laugh, shaking his head about the lewd grin Dean had used to point out what tasks he had in mind. “Start listening with your upstairs brain, I am talking about work.”

“Okay,” he was listening. Anything to get out of seven hours more of this.

“But I need to finish my search for sources of *Myrcia skeldingii,*” Snoopy pointed out and waited if Dean got the hidden message:

They would be apart.

They hadn't been apart much since -that. Snoopy had taken him to every meeting, every inspection, every battle(well, not a battle, more a brawl), or like today -to his research fests.

They made a good team, why break it up. “If you need me here it's fine,” even though he already felt his brain trying to shut off and save itself from stupor, “I'll get myself some java and in no time-”

“You will be bored silly.”

“Yeah.”

Snoopy's ankle hooked with his as he shifted, sitting up, “Listen, there is a territory of hell, in the lower mid-regions, some call it the Echoes. You actually reminded me of it, when you hid the Dagger and the Colt from me,”

-whenver Snoopy had the chance to be Professor Geek, his dimples grew extra dimply from enjoyment-so cute-

“-because demons use this place to dump things they want gone. Because anything of substance lost in the Echoes is lost to all demons, can never be found by them.”

“So it's like the Bermuda triangle of hell.”

“It's more like a desert for demons, because it doesn't respond to them. They can't manipulate it. Which makes it the only place in hell where damned souls are more powerful than the demons. Though very few damned souls find their way there. And none of them have the discipline of a live soul to let the Echoes be, so...” Snoopy had made a meaningful pause.

But Dean didn't get it, “Am I supposed to fake a knowing sound now?”
“The Echoes,” Smartypants explained, “are only fully there to someone who is fully there and yet they only give up their hidden objects to those who do not search for them.”

“Ahhh,” he made that knowing sound, “You want me to go there and search for something, but you can’t tell me what, or I won’t find it?”

“Almost,” Snoopy gave him that, “I want you to go there and not search for anything, just take a troop of demons and explore it. If you happen to find something, even if it looks like nothing-”

“I take it with me, because it could be valuable.”

“Exactly.”

“What do I need a troop of demons for?”

“You know,” Snoopy shrugged, “Just in case.”

“Of what, I thought they are useless there.”

“They make good decoy to anything hostile,” Snoopy said, but there was more, “also...” he swallowed.

“What?”

“Some parts of the Echoes,” he said like he tried to apologize, “are a little strange.”

“Strange? You mean crazy strange wackadoo? In hell?” What was new?

“Yeah, strange -even for hell,” Snoopy nodded.
Chapter 32

The kid hadn't been joking.

It started tame with a foggy forest, where gray massive trees grew upside down and the writing on the signposts was mirror-inverted.

He checked with the demon guide who had pointed him here, but the bird-like figure just shook his head - no he didn't see any trees or signposts. Dean saved his breath, not even asking the others, or pointing out that the fog was so thick it felt he was swimming in it - most demons didn't feel that kinda thing even under normal conditions.

The demon that lead them here, got out of dodge as soon as Dean gave him permission. The others followed him deeper into the fog.

Approaching a rectangular shaped dark spot and then entering it, Dean made some light. For himself, the demons following him, wouldn't be none the wiser. He didn't know what this looked like for them, but he was sure they didn't see the graffiti on the concrete walls left and right of them:

Man-high, black and white stick figures, smudged with red smilies.

Still pretty tame, he thought and then heard the creepy childish giggling.

He already missed Snoopy. Not because he was scared, but because no one was here to appreciate his joke, when he proposed to the demons to split up.

They were just confused.

"It was a joke, nobody is going anywhere without my say so. Stick together." On second thought, Snoopy would've probably not gotten the horror movie trope either, because Snoopy didn't like horror movies.

The tunnel became darker again.

At the sound of a body dropping Dean spun round.

He pushed mentally at the darkness. The more he manipulated the Echoes the less interesting things they would show to him, but at the moment he was only interested to see what made the last demon in line smoke out that quick.

"Sir," their leader, spoke up - the demon possessing a stout female corpse, "I take full responsibility for my subordinates desertion. I only ask for the right to discipline him-"

"Shush," Dean didn't care for her uninformed excuses, he watched as one of the stick figures chewed on dark ectoplasm and another blew demonic smoke rings.

"With all due respect, Keller," one of the demons whispered towards his leader, "I didn't see Scaggs leave the body."

Whatever was here had grabbed the demon fast then. "They got him, he's gone," Dean ended any discussion before it could start, "We keep going, but you fall as far back as possible without losing me."

Who would've thought he would see the day when demons were so scared of him they did not only
give their *Yes'sirs* readily and willingly, they were actually glad that the big bad crazy human took point.

Fools. The damned souls here wouldn't do anything to him. He felt their presence more when the tunnel opened to a sky drained of colors and it's shine was backlighting everything, falling on nothing, like nothing was real here. The first one he saw was a faceless silhouette minding his own business.

Though more unreal than the Meadows, as it all made even less sense, it felt ...not peaceful, but not unfriendly either. The denizens of the Echoes were not evil. Just totally bonkers.

When Dean approached a few of them -dark smudges of children on a swing-set more shadows than corporal beings- they giggled hysterically. But when the demons came closer too, the tone changed.

Dean signed them to Freeze and asked the wild smudged shadow closest to him, “Can I stay a little with you?”

Spoken to, the girl stopped swishing in and out of perception, slowed down to an actual perceptible being and looked up, pale green irises contrasted by stark white. She reached out and pulled at his sleeve and at his soul. Which was a really unpleasant thing to experience, but he felt there was no ill intent, she let go fast and screamed *Gotcha* at him and ran off.

Dean sat beside the swings for a while, watched a cloud move from one side of the sky to the other and let things be.

Which meant he did not warn the demons when the kids teamed up on them and ripped one of them to shreds just for fun.

They decorated the swing set with the legs of the corpse. All but the little girl chased around then and played some game of tag. She pushed him a little and he got it now, but,

“I don't wanna play, but you go ahead.”

She seemed to understand him, though decided to keep him company, sitting close. Cross-legged, just like him. She even mirrored how he had buried his hands in the pockets of his jacket.

Only that she had no pockets. Which made it a neat trick when she suddenly pulled something into existence and held it up for him:

A bird skeleton with feathers and a little bit gray flesh left on the bones.

“For me?”

She nodded.

As he took his gift and kept an eye on her, because she looked so expectant.

Bared her teeth and made a chewing gesture.

Somehow he had seen that coming, but he had a good excuse, “Thank you honey, it's so nice, I'm gonna take it home and share it with my friend, okay?”

She stared.

Not okay then. Well he would not eat a raw rotten bird. He didn't even like well roasted chicken very much.
Still staring at him, like she saw through his skin, she carefully stood up and grabbed his ear and tugged his head closer to-

Lick him.

There are no germs in hell, he told himself and prayed she would not find him too tasty.

She didn't, she let him go and backed off a little. Looking suddenly timid.

He wanted to tell her not to worry, but as clear as a bell, and just as loud -as if he were sitting in one that was struck, he heard: _Are you his brother?_

He felt a little dizzy, “Who?” he asked, maybe a little too loud, but he felt like his ears were bleeding.

Her eyes grew deeper and lighter, more yellow than green and the image of a very young, skinny(save for the pudgy, dimply cheeks) Snoopy flashed through his mind and Dean understood.

“You know Snoopy?” he asked her.

And she nodded and reached out towards his chest, but stopped before she actually touched the talisman and Dean felt that she wanted it. She wanted it badly, but she didn't dare to take it.

He startled as she suddenly jumped to her feet and joined her friends.

Pocketing the dead bird Dean decided to leave before the kids got bored and killed another of his demons.

He found the gravel of what turned out to be the flat roof of a mall.

Every shop sold shoes. The bottom floor was flooded and he was already going down the escalator as he saw the sharks in the water. Hopping over to the other side, he decided he didn't need to find out if they were friendly sharks.

At the top he almost walked by a bottle standing there like forgotten. Only that it looked too old, the label painted instead of printed.

He picked it up. Even his french was enough to read that the bottle contained Four Thieves Vinegar. Which was hoodoo, but the harmless kind. Was supposed to protect against the plague. Why would someone get rid of it, he was asking himself, as he wanted to open it to take a sniff and felt the bottle move-

Dip in weight, like something heavy had moved inside.

The dark green glass wasn't see-through and even if...should he leave it here? Who knew what a nightmare of Jeannie bounced around in there?

...

Well, whatever. Worst case Snoopy wouldn't open it and throw it into the Morass or something.

Outside waited a dead, snow crusted park to be explored.

The demons still kept their distance, but came closer after almost losing him once.

As he started to feel he was walking in a circle, Dean found a walled fence and followed it for a while.
The gate appeared to be guarded by a creature that was made from cast iron too, but at closer inspection wasn't guarding the gate—it was attached to it.

“Don't.” too late:

With a metallic screech the gate lashed out so fast the demon wouldn't have had a chance to escape if he had seen it coming.

After telling the demons where the gate was so they were able to stay away from it, he decided to go inside on his own.

Before the manor a beautiful white fountain flowed over with a green dark oil, that smelled like nuts.

Inside was no one, but a skeletal man—literal starved to skin and bones, sitting half naked on a high chair, waiting to see the doctor, as he said.

Except from a whole lot of rubble the manor seemed empty. When he passed the starved guy again, he thought about simply asking.

In a thick accent the living skeleton told him about the paintings. That as long as he had been here and waited for the doctor, the only one that came, was the devil and he hung the paintings.

“Thanks,” the paintings it was then, but before, he had to give the guy a hint that he didn't actually have to sit here and starve for another two hundred years. “You know you're in hell, right?”

“Camp Sumtah was hell, felluh, tho lucky me su'vivd it.”

Okay: Never argue with the damned souls, “Sure. Good talk.”

He broke the paintings out of their frames, cut out those that wouldn't butch and gone he was.

The demons had waited faithfully and followed as he sought out a different path through the park.

On a larger patch of grass was a hole in the ground.

A grave shaped hole.

It was strange, that nowhere else in the Echoes he had had a bad feeling yet, not even with the sharks. But this open grave, he had the feeling he would regret taking a peek.

He edged closer.

And closer—

-it was empty.

And like rookie he turned around to check on the demons, as he felt something big and solid wrap around his leg.

He fell. Drew the Colt. Hit the frozen grass on his side, clawed at it—

useless. The tentacle was as thick as his thigh and sticky with ice cold goo that seeped through his
jeans and sucked on his skin. He screamed and it pulled him into the grave. The last thing he saw of
the Echoes, were the demons running towards him.

He pulled the trigger, but the shot was muted by a giant wall of dense slime. It didn't die! Why didn't
it die!?!

On pure instinct he gave into the pull of hell, anywhere, anything, just away from this monster before
it smothered him in slime.

Coming to in the living room reminded him oddly of his first time here in his cell. Only that this time
his knee wasn't magically healed, but magically injured.

He didn't dare to touch the slime, or to rip the jeans off. It looked frozen, felt like it too and if it was,
he would take his flesh off too if he pulled.

It didn't hurt, but in a bad way.

“Dean,” she said and startled him badly.

“Oh gawd-” he tried to breathe normally, “I never thought I would say that: But I'm actually glad to
see you.”

The apparition of the foster mom smiled. “Are you hurt?” she asked genuinely sympathetic.

“Yeah, can you help me up?”

He would spit doodle out of here. No time to play around, he needed to get home and find the kid,
figure out how to treat this so he wouldn't loose the leg.

He really had no intention to hide an injury like this one. John Winchester's own stubbornness aside,
he didn't raise a complete fool – You don't hide an injury. No matter how foolish you had been to get
it. …
He really had no intention to hide an injury like this one. John Winchester's own stubbornness aside, he didn't raise a complete fool – You don't hide an injury. No matter how foolish you had been to get it.

But that was before he made it to the white rooms and the feeling returned to his leg.

The slime didn't start to hurt now either. And suddenly he felt stupid for panicking so badly. Hadn't the kid said the slug-tentacle-monster-pits were a harmless thing that everyone stumbled into sooner or later?

The demons were probably laughing their asses off right now. For all he knew they could've set him up.

He should've been more suspicious of the groveling all of them did in the last weeks. Damn assholes.

He made it back to what was his room now and decided to try and get the goo off by himself, before he bothered Snoopy with it.

It felt weird coming back here. But that was normal.

Dean had tried redecorating his room, got himself a pool table and because he thought it would be funny he made it to be covered in cream colored felt, so that it fit the new color scheme of his suite; but ever since he had been locked in it wasn't the same anymore - especially sleeping here felt like a trap.

He would have preferred Snoopy's room, they didn't need a big bed anyhow, kid always slept right on top of him, but the problem was that Snoopy's room came with Snoopy's desk and most mornings Dean woke up alone with the kid working at it -which was not the definition of kicking it back in Dean's book and he was sick arguing about it.

So he redecorated his room a few times before he resigned to the fact that it would never feel homey again.

Last was a sun-fire-theme, white, red, orange, black. Hence the black tiled bathroom he had limped to. It was also a subtle play on the fact that most people assumed hell was hotter than the sun.

Picking at the slime, he started to suspect he made it only worse. Trying to take off his jeans failed.

Cutting them off too.

And that was how Snoopy found him, with his jeans mid-thigh, trying to wipe the slime off his corroding knife.

"Yeah, go ahead laugh it up."

Snoopy didn't do anything the like. "Don't bother, your knife is ruined. The slime eats away metal like nothing else -don't worry," he hurried to say in face of Dean's clear horror: "Skin withstands the digestive enzymes much longer. A few hundred years usually. Here, let me," he halted Dean's tries
to make the goo budge and focused silently on Dean's leg and under his stare the goo liquefied.

He took his jeans off and wiped away what seemed to be nothing more than water now. “Thanks.”

Still, he wetted a towel and gave himself a catlick, just in case.

“No problem. I do have some practice. After the third time I fell into one of their pits I realized I need to learn to transform their slime.”

Snoopy had this tone. The one that said he was minding Dean's feelings. Which was awkward.

“You see,” kid cranked up the empathy, “It's something that can happen to anyone,” he quirked a smile and added assuredly, “At least you don't smell like hellhound blood anymore, or it would've tried to breed with you.”

And it got more awkward. Because the kid was not kidding. Probably wouldn't joke about that ever, since he himself smelled like hellhounds more often than not, but that was a line of thought Dean didn't want to follow.

“Are you okay,” Snoopy asked as he helped Dean up. Worried about his silence.

“Sure,” just not wild to trade stories about attempted rape and century long digestion, “I mean the stuff is not poisonous right?”

“No, but you have to be exhausted.”

A little unsteady maybe, “Nah, I'm fine,” it wasn't like he would swoon in Snoopy's arms. No need for the kid to hold on to him still-

“You were gone for fifteen hours.”

“No way!” the monster had him for about a hot second.

“As you share in my power the Echoes only drain your time slightly-”

-yeah okay, that this place had screwed with his sense of time was perfectly possible-

“-instead of stealing hundreds of years in a blink. Are you hungry?”

He thought about, but, “No.”

“Tired?”

Now that the adrenaline wore off, “A little.”

“Yeah, that's normal, I'm gonna help you to the bed, okay?

Now enough was enough! “I can walk just fine,” he shrugged Snoopy's hands off. “Sides, don'tcha wanna see what I found?”

Snoopy smiled like he thought Dean was adorable, “What did you find?”

It was humanely impossible not to roll his eyes about mother-hen-Snoopy, but Dean did so as he had his back turned to the kid.

He located his jacket, where he had shrugged it off when he had come in, and touched down the pockets as he walked over to the bed to sit.
Right pocket he felt, like he remembered, squishy -bird bones, “I got a biohazard and,” left pocket, the hoodoo bottle, “A hazard I don't even know how to grade.” He took it out and handed it over to Snoopy.

Who immediately noticed that something in it moved. He studied it, struck silent for a second.

Dean meanwhile tried to take the bird from his pocket in one piece-

“What's that?”

“Oh this kingly gift, I got from a little girl. But then too, I wasn't that hungry.”

Snoopy had a strange look upon him, staring at it, then holding his hand out.

Really? He wanted...okay, Dean handed it over.

The kid cradled the carcass in his hands and fixed his eyes at it like it spoke to him. His nose and his lip trembled -he recognized this thing- “Ava.”

“Yeah, she mentioned that you knew each other.”

Snoopy swallowed and shook his head. “We only met once, but that was...after...”

After what? he wanted to ask, but Snoopy seemed really shaken-

“She was like me,” he finally said.

Dean waited – he wasn't one to push, but when Snoopy turned all reticent, it never meant something good.

Kid put the bird away and picked up the bottle, held it against the light to inspect it. Tried to change the subject, “That's fascinating, there is a fairy imprisoned in this glass bottle. I have to run a few tests, but it seems like the glass is everything it takes to hold it-”

“Am I not supposed to ask what that means that there is someone like you?”

“Was.”

“What?”

“There was- or more accurate there were others like me.”

Snoopy wouldn't meet his eye. Looked like he wished he could make his six-foot-two gawky body curl so it wasn't seen anymore.

Kid swallowed again, before he explained, “Ava was -just like me- one of those not only initiated, but also chosen for a new life in hell. Before her seventh birthday Father grew disappointed in her development and ripped her soul out of her flesh.”

Not that Dean didn’t know that dear old Yellow Eyes had been capable of anything. Really any-horrifying-thing. But he always thought he had coddled his kid. Or as it turned out, his kids.

Snoopy had always put it like that: Azazel had treated him well, at least as long as he was little. Lessons under Alistair only came in Snoopy's late teens. Before that Azazel had protected the kid. Which made much more sense now, the bastard hadn't needed to be harsh – killing one of the kids in front of the others was sure motivation enough to be good.
Dean could just hope his assumption was right and Snoopy and this Ava girl hadn't been close, how much worse would it be to see someone who was like a sister...see her die like that. But still, the terror of the knowledge you could be next? “I'm sorry. I don't know what to say.”

“There is nothing to say,” Snoopy met his eyes fleetingly as he came closer, to sit beside Dean.

Not touching, but searching him out.

“She died here in hell, so her soul stayed here, but she doesn't deserve to be here. None of them do. I always hoped they would find peace somehow, fade away you know?”

That sounded awfully like survivor's guilt. No wonder Snoopy had never mentioned them before. “How many of them are there?”

“Dozens. I don't know the exact number. Most initiates didn't survive the demon blood, died as babies. Those I think are in heaven or somewhere else, not here...I hope so at least.”

Shit. Who knew how many...“So this whole thing, that you're the one and only, it's only propaganda, to make it more believable that you're the king's only rightful heir?”

Snoopy shrugged, inched closer to him and shook his head, “That's not all to it, I guess. I was kept to believe it too. For the first years down here, he let me think that I was special, his prophesied and longed-for child.” Snoopy scrunched up his nose disgusted, “When in reality, it was really just survival of the fittest.

After a stupid fight with Liam and I had run off to the mid-regions where he couldn't follow me and found the Echoes. Meeting Andy and Max, but especially Ava, I learned something crucial, something that allowed me to see through Fathers few lies:

I'm not the strongest.” He shook his head and looked at Dean, like he needed to put emphasis on that. Because it was so important.

Dean got it so far, that killing them was a waste – if they had power too, why-?

“Even after he knew that I found out about them, he told me I always had been his favorite, -in connection with Yellow Eyes that title was beyond sick-

“That I was the best choice to rule hell one day because I was the most powerful.

But that's simply not true. Some of these children's souls were an even match for me, despite me being in my body and fed on Father's blood on a daily basis. It gave me panic attacks to know that he lied to me; thinking there still could be others, that I was still on probation. He swore to me it wasn't so, but I only believed it after Mike taught me about war and power.

Mike had a way of making things simple, of finding a lever and place to stand in a world where there is practically no security.

He told me it made perfect sense for the king of hell to favor not his strongest child, but the one which is least likely to overthrow him. I was never meant to take over. I was not special, just a tool. One Azazel had invested time and resources in, but that didn't mean he couldn't throw me away and sire a new line of children any time.”

A tool. A good soldier and nothing else. Bobby had once accused Dad of treating Dean like his one man army, a grunt, an instrument...it was bullshit of course. Dad had loved him, maybe not as much...
as Bobby did, not as unconditional, not as blindly. Dad had known him better, his flaws, his faults, known him too well to be proud, but loved him anyhow. Dean couldn't imagine what it was like to grow up without that and he wanted to say something. He wanted the kid to know that he wasn't just a means to an end for him, that...but all he managed was to reach out for Snoopy's thigh and bump shoulders with him.

The kid gave him a smile.

A brave one, that crushed Dean's hope that of all the things Snoopy read in his mind, he did get the important stuff. But that was just not how passive mindreading worked. Which was why the kid probably didn't listen in all that closely anyhow.

Snoopy tugged at the jacket Dean still had in his lap, “What else do you have there?”

He meant the folded paintings that were still tucked away in the inside pocket.

Snoopy unfolded them. Eyes growing wide, mouth slightly open. “Those are incredible.”

If the kid said so. The blue one with the dark spiral and the red snake and the tiny scribbled minuscules sure looked nice -in a William-Blake-worrisome way. But Dean was certain they were not works of art. “What are they?”

“Maps of hell,” Snoopy answered without looking up. He wasn't reading the scribbles, for that his eyes glided over them too slowly, like he tried to guess what they could mean. Then he looked at Dean with some wonder and shook his head, smiling, “You really are something, you know that, right?”

“Yeah,” he agreed wholeheartedly. “But why again?”

Snoopy laughed silently. Shook his head again, “I spent months in the Echoes and never found more than a few minor weapons.”

“I'm good to go there again any time,” he proposed and added a little sullen, “But without those rats.”

“What rats?”

“The demons, I bet they knew what I was walking into.”

Snoopy frowned, not getting it – then getting it and pursing his lips, disagreeing, “First of all, no they didn't, Jörmundgandrs are migratory, no one knows where one drills it's pit next.

And second, they wouldn't dare to pull your leg.” He tapped Dean's bare leg in emphasis of his joke.

“Haha,” he gave the kid the dead look and made sure he knew, “It's not a pun if it's literal.”

“Actually its a highly sophisticated pun, when it is so literal. But I mean it, they wouldn't dare to, they are too scared of you now.”

“Oh, please. You just say that to make me feel better.”

“No,” the kid laughed at him, “Not at all. When they lost you, they came to me and I swear they were more scared of me handing them over to you, than of the punishment I dealt them.”

The kid wasn't just humoring him then? So they were that scared of him? Sure they barely dared to meet his eye, but he had thought that was a badly done con, “So all their grovelling ’s really real?”
Snoopy nodded.

“What did you tell them?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, come on, ever since *The Brides wore Blood* I'm treated like I am your general.”

“You are my general,” the kid snickered.

“Do I have to put you over my knee- Oh no, no, wait, you might actually enjoy that.”

Snoopy snickered again, cuddling a little closer, his arm sneaking around Dean's mid, the kid rested his chin on Dean's shoulder, looking all innocent, as he admitted, “You're not wrong, they do have a new respect for you since you helped me overpower the Disciples. But I didn't spread the word about it. It was not necessary, they were all there, they watched you enter the circles with me.”

“Yeah, but I didn't do anything.”

“You were there, you withstood their wiles and you helped me.”

“How?”

Snoopy swallowed.

Kid was the only one Dean knew who was able to make his eyes glow happily and twinkle sadly at the same time.

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to do this all alone?” he asked instead of answering the question, “To know that no one of power will help me?” He took his chin off Dean's shoulder, straightening for a deep breath. “That if angels were walking the earth, they would want me dead? And if God was still alive he would order them to take me out with the rest of the abominations?

But God and the angels are not even here, the demons are here. They are the only one's in power at this age and I am the only thing that stands between them and their complete control over the human race.

Father allowed me to care for humanity, because it made me predictable in ways demons and psychopaths aren't. Sane I was more useful to him.

Over the years he learned that he didn't have to lie for or force my loyalty, on contrary, he needed to push me away,- make sure I understood what being loved by a demon means:

I was useful to him, precious beyond anything else. It is the highest form of love a demon can muster up. The love for a treasured tool.

There was a safety in his need for me, one I miss since he died. Don't get me wrong-” Snoopy's eyes dropped.

Dean felt his shame like it was his own.

“-he was forcing me to do terrible things,” the kid said softly, “and I'm glad that that's over. That I have the freedom to do good. But it's...it's so damn hard to do it all alone.”

The kid had moved out of the formerly playful embrace, his hands in his lap now. He bared his teeth -in the way he did when he was disgusted with himself, “Intellectually I knew, Imbolc, -whose
loyalty was proverbial for thousands of years, she betrayed her sisters, in a desperate attempt to save her own life, and she would have avenged them, first chance she got...but knowing didn't protect me from wanting it to be different. From the desire for more, for an alliance.

With somebody like her by my side? Somebody of her power and knowledge and connections? The war could've been over within days. We would have won, no question. But most of all, I wouldn't have had to rule alone. I would've had someone to trust, someone who finds me useful beyond a single purpose, who would watch out for me for years to come...She promised me all that and sealed it with a kiss.”

To make a demon of her class stick to a deal it took a whole lot more than a kiss. But Dean knew what Snoopy meant, what it felt like to have someone promise you safety, promise that angels are watching over you.

“Of course I knew she lied,” Snoopy said it, “That the deal she had with me was twisted, but ever since Father died,” he shook his head again, and swallowed, “I catch myself wanting to believe, so badly, that I don't have to do this alone.”

“You don't have to.”

Snoopy smiled, “You're sweet.”

But he wasn't exactly an all powerful demon, he-

The kid looked at him and wiped all thoughts from Deans mind.

No one had ever looked at him like that. Not even people he saved from certain death.

“It's that sweetness that rings so true,” Snoopy said, “It opposes their lies perfectly. When you can, you try to help, to protect. No matter who, even me. You do it simply because you can,” he reached out for the talisman, “I didn't want you to take on my burden, I just wanted you as company. I had no hidden agenda, I only gave you this because I wanted to protect you.”

It wasn't the first time the kid apologized for the spell that did more than intended. Made them like blood, like family.

“I never meant to bind you.” Snoopy's eyes had been watery a few times already and now they begged him to believe him – like that was something hard; Dean didn't need to believe, he knew the kid had underestimated the depth of their connection in a bloodspell, And it wasn't as if he had ritually melded their souls together forever. It was just a talisman.

He pulled the talisman on it's chain from Snoopy's grasp and pushed it under his shirt, “Stop worrying about it. It's not like I can't take it off at any time.”

Snoopy nodded, and smiled grim and called his bullshit: “Sure. And it's not like I can't run away from this war.”

Sometimes the closeness of can't and wont was a bitch. “Now that's just apples and oranges. See, I'm a royal pet and if I learned anything from Bagheera then that my only responsibility is to make sure you feed me. While you on the other hand, you're a prince, you were born to run this place.”

Snoopy nodded. The corners of his lips twitching.

Obviously agreeing that Dean was always right.
“Do you ever listen?” or not, “I wasn't born a prince,” kid playfully argued.

“Yeah, well then, my point is invalid. You win.” Anything to make the kid stop regretting one of the best things that had ever happened to Dean.

Snoopy smiled his toothy happy smile, looked like he wanted to kiss him, but he didn't, he just nudged his nose against Dean's cheek like the puppy he was.

He could've kissed Snoopy and made it all better, but there was a question that stuck in a loop in his head ever since the kid had talked about his childhood again. “How much do you remember of the time before Azazel got to you?” he had never asked outright before and most times Snoopy tried to talk about it, they dropped the subject, but maybe now...

“All things and nothing.” Snoopy turned away from him.

He should have kept his mouth shut-

“It's hard to describe,” Snoopy said, but his tone spelled, that he wanted to.

That he needed to. But wasn't sure Dean would understand. “That never kept you from trying to spell it out for me,” he encouraged the kid.

Snoopy huffed a laugh.

Maybe it was his fault, maybe he was the thing that kept Snoopy between crying and laughing. He sure seemed to have that effect on people in the past, Dean mused, while Snoopy tried to find the words:

“The memories I lack are so selective, that I'm sure Fa-...Azazel had a hand in it. I don't remember faces or names, didn't remember them right from the beginning.

I recall how I spent my first year trying to remember, before I finally gave up. Matthew told me it wasn't so important to remember their faces and he helped me cementing the few memories I had left – against Father's wishes, of course.

But still I forgot a lot, I guess. Too much time went by, you know? And there were also things I didn't talk about with Matthew, at first, or never, because they were a secret.”

“But you remember your mom? Her presence, you said.” Dean knew what that was like, when her smell faded and then her voice-

“No.”

“But-”

“I can't be sure, -like I said, I don't remember the people as faces or anything identifying. But I remember thinking that I want to be like that:

Being big and brave, a hero, like him.

I'm pretty sure, it's not my mom I remember. It's just flashes, the feeling of a sunny smile, or him pulling faces at me, or just holding me. I recall more specific memories than that too. When I learned to ride a bike, I think that was one of my last one's before-...” Snoopy took a sharp breath.

-before that bastard killed Snoopy's real dad and dragged the little boy to hell. Dean sometimes wished he could resurrect that yellowed son of a bitch just to kill him all over again.
“I did terrible. Scraped my knees a thousand times,” Snoopy kept telling him and reminded him of Sammy -who never quite learned it to ride without help, so in Sammy's eyes he never really learned it, because it didn't count as long as Dean held on.

It had been Dean's fault. He couldn't let go, even after Sammy found his balance. He was too scared Sammy would fall again, scrape his knees again. Not that it bled, not really, just white scratches -still, after that first fall, Dean hadn't dared to let go again.

“I eventually got the hang of it,” Snoopy mused, “But I remember it cost him a lot of nerve. I think I hurt myself a lot in the first years of my life, because it was the only occasions I remember he got angry at me. I remember a few times quite clearly. Once I got hurt so badly, you can still see the scar,” Snoopy sounded proud, strangely enough.

It was a little out of character for him, Dean thought, before he caught on to the wistful sigh and realized it hadn't been so bad to get Snoopy talk about all this.

“It's my only scar,” Snoopy cleared that up. “Because it was from before.”

Before hell. Where his body magically healed. Yeah, Dean got it, that was something to be proud of. “So where is that one scar of yours?”

Kid smiled and then suddenly turned all shy on him.

“Come on, you've seen most of mine,” that was true, Snoopy had actually licked some of his. Weird puppy.

It was not on Snoopy's face or his arms and Dean was pretty sure not on his chest, but one could never be too certain about his sex-hazed memory.

So he first asked Snoopy to lose his silk shirt and his tee, and when he denied, Dean wrestled the kid out of both of them.

“Nope,” he called from on top of Snoopy -whose arm was twisted to his back, “Neither on your chest nor your back. Wanna give me a hint?”

Snoopy push-pulled out of the hold and forced Dean on his back and to stay still for a second, to kiss him.

Kid was so heavy, but who needed air, when he was kissed like the other wanted to feed him pure life. And Snoopy still had his leather pants on -kid was giving Dean a kink for them, seriously, to tangle his leg around Snoopy's obscenely soft leather-clad thigh...He felt a little pang of regret when Snoopy moved away to shed the dead-animal-skin.

Yeah, he definitely had a fetish. Not that the kid's legs were not nice...by the way-

He got down there and tore off Snoopy's sock.

“What you're doing?” Snoopy screech-giggled.

“I'm searching for your scar.”

“It's not between my toes-jaaeeeeehhh!!!!”

That was a seriously unnatural sound he just made the kid produce. Also, with his pants stuck around his knees Snoopy was totally helpless, which was awesome.
“Pleeee-” Snoopy coughed and laughed and coughed some more, and finally managed, “Please stop.”

“Gonna show me your scar?”

Snoopy snorted. “I failed at torture under Alistair.”

That was a No. And for Dean a red flag not even to try to tickle it out of the kid. He helped Snoopy out of his pants and his other sock and stroked up the bare thighs with those fuzzy little hairs that tickled so nicely -the upside to the kid being a regular gigantor was that Dean didn't feel like a complete pervert every time he noticed how youthful Snoopy's body still was.

“You never gonna find it,” Snoopy misinterpreted the attention his thighs got. “It's camouflaged.”

“Yeah?” -he thought about that a bit and came up with the obvious: he picked through the shaggy mop of hair.

Snoopy used the time to kick his pants off, before he informed him, “It's not somewhere where I grow any hair.”

Dean's gaze dropped purposefully to Snoopy's crotch

“You're an idiot,” kid stated affectionately and pulled his boxer shorts off too.

No scar. Dean let the subject go, but only because he was tired and more than a little horny and because he wanted to kiss Snoopy some more already.

So he did.

They were in middle of jerking each other off, when Snoopy got distracted and stared at him.

“What?” -was he giving too hard-not hard enough-?

“You're so beautiful.”

Oh God, that again.

“Don't roll your eyes,” Snoopy laughed, “You get no say in that. You're on the cheap seats, you don't see yourself right now-”

“The view from here's pretty good, thank you.” Snoopy was fine-looking enough for both of them. His eyes alone...

“For someone who's bragging about his good looks so much,” Snoopy pointed out and nudged his nose against Dean's playfully, “You're really shy.”

SHY-? “I'm not shy,” he pushed Snoopy's hand back on his dick, because all that talk and no the play... “I know I'm a handsome son of a gun. But I'm not buiiifuuu,” that word -Jeez.

“Would it kill you to take a compliment.”

“Probably,” it wasn't about him, “So why risk it?” it was that he couldn't say it back without blabbing out everything he felt and saw. Couldn't tell Snoopy that he had the most amazing eyes ever, brown blending into gold into green into the tiniest hint of blue at the outer rim of the iris. It was like they were changing color, which was lovely and scary, considering that they sometimes did, that they could drown in black or worse change into the color of a sallow moon...and not only would
that make Dean sound super-gay, but it would also ruin the mood.

And it was hard enough to get what he needed, as Snoopy was goofing around again -kissing Dean's belly and- “Ah, no, No.” he grabbed the kid by the hair, to keep his mouth off him, “We're not doing that.”

“We're not – I am doing it,” the kid got cute.

“No.” Dammit why did Snoopy have to get adventurous now, a mere minute before they were there.

“Why not, you like to be blown?” It wasn't so much a question, Snoopy had seen enough of his mind to know that much about him.

Same song, different verse: Because Dean couldn't give back.

“You don't have to do me back,” the kid guessed right.

“Can we not talk about that, or talk at all,” he was losing his erection here!

Snoopy nodded and kissed him and Dean hated that he was probably assuming shit now, assuming he got issues or something.

He just never had done that. And he wasn't going to. And if Snoopy did it for him, it would feel wrong not to give back. And he didn't want to and that wasn't because everyone and their dog looked at his lips and thought: cocksucker. He just didn't want to. Anyone had their limits, even needy sluts who did anything that was asked of them. And he had never had a problem going down on girls, he liked that, he wasn't weird. And he knew damn well, that he had no idea if he would like sucking dick for he never tried, he just-

“Dean,” Snoopy said loud and clear against his ear so it felt like he shouted, stroking him in sync to Dean's hand on him, “It's okay,” he said softer, “It's no big deal.”

After Snoopy came over his hand and paused, breathing hard and after he resumed to stroke him and made Dean shout out his climax, as they rested, his mind caught up with him and he realized this had been the first time he had said No to someone he liked.

He had never done that before. Never had the occasion. The few guys who had tried to push him to his knees had been assholes, so they didn't count.

Whatever someone nice asked of him, he had tried to give it, no matter how hard it had pushed his limits, no matter how ashamed he had been afterwards.

He knew what that meant. And it made him feel almost uncomfortable, like that feeling when tears were gagging him, only deeper inside.

It was good that Snoopy was asleep already, because it would've needed only a nudge and Dean would've said something stupid and true, like, I feel safe with you.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It wasn't for quite some time, that he caught up on the fact that the kid did more than just indulge him. Taking afternoons off, living the high life, watching deep orange sunsets under gigantic buzzing/singing powerlines in the Meadows, that kinda thing was just Snoopy being the guy who grew up in hell and didn't know better. So Dean's alarm that reacted to 'romantic relationship' didn't go off. Not right away.

Maybe he would've never caught up on it, 'cause really, it was a little hard to woo someone in hell showing them the sights:

The church they had a picnic in was nice and private and had a rose window with detailed stained glass, which Dean liked very much and he was able to irk Snoopy enough to get him to play a short melody on the pipe organ -mostly to set up a joke that made Snoopy roll his eyes so hard he got a cramp. He called Dean an idiot again and kissed the hell out of him. If it hadn't been for the small child whimpering in the confessional, it would've definitely been romantic.

Or the long walk through the park they took one late afternoon, very romantic, and the peasants cheered so happily, while the castle burned down. It didn't strike Dean as weird then, that Snoopy wanted to sit there for a while, watch the fire and hold hands.

Kid always wanted to hold hands.

Also: Why even bother with romance? It wasn't like Dean wasn't putting out anyhow. Kinda. They weren't actually fucking. But Snoopy was not the subtle type in bed, if he was unsatisfied he would've said so. They were good, so there was no reason to put Dean in a mellow mood. He was the mellow mood personified!dammit!

Why the hell was the kid trying to slip gifts past the radar:

First he gave him a well crafted hunting knife to replace the one that had been damaged by goo.

Then the leather jacket, mumbling excuses, *Hell keeps swallowing your coats.. and The robe is very frayed by now...* That was an understatement, his last trip to the Echoes left the hooker-robe in a state beyond saving – but hey, he got the cup of Jamshid, Ariadne's thread and the Angurvadal, a sword which' runes blazed bright in times of war. Quite a big haul in only one night down there.

So a new jacket was a reasonable gift? Right?

Wrong, because then Snoopy made him chocolate lava cakes.

That was too much. What would be next? Hand-feeding him strawberries?!

No, actually the leather jacket had been too much already.

It was perfect. Not made of this obscenely softened stuff Snoopy donned, but simply worn-in, dark brown leather, just tough enough to do the job on protecting Dean's hide. He once had had a similar one, worn-in by his dad and still shared between them on occasion. But then Yellow Eyes had jerked them around, they had to leave in the middle of a hunt for a Woman in White and that jacket was left behind. Like so many things. But that jacket...the thing was, you don't buy a leather jacket, you get it
handed down, you pick it up along the way, it wasn't as easily replaced as other things.

But the jacket Snoopy gave him, it was perfect.

Sure Dean had thanked him. And thanked him more enthusiastically for the cake. But it was all a pointless waste of time and resources, because he didn't need to be wooed.

He didn't know how to make Snoopy stop and he had no one he could ask. Even if Bobby were already back to normal, Dean couldn't write him:

**Dear Dr. Bobby,**

*How do I tell the Prince of the Underworld his romantic streak gets on my nerve and he can stow it because I'm a sure thing?*

*Sincerely, your Idjit.*

On the other hand he had to break the news to Bobby somehow one day. Or maybe not. Maybe Snoopy grew tired of him after the war and no one ever needed to know they had been making out like horny teenagers.

So he tried with the direct approach:

“**You know you don't have to romance me-**”

“Yeah, I know.”

In hindsight he should have stopped when it was so obvious that Sneaky-Snoopy knew exactly what he was doing.

“No, I mean,” *stop making romantic gestures and getting me little gifts or big gifts, just stop making things complicated when we would be fine just working together, “-we're good right?”*

Snoopy looked up and smiled at him, nodding, “Yeah,” smile faltering a little, “Why, is something bothering you?”

“Me? No.” *Yeeeesss! You are, you're too nice, too giving, too everything and you make me look like a cave man in comparison.*

He failed to communicate that.

And that was why he had snuck into Snoopy's room and was going through Snoopy's stuff right now.

He had wrecked his brain -for about ten seconds, what Snoopy would like, before he realized, a kid like Snoopy surely kept a-

Yahtzee!

Flipping the large journal open he allowed himself a snicker. He knew it:

Kid's journelling style only missed a little glitter to dip into scrapbooking. Written entries were few and far between... *-which did make sense in a way. Everything written down could be used against Snoopy, while pictures and drawings-*
Oh, wow.

The pastel drawing was not from Snoopy, but it was of Snoopy: A younger Snoopy, seventeen at most, lounging on a throne-like armchair, flowers in his floppy locks, wearing garterless stockings and nothing else.

By all means, a guy holding a feathered fan should look ridiculous and not so damn sinful. Especially not at that age. Dean was a little torn, between finding Snoopy and getting him naked. Or going back in time to slap some sense into that kid before he got himself raped. What had Snoopy been thinking posing for someone-

Jamie, was scribbled into the lower right-hand corner. So it hadn't been just anyone, or worse a demon, it had been Jamie Snoopy had posed for. Jamie, the artist, the singer, the part time teenie-rockstar and full time exotic dancer, who taught Snoopy everything about nipple play.

Everything...mmhh...Dean idly wondered how many sittings it had taken to get this drawing done, how many times they had fucked before...Alright, time to refocus:

He was on a mission here. Flipping over to the next page he was greeted by a family portrait of five, all their faces smudged and blank. Ho-kay, that certainly meant something to Snoopy, but it was nothing that helped Dean in his quest for a Snoopy-specific romantic gesture.

There was a very obscurely written letter by Keith, that, even if Dean hadn't known the kid had overdosed, would've given a hint he had a problem...it ended with We think caged birds sing, when indeed they cry. And then he had painted a smiley.

Hell was probably not the best place for someone with bi-polar disorder. Or it was the best place to develop one. No wonder Snoopy asked him on regular basis how he was coping with everything he saw down here.

Dana's red string bracelet was in here too, with some drawings by Snoopy that didn't make any sense to Dean.

Nor did the scribbles from the years where Snoopy had been alone. Aside from the one line dated September 2001,

I failed Alistair's lessons, he doesn't allow me back.

Snoopy probably hadn't dared to write down how relieved he was, how hard he worked to fail, get soft and weak under the weight, break the way Azazel didn't want him to be broken.

Turning the page, he found himself staring at a drawn portrait of himself.

It was good. Of course it was good, Snoopy was good at drawing, but it was inspired good, catching him staring angrily at something. Only his mouth was wrong – his lips were not that plush.

More scribbles, some notes on battles won and battles lost and then the last entry – a poem.*

A pretty personal poem, but as Dean read it, he got the intense feeling of being watched. Throwing a glance behind him – nope, still alone. He started to read again-

But it didn't go away. Maybe it was the fairies in their jar-prisons on shelf over the one where he had found the journal. One of them snuck glances at him. Knocking at the glass made her cringe. He would've told her to mind her own business, but Snoopy's experiments had proved they couldn't hear through glass.
Putting a hoodie over the three jars, he felt a little bad for adding darkness to their solitary
confinement, but then they started to glow bright enough it shone through the hoodie...and the
feeling of being watched crept closer-

He looked down-

“God!dammit!”

Deep breaths.

Bagheera sat directly before his feet and stared up at him.

As intrigued as a cat was able to stare, she asked what he was doing.

“Don't look at me like that, you're nosing through his stuff all the time.”

She swished her tail.

“You're going to rat me out, aren’tcha?”

She looked away and then tapped his boot with her paw. Swishing her tail again, she let herself fall
between his legs and bit and clawed at his jeans, attacking his boot with her hind legs.

He picked her up and she promptly play-bit his hand, locking her jaw around it and scratched-

“No.”

She stopped, a little.

“We're not playing rough. I have enough of that with those damn hounds.”

They still didn't listen to any of his commands, but Bagheera knew his tone well enough, to know
fighting with him only got her the cold shoulder, so she was good and cuddled his arm.

“Why can't they be more like you?” He stroked her into trance, “Why can't everyone be more like
you?” Bagheera had never tried to bring him little gifts. The fairy she had caught, she had eaten all
on her own, because she was a smart cat and knew he was perfectly able to hunt his dinner all by
himself.

She would never get the idea to bake for him.

As it turned out, his fretting had been all for nothing. Snoopy stopped all on his own, due to stress
and Dean learned the thing that made the young prince's heart flutter had been right in front of him,
all the time:

Being surprised by inappropriate, distracting kisses in the middle of a stressful day. The kid always
protested, and then always whined when Dean mockingly stopped.

So he had violated Snoopy's privacy for nothing. Not that he would've lost sleep over reading a
mindreaders enciphered diary. If there hadn't been the poem.

Dean wanted to forget it. Wasn't really the type to give poetry second thoughts, not usually, but
when had anything concerning Snoopy gone down the usual way?

It had caught like a tune, bearing Snoopy's voice telling of,

*His fevered whispers*

*against the edge of your teeth,*

like Dean had heard it from him,

*and you're left to wonder if all red tastes the same*

*If pomegranates taste like blood, if suns tastes like skin?*

*Hands trace ribs,*

it felt like it was about him.

*Leaving trails of crescent moons behind,*

It had to be about him right?

*You bite his lip and swallow hatred from his tongue, And you wonder.*

But that was how he made Snoopy feel? That bad?

It couldn't be. No one came back for more kisses if they made him feel like that.

He shut the TV off. He didn't even know what they had been watching.

Snoopy stirred beside him.

"Dean?" he asked, as Dean left and now was going through the wardrobe, getting the journal.

Opening it at the last entry, he put it in front of Snoopy and asked what he needed to know or else it would drive him insane:

"Is this about me?"

Snoopy looked caught and didn't even sound accusing as he asked, "You read my diary?"

"Let's skip that point, I had a good reason, I tried to be romantic."

"You tried what?" -Snoopy's face cramped from knowing he shouldn't laugh.

"Yeah, I'm awkward about that, suck it up. Back to the point."

"Please, Dean, do tell," the kid gloated, "how you got the idea reading my diary without my consent could lead to more romance."

But for once he wasn't in a mood to joke, "I found it when I searched for something heavy to spank you with," he who asked stupid questions, got stupid answers, "Now stop changing the subject: Is this or is this not about me?"

Snoopy sobered up, he bit his lip. "And if it was?"
So it was.

Snoopy gave him that look, begging him to drop it. But Dean couldn't, now less than before he knew for sure:

“"You still think I hate you."

Snoopy smiled his sad little smile and agreed, “A part of you still does.”

He sounded so sure, it knocked the wind out of Dean. All he could do for a second was shake his head, before he told the kid, “Sorry, but that's just dumb.”

“You're always angry at me-”

“Of course I am! You really don't get it do you? I thought you know that your mindreading doesn't do shit – why didn't you ask me why I'm angry at you?”

“I killed your father. You're conflicted, I know you like me but-”

“No, I don't like you, you are the weirdest, most annoying person ever! When I'm not worrying over you, I'm irritated by you or grossed out, you should make me miserable and most times you do, so No! I don't like you, you idiot, I love you. And just to be clear, I'm not dewey-eyed in love with you, I don't wanna write you love songs, most times I want to punch you in the face and even when I'm not angry, there are no butterflies-No, that's a frickin' ulcer in my stomach!”

Snoopy looked at him, silent.

Shit. He really had said it all.

Snoopy was still staring at him too frickin' calm and finally asked, “Are you done?”

“No and that's the problem,” -he thought he never had to feel this way again; that the good thing about being broken was that it could never hurt so much anymore...

“I guess that's only fair,” Snoopy shrugged apologetic.

“What's fair about this?”

The kid wouldn't meet his eye for a moment and then, “The way you feel, this love? That's exactly how I feel for you too.”

He inched a little closer to Dean, close enough to reach out for his hand and lace their fingers together.

“I'm scared too,” Snoopy said, “Hence the poem – maybe hate wasn't the right word. Can we leave it at that I'm a crappy poet?”

Snoopy drew him closer, back on the bed and in between kisses told him, “I love your kisses.”

“I noticed,” he placed his thigh heavy on Snoopy's clothed groin, the hard length there...

Snoopy laughed, “You wouldn't know romance if it bites you in the ass-”

“Don't know what you're tryin' to tell me, but I admire your kinky vernacular.”

Snoopy snickered breathy into Dean's ear and kissed down his jawline, found his mouth again and
then was quiet for about ten seconds:

“I wanted to tell you that I love that about you... ...and about the gifts, you could've told me it makes you uncomfortable-”

“Yea, yeah, that issue's over,” done with it, next topic: “Teach me more about ass biting romance.”

Snoopy laughed.

Laughing was good. Dean aimed to entertain.

While Snoopy aimed for Dean's nipples. What the kid was able to do with his fingers alone was mind-numbing, but when he brought his mouth down...that surely was illegal in some countries.

Chapter End Notes

*credit for Sam's poem goes to phiaa who can be found at lostcap.tumblr.com

We deem phiaa an institution, a poet you have to have read, such as Siken or Rilke. Therefore we agreed on the use of the poem without explicit permission of the author, something I usually abhor. I want to take the chance to make my respect for her known and explain my silence so that as a rule, I do not get into personal contact with the poets I admire.

Sincerely yours, Francis

As always, I read all the comments to Jo -big fat kisses from him(his words, not mine), but we answered none in fear we would spoil something by it. The closer we get to the end the harder it gets (especially for me) to shut up let the story speak for itself,

Bye, Bee
Kid scared the shit out of him, first waking him in the middle of the night with labored breaths, like he was running and not lying right next to him and then he wasn’t reacting, wasn’t snapping out of it, not after Dean shook him, or put on the light, or shouted at him.

Snoopy’s glassy eyes were wide open and twitched like he dreamed of something wild, he looked like he was in pain and then, his eyelids just fell shut.

Another deep breath later it seemed like he had gone back to sleep.

Dean carefully touched him and got a reaction. Shaking him awake, he asked, “Are you alright?” because nobody liked to hear, *What the fuck just happened*, first thing after they woke up.

Snoopy blinked against the light, “...I woke you?” he mumbled, “Sorry..I had a vision.”

“That happened to you before?

Rubbing his face and moving his jaw like he needed to relax it, Snoopy finally nodded. “It comes and goes. I deliberately blocked them after Father’s death – they are not exactly helpful. Maybe that’s why I now have them in my sleep.”

“You mean like psychic wet dreams?”

Snoopy grimaced and nodded pushing his head into the pillows, “Yeah...if wet dreams gave you headaches and nausea and flashes of gruesome violence then it would be exactly the same.”

The snark was strong, which meant Snoopy had to feel extremely crappy right now. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Turn off the light.”

Dean did and settled back on the bed spooning Snoopy who promptly sighed.

“Is...” Crap, he hated conversations like this one. “What did you see?”

Snoopy tensed.

Just a tiny little bit, but Dean held him in his arms right now, so it didn't escape him.

“Nothing important,” it rang true, and yet, “Could be a simple *ruge de guerre* for all I know.”

“And to those of us who are not fluent in French?”

“A planted vision by Lilith to throw me off track or scare me.”

“She can do that?”

“Anyone who is in the possession of Azazel’s blood can do that,” Snoopy said and sighed, but he had sounded even more awake than before.

Dean held him a little tighter. The bitch would die and if it was the last thing he did. “You're not scared, right?” he made sure Snoopy knew there was no reason. Not as long as Dean watched out for him.
“Even if it was a real vision,” Snoopy said firm, “I wont let it come true, so no, I'm not scared.”

-he was stubborn and he was lying. Snoopy was scared, which could only mean, “Did I die?”

Snoopy unwound from his embrace, to turn around, close, eyes colorless and bright in the near darkness he looked at Dean, so serious like the world had ended and he answered softly, “Worse,” added stubborn and even more dead serious, “But I wont let it happen.”

It was terribly inappropriate that he remembered Dean of Sammy, but he did. The tone was exactly the same as when Dean had gone through a drill with Sammy, what to do when something evil was after them and Sammy had interrupted with:

*I'm gonna save you.*

If Dean had known that Sammy would die a few weeks later anyhow, he wouldn't have been strict, wouldn't have said, *No, you can't. You watch out for yourself, that's your job, you run and hide, no matter what happens to me.* He wouldn't have broken Sammy's heart, make him cry that one single tear that escaped stubborn silence.

He had never hated his father more than that day. Dean had only gone through the drill with Sammy, so their dad didn't. Because Sammy didn't need the same nightmares he had after Mom died and John told him about monsters.

He had lied to Sammy, said that Dad always beat the monsters, so Sammy didn't need to be scared for Dad. He hadn't been thinking about lying about himself too.

It had been too important that Sammy got the drill right, would react the right way – he hadn't meant to take away Sammy's innocence the same way his had been taken. He had wished Sammy could be the stubbornly brave kid a little while longer. But he failed, as always.

Maybe he just wanted a second chance and that was why he saw his little brother in the guy who lay naked, pressed against him and watched him with such unbroken concentration, like that would keep Dean safe all on it's own.

“I know, Snoopy. You're keeping me safe. Now close your eyes and get some sleep,” he stroked the bangs from Snoopy's forehead to kiss it and rest his own head against it. Pushing a thought at the kid's mind, *You saved me already. The monsters can never get to me, not ever. Thanks to you, I'm never going to give into them again.*

Snoopy's chest pressed lightly into him and the sigh filled the air between them with warm breath.

Having the kid fall asleep in his arms was the best feeling in the world and every time it happened, the scare that flared up was answered by a stubborn voice inside of Dean that said, he didn't care if it was the last time. He had this now and it was more than he had had in a long time and he would be damned if he ruined it while he had it.

Bobby was back and he was more than grumpy.

*“Put the damn bastard on the phone!”*
Phone? thought Dean, staring at the bowl of blood.

“You know what I mean, get him speaking to me!”

So that the kid could mumble-tumble through Dean's carefully constructed lie? No deal. Not that Dean had had much of a chance to tell his lie yet, “See, he’s-”

“Think I care!? He will answer to me – you ain't no good for that!

Ouch. “What-”

“For all I know he has you mindwhammied from the get go. Had I not met up with Pamela I wouldn't know that the freak had been messin' with mah head, I'd be idly workin on the Chevelle none the wiser you ain't gettin' any closer to gettin' free!!”

“And that's-”

“Get him!”

“No. You can yell at me till you're hoarse and I'm deaf, I still wont get him, because for that I would have to wake him. And I'm not doing that just so you can vent to him.

Trust me, I've torn him a new one already for messing with your head.” -and there went his plan to take the blame, say it was his idea to manipulate Bobby into not worrying about him. “And it will never happen again, I promise.” -yeah that would not do it.

“I'm sorry, had I known the Antichrist needs his beauty sleep, I would've made an appointment for when I'll blow his brains out!”

Wow, Bobby was pissed. Anyhow, “He had a rough couple of nights and is catching up on some sleep.”

“Do you even hear yourself, boy?”

“Yeah, but if I sound like his nanny, that's only because that's the job description behind the rank: General of the Legions united under the Prince Regent of Hell.”

…

“Yeah, I know, it's a mouthful. But it comes with board and lodging.”

…

…

“Bobby, you still there?”

“I just don't know what to say to you.”

“I don't agree with what the kid did and his only saving grace is that he had been as high as kite when he done that to you, but sometimes I wish I could make you forget a little about me, you know: make you worry less about me.” The lie he had prepared hadn't been so far fetched – if this manipulation wasn’t a literal mind-rape he would've asked Snoopy to make the whammy on Bobby permanent.
“Bobby, talk to me?” Please, “I get it you're pissed-”

“No, I don't talk to you, because I'm not sure I'm talking to you.”

“I'm not mind-whammied.”

“How would you know?”

Good point, but, “Why whammy someone who's gone native by his own free will?”

“What is that supposed to mean?” -Bobby sounded very careful, like he still didn't believe he was talking to Dean, but kept him talking just to see, or just in case.

“I wasn't joking around, I am the kid's second in command now and I'm not too bad at it. Since the demons actually fear me, I've got some things done, made a real change. I freed those other kids Yellow Eyes poisoned, I found their bones and burned them and- ...right, you don't know any of that because I didn't tell you about the Echoes yet:

That's a special little part of hell where everything is opposite from how it usually is and we found out how that works. How to make a part of hell uninhabitable for demons.

See, usually the souls in the Meadows are kept in solitary, but it took only a few hundred souls made aware of their power - it was like knocking over dominos: More and more of them are becoming migratory, they're reaching out to each other and they teach each other how to hide from demons, use their soul to manipulate the Meadows. The Meadows you know, which is the second largest part of hell, it's changing for the better because of what we did, what I did. Can you even imagine that, because I sure can't. I didn't think it would work, but it did and suddenly I'm changing the lives of billions -I mean I know they're not alive, but they are souls, they're people and you know what most of them are in for? They were not devout enough, not obedient enough, can you believe that shit?” - alright, that had come out a bit more...more than he intended to. “Bobby?”

“I'm hearin' ya.”

He couldn't tell what that was in Bobby's voice, or what he meant. What else did he want Dean to say, he couldn't prove that he was doing good, no one on Earth would ever know unless they died and came down here-

“It's good to hear you, Dean, I wasn't sure, now I am.”

“Just like that?”

“I know how you sound when you're happy, it's been a long while, but it's nothing that freak can make me forget. Nor do I believe he knows you well enough to fake it.”

Happy...if that was happiness it sucked, because he was so scared half of the time he had started to bite his nails. But those other times, when Snoopy... -who by the way needed a bit of an uplift if Dean was ever going to tell Bobby he had gone full on Persephone. “He is not a freak, Bobby. He is just a kid. I almost left when...when he was in a bad place because I was so angry that he made you forget me, but I couldn't leave him. He needs me.”

Bobby didn't answer, only made a grumbling sound.

“So,” time to change the subject, he had a little project for Bobby, “What do you know about the Galdrabók?”
“Icelandic grimoire, the known copy is fake and useless, the real thing lost for over two centuries now.”

Bobby really never disappointed. “Do you know anyone who can read it?”

“You mean beside me?”

Now that was impossible. No one, not even Snoopy, spoke Icelandic -aside from the Icelanders of course, “You're screwing with me.”

“Nei, hálfviti.”

“That doesn't count, swearing I manage too. But the inscriptions over their magical staves don't make a lick of sense to me.”

“Are you telling me you have the original Galdrabók?”

Sure, he found it in the Echoes, “Why else would we be be talking about it?” Since when was he known to casually discuss grimoires for fun?

“The Galdrabók...” he could practically see Bobby shaking his head about the nonchalance Dean held for the thing, “I don't suppose you can simply send me a copy?”

“Actually,” ...

...for the rest of the day they were translating, until Dean asked what would happen if one put the stave Smörhnútur on I Can’t Believe It's Not Butter, for it was to ensure that butter was procured through non-magical means. Bobby hang up on him then.

It was supposed to be a joke.
He truly enjoyed this; even as a completely non-sexual thing to do. The oil Snoopy wanted him to use smelled warm of sandalwood and the dim candle light made Dean feel like time had slowed down and he could do this forever.

Regardless of the sunset they had watched before coming here, it was still only early afternoon, so technically, he could do this to Snoopy until the kid was a blissed-out, helpless puddle of mush.

Dean had already planned some wicked revenge, when his favorite puppy had been yapping about hell's seasons and light-sources and wouldn't stop, even after Dean told him he really didn't care and he just wanted to enjoy the quiet moment.

But sweet payback was later, now was afore-the-foreplay and that meant only minimal teasing. Dean was totally professional about the massages he gave. Totally. That was a very professional boner that was tenting his shorts.

The kid's body was beautiful – in the way great guitar riffs were – coming alive under the right hands. Laid out on black sheets as he was, Snoopy held perfectly still, was perfectly relaxed, but Dean felt the muscles sing under his hands and kneaded his way up the kid's spine and stroked all the way down: from broad shoulders to slim hips. Miles of shiny golden skin just for him to work with.

Snoopy whined a bit when he rubbed his thumbs from the sacral bone into the high part of the gluteus medius again -kid knew what was coming next:

Dean slipped his hands under Snoopy's body and spread his fingersoothed on Snoopy's belly, digging deep to drag them up as firm as the oily glide allowed and he earned himself a moan.

Snoopy moved his arms weakly, an attempt to push himself up or something, but Dean leaned down on him before that was even more than an idea.

His hands stroking over Snoopy's sides, Dean kissed his neck, “Think you goin' anywhere?”

“Please,” Snoopy whined.

Dean had him trapped in the worst way, straddling his thighs below the ass and like this -pressing his groin against Snoopy's buttcheeks, letting him feel all of it. The kid strained, rubbed his ass against him, arched his back wanton, mostly to try to sneak a hand to where his own cock was still trapped facing down.

“Uh-uh,” Dean admonished and pushed harder-

“Fuck!”

Oh, a dirty word, that was interesting, but it wouldn't get Dean to let go of Snoopy's hand or let up on the pressure. “That's my job,” Snoopy wouldn't be touching Snoopy today, only Dean was allowed, “All you have to say is, I'd like my happy-ending now, pretty please.”

“Nnnghh,” Snoopy said.

And just as Dean decided that that was close enough, let up at the pressure, the kid reached for his thigh and his ass, urging him to thrust his dick against him again, arching his pert butt lazily towards him like he was a fucking porn star.
Dean looked at him, how Snoopy was pretty docile for a guy turned on so much and it wasn’t all the relaxing massage he had given him. The kid’s face buried in the pillows—...a part of him was lost in his own mind, where Dean evidently would do more than just jerk him off, if the strain and the twitches of Snoopy’s hips were anything to go by.

The idea to go there made him swallow and yet all he could think of at the sight of Snoopy under him, was that he wanted it too.

He leaned down again, not enough to touch his chest against the kid's back, just enough to let him feel the heat and asked, “You would just let me fuck you like this?” like this -face buried in the pillows, -screwed into the mattress, -completely at Dean's mercy.

Snoopy twisted his head to the side, from his lips tumbling a breathy, “Yes,” before his eyes even found Dean’s.

Shit the kid was so far gone he was almost there already. Dean had known he gave good massages, but that effect...Snoopy had to have been fantasizing about getting fucked for a while now -lying there all quiet and innocent.

Warming more oil between his hands, he tried not to think to hard about what he was doing. He shuffled a little bit down, so that he straddled Snoopy’s thighs lower and had better access to his ass. Which allowed the kid to finally move his hips up, let his straining dick bounce against his belly. Snoopy touched himself, held on to his dick, back tense -all Dean's hard work undone- breathing deep like he tried to keep himself from coming while Dean brushed his oily hands over his buttocks and re-assumed the same rhythm he had given the massage before. Only that he now did not circle in on knots, but on Snoopy's hole.

He had tried not to think to much and just give this to Snoopy, but it didn't work. Of the girls he had fucked in the ass, only one fuck had been dirty, but they both had been too drunk to care, yet later it had kept Dean from jumping at the chance to finger anyone's asshole open. So he didn't expect it to be so damn hot to slip his finger past the oiled up muscular ring. Snoopy was clean -empty, just silky smooth insides that felt pretty good on Dean's fingertip. The temptation to play with that feeling for his own enjoyment was strong, but the kid looked like would fall apart any second, so Dean added another finger, and now got an idea how tight it would feel around his dick.

When he moved away from Snoopy to take his shorts off, the smell of sex, sweeter and sharper than the sandalwood, hit him. Largely because Snoopy wasn't watching him right now, Dean didn't think and just smelled his fingers and had that smell go directly to his head. He licked his lips, they tingled and a blush spread on his cheeks long before his mind caught up to the fact that he would really like to put his mouth where his fingers had been.

Snoopy started at a restless move, like he wanted to turn around. Dean placed a hand on the kid's back, “Shh,” straddled him again and reached for more oil.

He was watched through half-lidded eyes when he oiled himself up. Snoopy's breath picked up again under the sight of Dean's cock – that was always a nice compliment. He couldn't stop stroking himself, as he slipped his fingers between Snoopy's buttocks again.

The only way the kid's tight ass could feel any better was if it was even more slippery, so Dean added more oil and worked him open. Snoopy just watched. Somehow that was better than everything else – how completely the kid trusted him -Snoopy usually was much more demanding, a lot more proactive and a whole lot more concerned to make it good. Which Dean liked, a lot, but he liked it too that Snoopy just lay there and let him do all the work. Expecting nothing but a good fuck, not even bothered to arch his back or spread wider when Dean lined up and sank in. Just let him pick
up speed and pound away.

Get them both close and thrust deeper, stay there and with their bodies molded together Dean worked his hips in shorter thrusts, deeper, dragging it out for both of them.

He found Snoopy's left hand and laced their fingers together and put his full weight on him.

Dean felt deeply connected to Snoopy like this, he had the feeling the talisman, pressed between his chest and Snoopy's back, heated up and made his blood pump faster.

He felt Snoopy's need before he tensed, before the frantic jerks of his buried arm betrayed he brought himself off and Dean pushed his hand along side his to cup Snoopy's balls just as they tightened up. He felt him come with his whole body, the painful grip of his fingers on Dean's, the thrash of his legs side to side with his, the stutter of his hips messing with Dean's steady thrusts, the sweat on his shoulder under Dean's lips, the contractions of his ass where Dean shot his load.

He didn't notice until later, how bruisingly tight he had wrapped his arm around Snoopy's middle during his last thrusts. Like he would fall off, -like he could fall off when he was still impaled in Snoopy's body, sweat and oil welding them together into one.

Jeez, the kid was giving him a new kink per minute, to know he had just come inside of him...that his jizz was there inside Snoopy's body. That he was still inside Snoopy's body, that the kid had let him fuck him.

He felt reluctant to pull out. Not that he was able to move. But if he had been able he would've used every second his dick was still hard to fuck the come out of Snoopy.

Damn, he had thought when they really would have sex it would be all romantic and stuff, lots of little kisses and modestly hidden away under covers.

Not that Snoopy would untangle his fingers from his as soon as he was able to move. Okay, that could be, because he had almost dislocated Dean's pinky finger when passion took over and now was sorry about that.

Thinking along the same lines, Dean carefully pulled his arm from under Snoopy and stroked his flanks, “You good?”

Snoopy snickered.

Yeah, Snoopy was in a good place.

“If I don't say Yes, are you gonna stay in me until I call uncle?”

What? Dean hadn't got a word, only the fact, that the kid was way too coherent and sassy for someone who had been fucked a mere second ago. He started to go soft, yet he tried to be careful when he pulled out. Falling to the side, he finally felt the warm relaxed feeling spread into the overall heaviness his orgasm left him with.

Snoopy shifted closer, nuzzling his neck and finally kissing his cheek and nipping at his lips.

There was the little kiss. Now it was all exactly like he had imagined it. He bent his arm and buried his fingers in Snoopy hair and shut his eyes for a second.
Usually it was Snoopy who fell into the deepest of sleeps right after, but this time Dean dropped out of consciousness and when it found him again, the candles had burned down to the last inch and the orange-red glow that illuminated the room came from the crystal ball Snoopy was staring into.

“Put that thing out, would'ya,” he told the kid. The bubble that had emerged from the cup of Jamshid was fucking creepy. A window into the future of seven different universes – super useless if one always had to guess which universe, if any, was theirs.

Snoopy placed the glowing ball that was swimming with fire back on the cup and the light went dim. He smiled. He was naked and beautiful and not one bit tired it seemed.

Tarot cards littered the bed. “You've been trying to get a glimpse at our future?” Dean asked more as a joke, knowing it didn't work that way.

“Naw,” Snoopy picked them up and stacked them, “It just calms me down to see they always tell a different future, every time.” He shuffled them and grinned, “Wanna play?”

With tarot cards, not really, but with Snoopy, “Yeah, any time.”

The kid laughed.

He was so sweet. Dean couldn't have been luckier. -well maybe if he didn't wake up with morning breath after only an hour long nap.

Snoopy playfully came up behind him, as Dean filled the glass on the nightstand with water, stroked his thighs up to-

Dean coughed. Kid wasn't wasting any time, as usual.

Snoopy's hand had retracted to his knee and he was smirking. And staring at the half-full glass.

“You should drink it all,” Snoopy urged him, “For what I'm going to do to you, you'll need it.”

“Yeah?” He put the glass away.

“It's going to be a long night. Don't wanna give out from dehydration.”

“Promises, promises,” he pulled his naughty puppy in for a kiss.

And got a full on body experience instead. It was hard to believe that this one was the same who had been so passive not too long ago. Snoopy stroked his huge hands over him broadly, pulled at him demanding into one direction and pushed him with his chest into another.

And then suddenly stopped.

Dipping his head away from Dean to avoid his kisses, he looked alarmed.

“What?”

“Do you feel that?

Yeah, but prior the interruption he had thought their kisses made gravity shift.

He followed Snoopy's gaze to the nightstand, to the water in the glass and the carafe and it's tilting surface.
“We're under attack.”

Snoopy was off him in a blink and threw Jeans and the Colt at his direction.

Dean caught the latter, but the panic didn't make sense to him-

“Someone's breaking into this part of hell from Earth-side,” Snoopy explained to him unasked.

Someone aka Lilith. “I thought that's impossible-” he jumped off the bed, before gravity shifted for good and it fell over.

Snoopy didn't comment on his disbelieve, just made a door into the upright floor and didn't look back for him as he left -knowing damn well Dean wouldn't slack off.

The protected parts of the equator were crowded – never a good sign.

But all demons seemed to know exactly what to do, organized, like they had orders for this case.

Two of them waited in the office hall with it's milk glass dividers, close to Snoopy's room.

They flanked a demon bound and gagged, possessing a man, Dean recognized the carvings on the gag as sigils designed to hold the demon in.

One of these days he had to ask Snoopy how he managed to pull off the commanding presence bare-chested in nothing but skin tight leather pants, looking like a fucked-up rockstar, not a commander.

Couldn't be those extra three inches, because these demons were towering over Snoopy like the beasts they were, bowing their heads and averting their eyes as they handed over the prisoner.

The kid waited till they had cleared away, before he opened the door to his room:

The safest place in hell.

It was really true then, they were directly attacked if they came to the panic room, but- “Wouldn't it be easier to hide in the Meadows? Especially with the ruckus we caused there.” Usually Snoopy was big on the guerrilla tactic.

“Would be,” kid nodded grim, pushing the prisoner into a chair, “But we're closed in from all sides.”

There was something like... -not panic, Snoopy didn't do panic under battle, but a wide-eyed-vigilance in his whole manner. Anyhow, “Who's the guy?”

“Montague. I captured him to have him ready should it ever come to this.”

“He worth any to Lilith?” -Dean doubted that-

“No,” Snoopy affirmed his doubt and then said, “he is just worth his blood.”

Of course. Damn.

“And the soul of the man he possesses.”

What? “I thought you don't-”

“I don't. I've never...-” Snoopy shook his head. “A souled body's demon's blood is much more potent than what I usually have. Not just stronger. To drink a demon dry to the soul's death, it's different.”
“It's murder.”

“Exactly.” Snoopy's eyes met his, but they looked dead, not hard, just- “It's dark magic on it's basest level.”

No. Just, no. He stepped in close to Snoopy, touching him, grounding him, “You can't do that. That's not who are,” that's not who Dean wanted the kid to become, “You're not a killer,” not like this, not in cold blood.

“It's sweet of you to think so high of me,” Snoopy told him, and at least his eyes lighted up a bit again, “But you're wrong. I am and that isn't changed by the fact that this man is one too.”

Dean looked over to the skinny baby-faced guy and took in the evident Dahmer-vibe, but, “Why does a demon possess a killer for, isn't that redundant?”

“The last time Montague walked the Earth,” Snoopy explained, “1984 he seduced three into murder, Richard Ramirez, Ricky Kasso, Sean Sellers, all in the span of a year,”

Ten years before them he inspired David Berkowitz into serialkilling, right after he left England in '74 where he was insufficiently exorcised from Michael Taylor, who murdered his wife afterwards, the list goes on and on for a whole century. He is a recruiter, he doesn't search for innocents, he pushes those who are on the brink of murder over, so they will end in hell.”

“So this guy-”

“Richard Slessman,” Snoopy provided a name.

“He has killed people out of his own free will?”

“No. Not yet. But he enjoyed it when Montague used his body to kill the girl he has fantasized about. He loves to be possessed, he loves the intimacy of it, he would do anything for Montague. I broke his mind open to be sure, saw it in his thoughts, he is more scared to loose the demon than to die. He is only one step away of being a demon himself – most of Montague’s lovers are tender material, easy to form, but a soul is a soul. And to gain enough strength I must bleed a possessed souled body to it's death.”

For how resolute Snoopy sounded, he was still not doing it. And the guy he would kill wasn't the reason. “Let's say he deserves it, then what are you waiting for?”

It said a lot about where Snoopy's head was, that he didn't correct Dean, that he never said that this guy, Richard, deserved to die. “This might change me forever,” he answered instead, voiced too small for a statement so big.

“Change you how?” -like initiation?

“I don't know.”

“You're scared.”

“I don't want to become something else,” he breathed hard, like he tried to collect his nerves-

“Then don't do it, let her take me.”

“She would kill you or worse.”

“Well-”
“No.” Snoopy shook his head so stubborn, Dean didn't dare to say that he had had it coming, made his bed and all that. “No,” the kid repeated, “Personal sentiments aside, you are too important to sacrifice you like a pawn. I may not know the exact worth you have to Lilith, but at this very moment she burns the last of her followers to get to you. She takes the risk of exposing herself to me. You must be essential to her plans.”

“What if that is the plan? To back you into a corner, make you do this, make you become like them?” Maybe this was all there was to it: Lilith had only chosen him for the resemblance he bore to Snoopy’s caretakers - she couldn't get him through them... but the kid didn't even seem to consider that it was all a trick, he just kept shaking his head:

“Then that's that,” Snoopy established, “I don't know what she wants with you, I cannot let her take you. I have to-”

“There is a third option you mentioned before.”

It rumbled under their feet, the ceiling cracked, the walls quivered, she was coming.

“I don't know what you mean?” Snoopy asked like he honestly didn't remember.

Angry fissures ripped from one wall into the floor and at the carpet.

“You said, you wouldn't let them take me alive.”

Snoopy just looked at him.

It was okay. Hell could become something better under the kid's rule and if Dean needed to die, to throw a wrench in Lilith's plans, then he was okay with that. What he wasn't okay with was when the kid became something else, became what Yellow-Eyes had wanted him to become.

But the kid still looked at him, like there was something to think about, when literally the ground was falling out from under their feet. Snoopy looked at him all dark and brooding and then shook his head, “It's too late for that.”

With a flicker of his hand he fused the ground shut and walked over to slash Richard's throat. He bent over, to grasp the head, and drank his fill from the spraying artery.

Dean wasn't all that surprised that the kid sent him away as soon as he had wiped his mouth.

The pressure on the room from all sides, had depleted, like they were in the eye of the storm, but that was not it: It was Snoopy. He equalized the force Lilith put on him, on his domain. Dean saw it in his eyes, in the certainty.

“Just go, Dean,” he repeated himself a little impatient, “Use the door, it will be alright.”

Pressing the door handle down - leaving, felt too easy and it actually surprised him then, to see the little girl with the white eyes in the darkened office hall.

He stepped out, she smiled at him and for a second he thought about shooting her with the Colt.

He didn't, not because he doubted he would've been fast enough, that too. But because it was too late already, what was done was done.

She opened her mouth, “De-”
A crack -when her spine snapped and she was flung into the glass walls, shattering loudly.

Snoopy's presence was a physical feeling as he moved by him with one last look that told Dean to leave already, before he turned to Lilith between the shards, smiling at her,

“You shouldn't have come.”

Dean slipped through the first door, pushing his want to close his ears to what would happen at the door, so it took him far away.

He wasn't really scared that Snoopy wouldn't survive, he could take her. But surviving, even killing her, didn't necessarily mean winning.

As he walked down a corpse littered, wrecked metro tunnel he wondered why he was so calm.

And then he remembered that this was what it felt like to loose. That he had lost already. That he should have never let the kid drink that guy.

Something alive heaved itself from the fallen. A demon and it came at him.

Dean raised his hand and shot it. Stopping it a mere inch before the Colt's muzzle.

The bang woke something in him. It may was too late, but it wasn't too late to turn around and go back. Taking an emergency door to the left he circled back and found the hallway which's one side was bare gray stone and the other the white smooth wall with it's white doors, he counted them to-the one that should've opened to the room before Snoopy's room.

It wasn't there anymore, it was an abyss, like...like something had crashed through the floor and broke way for a gorge of nothingness, reaching into the deepest parts of hell.

Holding on to the door, he tried to open a pillar into this chasm that apparently swallowed Snoopy and Lilith. It didn't work. He tried to repair the floor, to do anything, but it stayed exactly like it was.

This were the white rooms, dammit, the easiest to manipulate place in hell! Why couldn't he -he should be able to just reach in there and grasp Snoopy. He-

A meow startled him badly.

Bagheera scurried closer, took a look at the fight's fallout, nose curiously edging over the brink. Dean picked her up.

What had he been thinking? Coming back here, doing what? Besides of probably getting Snoopy killed, because he diverted his attention at the wrong moment.

Dean walked away from the fight. Found the first pillar up to the Meadows and walked for a while before he felt the cheek-numbing wind of Father Spinelli's meadow.

Bagheera walked beside him, not straying like she usually did. He picked her up again, for the snow was dirty and just wet enough to make her shake her legs every few steps.

Ned was sufficiently lucid to be able to tell something was wrong and he took a break from handing
out seven-can soup. He sat with him for a while. Felt that Dean wasn't up for small-talk.

Only after a long while he said, “Ya shuld put on sumthin’, Dean?” gentle, like Dean was just a little bit distracted, didn't look like a lunatic running half naked through a freezing cold city.

Bagheera had long since left him for Ned's warmer lap. The priest sat her down between them to get up and find Dean a smelly winter coat. Put it wordless around Dean's shoulders.

Sat with him again, tried to coax Bagheera towards him and was given a cold shoulder, because hell hath no fury as cat scorned.

Finally the old man sighed and asked, “Ya friend? He okay?”

Dean hung his head between his shoulders and hid his face in his hands and he cried.

Ned patted his back and sat with him until the crying dried out.

Ned was about to stand up as the ground shifted and made the old man fall to his knees. The ground shook like in an earthquake and then exploded.

When Dean's senses caught up, his eyes told him the ground was as it was, but under them, somewhere something had ruptured roaring like thunder and like in a landslide everything dipped and jolted and moved somewhere, before the ripples ran out.

“Are you alright?”

The father nodded.

That was enough for him, because Dean had only one thought: Snoopy. He felt him. Whatever had happened, it didn't kill him, he was alive. And Dean felt where he was and what he was doing - struggling to get up...

Spitting into his hands, looking for the first thing he could use as a door, he doodled at the church van's back door.

Dean ripped it open and climbed into a wrecked warm cavern, filled with water, stalactites hanging from the ceiling, daring to fall, some falling.

The water was at most parts shallow enough to stand, absentmindedly he touched the talisman like he could reach out to Snoopy like this and actually felt him reach back.

Then he heard a splash to his right.

Wide-eyed and struggling to get to his feet in the calve high water, there was Snoopy.

He was breathing heavy, but he looked good, he looked like himself, like he was when no one was looking. And he smiled when he recognized-

“Dean.”

“Hey-”

“We have to get out of here,” Snoopy finally stood, but swayed.
“What's new?”

The kid smiled harder. Like Dean made the best joke. He shivered a little, even though it was plenty warm.

Actually it felt weirdly warm here, like...like in the Racks. They were this deep-?

“I killed her,” Snoopy told him, part elation, part disbelief, like he didn't trust his own words. “I did it.”

Dean didn't know what to say.

“We need to hole up somewhere safe,” Snoopy didn't seem to have the same problem, “I don't know how the demons will react to what I did,” he shook his head, mouth still working, “I didn't just kill her. What I did it.”

“Yeah, yeah, tell me later,” Dean so was fucking relieved to have Snoopy babbling at him, that it scared him. The kind of high he felt right now, to have the kid hanging heavy on his arm and smiling and being okay, that kind of high blindsided one the worst way. Got people killed because they didn't get out of dodge, or didn't check for wounds...which by the way was the first thing he would do as soon as they were safe.

“I love you,” Snoopy told him, breathing too hard for Dean's peace of mind.

“Is magic safe?”

“What?” the puppy asked how that was Dean's response to his declaration.

“You said we need to get out of here, is-”

“No,” Snoopy finally got it. Concentrated on opening a pillar and took his arm off Dean's shoulder to climb ahead.
For those who haven't been counting: There are only two more CHs left (this one included). You have been wonderful readers; Jo was moved to tears a few times by your comments and we both are happy that so many of you seem to enjoy the humor and the sweetness and the subtle (or not so subtle) horror. Jo is a little concerned how you will like the ending, but as his most faithful reader I am certain most of you will take it well. Francis sends his love too and I can tell he finds your appreciation of his compact prose inspiring. Maybe I can get him to write more SPN with us again. There is still so much unexplored territory left in this universe and other SPN universes (this is not our only novel-length SPN fic); it would be a damn shame to leave it unwritten.

From me,
Danke für alles und bis dann,
Bee

P.S. the final CH will be a Christmas present

After all things that had happened, Snoopy had insisted on holing up to...wait for it...To do research.

Right after half of hell had collapsed in on itself Snoopy wanted to read a little bit. Because that was the thing the kid had done besides killing the evil bitch. -coming away with a few scratches. Killed the oldest of demons, destroyed the Morass pillar, wrecked hell, and all that without breaking a nail.

Dean sat across him, leaning against the steel railing high up over the reading room of a meadow consisting of the Finnish State Archive. He watched Snoopy and was wondering if God had maybe checked out because his whole creation had become too crazy for his old heart.

What a stick-in-the-mud.

While Snoopy on the other hand was able to find fun in ancient texts and looking adorable doing so. Though a little bit wet and singed -his hair over his left ear was burned off. Still, Dean wished he could say...Ah, what the hell:

“I love you too, you know.”

...

Wow, that was even less reaction than the kid got from him. The way Snoopy's eyes and lips moved silently, he hadn't even lost the line.

Dean tilted his head back and studied the coffered ceiling, brown and blue, soothing compared to the yellowish light from the shelves, he heaved a sigh-

“How?” Snoopy asked with delay of a full minute.

“Nevermind, watcha reading?”
“I will tell you when I can verify it,” Snoopy promised super-vague.

They were here, because here Snoopy had stored away some of hell's oldest grimoires which held literal copies from clay tablets and bamboo books, written in scriptura continua—which always made Dean's eyes water, seriously, how hard was it to invent punctuation? Not that he was able to read any of those old languages, but Snoopy was and he leaved now through them, frantic, as it first seemed, but now -his eyes glazed over with enthusiasm, he looked more and more smug and therefore Dean smelled a lecture in his immediate future.

Snoopy clapped the file shut. “I know why she wanted your soul.”

“Why?”

“See,” Snoopy hugged his legs and leaned forward explaining eagerly, “There are these old prophesies of breaking the seals of Lucifer's cage. They are terribly obscure, but one point is always stressed:

That they had to be broken in a certain order, or hell would collapse in on itself, because with every seal a pillar of hell breaks and if the wrong ones are broken it destabilized hell too much to break the rest safely-

“Are you trying to tell me that the devil is real and you made a crack into his cell?”

“No-” Snoopy laughed at his panic, “I mean, yes, of course the devil is real, but what I was telling you is that if the prophesies are right, nobody can free him anymore. I always asked myself why Father never killed Lilith. I mean they hated each other, had completely different views on everything, but they must have worked towards a common goal – maybe he was never truly rivaling with her, maybe he just tried to turn me against her. I am one of the few beings strong enough to kill her, but he always warned me I had to get older and must never use the Colt. It all makes sense now!”

Sure, “To you maybe.”

“The pillar that collapsed with Lilith's death was the oldest pillar of hell. Think of hell as...” Snoopy's eyes darted through the empty air, drawing lines and shapes only he saw, “As an inverted house of cards- no, that's not it,” he shook his head, “Forget it. Hell is not built like a building, more like a mine, but it wasn't built like that, it-”

“Get to the point!”

“Lucifer's cage must have been built in a way, so he cannot dig himself out,” Snoopy's hands formed a bubble, “If he tries it collapses on him,” and snapped it with a clap. “But even digging from the other side is dangerous, you have to stabilize hell first. There is a prophesy about it too, the first seal breaks when the light is put out in the Meadows. They have to sink into darkness, which is meant literally, if the Meadows become all at once the same solid structure as the mid-region of hell it would add to hell's stability.”

“Was that what Samhain tried to do?”

“No, the Meadows cannot be changed permanently by the doings of a demon. Only by souls. Only a soul could break the first seal.” Snoopy actually drew breath and bit his lip before he went on:

“The prophesies are not consistent about how, but some state, the first seal shall break, if the righteous man sheds blood in hell; I can only assume that shedding blood is not meant literally, because that happens all the time. But Alistair always called it shedding blood when he broke a soul
into a demon. Every time that happens the Meadows become a little darker, it's almost not percievable, but if you grow up there, you notice. Everything in hell is connected, if an especially strong soul committed an atrocity like breaking another soul, it would change the Meadows. The stronger the soul, the greater the atrocity, the more permanent the damage.”

Okay, now Dean started to get the picture, “That's why Azazel sent you to study under Alistaire-”

But Snoopy was shaking his head, “I hate to rob you of your delusions, but just because I was bad at torturing, doesn't mean, I didn't break souls,” his enthusiasm waned a bit, “I broke them too fast, smashed them into pieces. They made useless, minor demons.

No, the righteous man is someone who burns with the fire of asha. A Zoroastrian concept, one could translate with truth in action, good thoughts and good deeds, fueled by the strength of the heart. A healer, a saint, someone like you.”

He could just answer that with a snort. A saint? Kid had to take another look in the dictionary.

Snoopy shook his head ever so slightly, “Even after all this time, you still don't realize how much relief you brought the damned souls, how easy you made them smile, how special that is.

Azazel and Lilith knew, that it was you they needed to break. That was why Iscah was assigned to you, not to kill you, but keep you on the brink of desperation, wait until you were ripe to sell your soul. But of course your father mixed up their plans.”

Yeah, that was a John Winchester specialty: Mixing it up. “You did too, you didn't listen to Iscah,” she had told Snoopy more than once to hide Dean on Earth or to turn him over to her, she would break Dean into a useful demon, she said. “You listened to your gut, you killed her and did your own thing.”

Snoopy chewed on his lip and nodded.

Freeing Lucifer, Dean guessed it would take a few more days before that would sink in. Those demons had wanted to start the Apocalypse. And Snoopy had stopped it, without even knowing what he stopped.

…yeah, it would definitely take a few more days.
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Snoopy was a little under the weather, after charging and unloading that much power in such a short time it had to be expected.

That was too why Dean laid off his much anticipated trip upstairs to visit Bobby.

And because they carefully explored what was left of hell -which was a lot. Collapsing a huge part of hell left still most of it intact. Especially the Meadows seemed sweeter than ever. Though that was due to how few demons had survived the war. And many of those who had, had been too close to the Morass during the collapse, were trapped there now.

Even though Snoopy reminded him that he only won the war, but not yet established his reign, it was like they had conquered a whole world and all that was left to do was to explore it.

Which in Snoopy's case meant to boldly go to libraries no mortal nerd had ever laid eyes on.

And for Dean it meant to carry Snoopy's books.

Snoopy's room was gone and they hadn't built another place like it yet. Most nights they camped out in the Meadows, last night literally. Dean had found a glowing warm summer evening shortly after sunset, when bees were still buzzing, a woman eternally washing clothes in the nearby river. Snoopy and him slept in the dry flat grass and felt so safe like this was someone's heaven. Maybe a long time ago, hell had been something like heaven, there were many myths about that: One Underworld, with only different parts for the different souls. As far as Dean had lived it, it was like in all the myths, less a matter where the Realm of the Dead was located or what it was made of, but only a matter who ruled it. Who decided how the dead souls were treated and how they treated each other.

In another library Dean almost died of boredom. Well not died, but almost broke his coccyx when he glided down the handrail of the spiral stairs.

“What do you need to research anyhow?” -didn't winning a war usually go hand in hand with taking a little time off...probably not, now that he was thinking about it. Ruling hell sounded like a shit-load of paper work.

“I'm trying to make good on my promise,” Snoopy answered.

“What promise?”

…

Oh. That promise. Dean hadn't been pushing it, because it was pretty obvious Snoopy wasn't in the shape to do any heavy duty magic, like rising the dead and such. And all demons who could do it for him, were either dead, or buried -or not on Snoopy's side anyhow, so he would have to bulk up again to dig them out or order them around...or go necromancer himself which was potentially worse than demon blood; in short it all wasn't as easy as it could've been if Lilith hadn't gone total war so
that their armies canceled each other out.

“I don't want you to think-...” Snoopy started, and started anew, “No matter how much I want you to stay, that won't stop me from keeping my promise. I will find a way to bring your father back, I haven't given up on it and I won't-”

“I know. But who says I'm going to leave then?”

Snoopy looked kinda small -swallowed by the low couch with it's soft pillows.

“I mean, we have a good thing going here, right?”

That made the kid smile and reach for him and pull Dean into his lap.

Kid was lucky hell was so empty, because Dean would surely not let him manhandle and molest him like that in a library on Earth.

Okay, maybe he would. But only to see how many minutes of loud french kissing it took to get them kicked out.

But he wasn't too sorry to be in hell either, when their make-out session remained uninterrupted.

And that was how they ended up searching for a permanent place to lay their head and hang their curtains or something... Scouring a city apartment of a meadow with nice weather -those were still a rare thing, even now; but the apartment was too unpractical, because it's bathroom door was stubborn, always opening into other meadows and the front door wouldn't open at all. One could only visit the city by climbing out of the window down the fire escape.

Then the kingly place Snoopy suggested wasn't Dean's thing. He said it smelled like mold, but the truth was that he thought the red/gold walls clashed with the persian carpet covered stairs. And there were a lot of stairs in that place. Though the ceilings had been nice, -painted with heroic figures.

Finally, and just for fun, they checked out Blenheim palace in the upper mid-regions.

Laughing and elbowing each other they left the estate through the east gate and walked by a tiny pie shop advertising it's apple pies.

“What's it with you that you're always hungry?” Snoopy accused him of manipulating hell.

“Dude, I don't even like apple pies,” not since he almost been fed to the apple-pie-god.

“They are a bad memory?”

“You know what happens to naughty puppies who don't stay out of people's minds?”

“Dean,” Snoopy sounded somewhat alarmed, “Are they a bad memory?”

“Yeah, why-” Bagheera slinked by his leg, -hadn't they left her in the Meadows? “Hey,” he called after her, took a step and was-

-in a room.
Snoopy was gone.

The cat stood in the door frame, with her back turned to him, looking for something, not yet sure if she wanted to get there.

It was a dirty little room with a dirtier bare mattress on the floor and neon-red spray paint that spelled,

*Remember all those great times you had and all those things you hoped to be?*

Yeah, not really. What he did remember was that he did not put himself here. Here which felt a little bit like the Dungeon, and it was that little bit feeling that irritated him. The outskirts of the Dungeon didn't feel like this and the Dungeon didn't either, one couldn't feel the Dungeon a little bit, it was like burning yourself. You couldn't burn yourself a little bit, it either burned or it was hot, it hurt or it didn't. As long as it was only uncomfortable it wasn't the Dungeon-

So where the hell was he?!

He reached for the Colt and found it missing.

The cat turned her head towards him, and at first he thought that a red eyed demon possessed her, but then he took in the rounder shape of the head and saw it hadn't been Bagheera all along. She ran off.

No matter where she went, he surely wouldn't follow her. But he couldn't stay either-

He jumped-something had grabbed his shoulder-Snoopy! “Dammit!” he cursed, “You-

“Shh,” Snoopy stooped him.

“Please tell me you still have the Dagger,” he used a lower tone.

Snoopy checked and came up empty.

Frickin-Fucking-Fantastic. “Where are we?”

“Still in the mid-regions,” Snoopy whispered, eyes fluttering over the ceiling and walls, “It's not the where it's the who, but that's not possible, it-

“Wh-mmh-

-Snoopy had put his hand over Dean's mouth. He shook his head. His eyes were wide, he was scared.

Silently they found another way out, not the one where the cat had left -if it had been a cat, that was.

Dean got it, they had to gather some distance and not get caught while doing so, because whatever they ran from, they wouldn't outrun it once it spotted them.

The rooms got darker and darker and Dean had the bad feeling that they walked right into a monster's mouth. Something rustled and he pushed Snoopy into the next shadow, out of the light.

He didn't get a good look on what crept by them, not all of it moved through the last ray of light, but it was on all fours, without moving like being on four legs was natural for it.

Then there was another beam of light traveling over and closer to them, and Snoopy pulled him deeper behind a rough wooden object -Dean felt the splinters and saw the beam travel on blocked by what they hid behind.
“Your fear,” said a nasal voice, that paused to take a deep sniff, “It has a added to it's former bouquet, my young prince,” the title was laced with malice, followed by the sound of lips smacked in disgust, “Your old pains and weaknesses—”

Snoopy had taken Dean's hand,

“-overlaid by a fools bravery:

The fear for a loved one. Which robs you of your very,” paused for emphasis, “Last,” and again, “Good quality: your reasonableness.”

The grip Snoopy had on his hand told Dean all he needed to know – there was only one demon who scared the kid on a primal level.

“But then,” Alistair crooned, “You've always been a disappointment,” his voice kept making those weird smacks, like he was tasting the air with his words, “A disappointment to me, to your father, even to that blood-relations of yours.” He was walking around in the room, like he didn't know already where they hid. “You didn't try to find them, no? No, not you. My reasonable boy. You know they would despise you. They are still alive you know, some of them. We all had our part to play. Even a dull piece like you, good for nothing but to be filled up with power. You don't really know what you could've been, how great your meaning was. Was...” he paused, let it sink in how past he was of giving a damn, “Now, I will only take my satisfaction out of you, not because you killed my sister, or for disobeying your father, again not even coming close to living your potential. No, no, this is for the mess you made of my hell, ruining my works of art.”

He snapped his fingers, turned on the light.

Dean blinked against it, and saw the demon at the far side what seemed to be the attic of a large building. Snoopy pushed himself in front him, but hadn't let go of Dean's hand.

Alistair possessed a man that smiled mask-like at him while he spoke to Snoopy,

“You wiped my life's work away, dull child. For that I will take him. I have looked forward to this one under my blade.” He sauntered closer, the creature they had barely seen before on his tails - something that looked like a human had turned into a hell hound and stopped before it was completely done, “It's always the righteous ones that take to the art of shedding blood like there is no greater joy but work well done. You understand that Dean, don't you?”

For a demon possessing borrowed meat, he sure had piercing eyes.

“You don't have to be scared, I will take it slow,” he promised, considered then, “You will be good for me. Do everything I ask, all so I leave little Snoopy alone? You love our pet-prince, you loved him as much as you loved that brother of yours, maybe more -more carnal, more sincere...there is no shame in misguided love, I will teach you better, I will do it myself,” he drew in breath noisily again, and like his gaze on Dean it felt like a physical sensation, rather than a noise.

The demon nodded like he knew he had this effect, “Rarely smelled a pride that had such promise,” he reveled in his own words. “Pride spun thin is a thread that will cut you, not choke. Pretty cuts, you will see.”

Dean had been able to feel Snoopy steadying himself, preparing during the sermon of that stupid prick.

“Don’t” Alistair said, because he had felt it too. “You can't be serious. You will hurt yourself, boy,” he shook his head smug.
Snoopy didn't say a word.

Maybe that demon didn't get it – the kid didn't care how much it hurt.

And it hurt badly.

Snoopy clutched on his hand, crushing Dean's fingers and reaching into him, asking for that little bit more strength, that he needed to tear the world apart with his other hand.

They fell.

And they landed in a prison cell of all things.

In the Dungeon. Maybe Snoopy had made hell into an even greater mess. Another tear in Alistair's precious work or whatever.

“Hey? Snoopy,” The kid was still not moving, Dean checked on him and found him bleeding from his nose. Nothing new there, but the bleeding from the eyes certainly was.

“No-!” Snoopy coughed and calmed down as soon as he noticed Dean for the one who cradled his head in his hands. “-only wounded him...-safe. Find us a safe place. Can't take him 'nother-have to run, cover o' tracks.”

Dean was way ahead of him, having slung Snoopy's arm over his shoulders he got the kid going.

Where they breached from the Dungeon into the mid-regions there were no emptied cells that marked the outskirts, the passage was a frozen waterfall Dean had to break first. Which was good. He had never been here, that meant this part of hell didn't recognize him, was more open to him.

Manipulating the mid-regions was child's play. But that alone wouldn't get Alistair off his tail.

He focused on something that went against hell's nature, even here in the empty planes:

Music. Humming Metallicar's The Unforgiven, he followed, tried to find the parts of hell that shied away the least-

“What-” Snoopy asked weak.

“Shh, trust me.”

The kid either did or needed all his strength to remain conscious.

Through the stone gate of an overgrown temple, they made it to a pale green drawing room with white stucco. From there an empty storage place but Dean didn't like the windows -the painted words on them seemed fresh, like someone just had scribbled there:

Your oldest Fears

Are the worst Ones

One panicked second he thought that bastard got them again, taunted them and then he realized that it was a warning.

He backtracking to the drawing room and chose another door, leading to outsides that were canopied
with architectural non-sense, looking like a huge egg-cutter, yet not in an unfriendly way. Dean liked cut eggs, so he guessed it was safe to go on.

Another time hell warned him Alistair was near with a snake slithering through an animal skull, looking at him all wrong and reminding him of the creepy red-eyed cat.

Maybe he was trusting hell too much sentience, maybe it just reacted to Alistair's presence and he knew how to tell the signs.

But he liked the idea, that hell had a mind of it's own, so he didn't care about what was more likely.

*His hell,* the asshole had said. Please bitch, *their* hell was helping them along into the Meadows without them ever needing to dare a pillar.

A few more rooms and a rather long walk down a highway bridge, they entered the Meadows by foot.

They found shelter in the pillow fort one of Dean's little friends had made out of someone-else's meadow. He still didn't understand a word she said -aside from her I love you's, but she seemed happy enough with their presence, and even tried to play doctor for Snoopy, starting to wrap a scarf around his bloody head-

“Thank you, sweety,” Dean took the scarf from her and shooed her away.

She nodded, like she understood exactly what was going on in his head, even when he was not.

He had no idea what to think of how Snoopy dropped in and out of lucidity. What ran in a loop in his head wasn't helpful at all, *I can't loose you, not you too.*

“I'm okay,” Snoopy said, but didn't try to sit up, “I'm gonna be fine,” -no he stayed where Dean had carefully placed his head on pillows. His head that was bleeding from everywhere, eyes, nose, ears.

“What can I do?” he needed Snoopy to tell him.

“I don't know,” the kid's eyes got glassy again, “-sorry, I was reckless.”

“Hey, no, don't talk like that.”

Snoopy gave him a smile. He blinked, like he tried to stay focused, “Earth, is our only chance...he is a creature of hell, his spies too-...” his gaze dropped to the side.

“Stay with me, come on.”

Snoopy did focus on him, barely.

“Earth's not an option -if I was him I'd have eyes on all gates.”

“Why you're interrupting me?” Snoopy asked, “I was about to say that.”

“I wasn't interrupting you,” he needed to tell Snoopy. Wiping the tears off, Dean did his best to come up with something... “What if we stay and fight, I can get to our weapons,” use that Dagger to bleed Alistair before he put a bullet into the son of a bitch.

Snoopy blinked and moved like he tried to shake his head.

“Why not?”
“His delay,” the kid explained, “After he unarmed us...he has cast them to Earth.”

“What?”

“He knows that I can magically summon every item foreign to hell, as long as it is in hell. So he sure has threw them away. Objects are easier to get in and out of hell than souled or demonic matter, it-”

-cough

Kid keeled over and coughed up blood and then went slack in Dean's arms.

“No-”

His eyes wouldn't open.

“No, no, no-” Dean helplessly touched his hands to Snoopy's head, didn't dare to shake him.

He couldn't panic.

He had to think.

Be smart about this.

What did he know?

Nothing. Just that Snoopy needed help, that hell wasn't healing him properly when the injury came from over-using his powers.

He knew that he couldn't risk to summon a demon to bleed him for Snoopy.

He couldn't do as Snoopy told him and get him to Earth, because it would be foolish not to expect Alistair would block every gate. Especially the first one he had thought about, the one that opened into the sewer system in Clifton, New Jersey. Snoopy's enemies knew he was American, that he would try to take the fight to his turf.

He couldn't do all that because it was expected, because Alistair had nothing to do but wait for him to make a mistake.

He had to do something unexpected something that shouldn't be possible, like, like, like-

Make a new gate.

No one knew how that was done, but someone had to have done it at some point.

Okay, what did he know about devil's gates?

All devil's gates were around pillar openings in the Meadows...why only in the Meadows? 'Geographically' speaking were the Meadows the furthest away from Earth. It was the narrow planes, like the in between of the Morass and the Cage or transitions between the Dungeon and the Mid-regions that were closest to reality, which was why most exorcisms pushed demons back into hell landing them in the Morass or the Dungeon. So why the Meadows, what made the Meadows different from other-

Souls.

The legends came to mind, the one Bobby had pestered him about. That according to one legend about a mortal boy, whose life seemed to be the origin of the Adonis myth, who was shared between
Lilith and Inanna—or as he knew now, the demon Asteroth—according to this legend any soul not bound to hell could leave hell any place, any time. Dean had discarded it since the how had been more than vague and because Snoopy had told him a soul in the flesh not possessed by a demon needed to leave through a gate.

But maybe the myth had stated a simple truth:

From hell's side a soul could make a gate anywhere. That it only happened in the Meadows was because souls were left alone there, had enough time to do weird stuff like for an example dig or built any other passage out.

He would only know if he tried but not in the Meadows, Alistair would expect him to show up here, no, the outskirts of the Dungeon. Where the veil was so thin, that some souls connected with the flow of Earth's time. Yeah, he knew exactly where he could built a devil's gate.

Which meant, first thing he had to drag an unconscious Snoopy all the way down to where he just came from. A long way he had come for a little thinking—it better paid off.

It did.

Dean found the ghost of the ancient hooker and built a door into the oscillating cell of hers. As someone who shared in Snoopy's power, he was even able to shut the door properly when they were through.

And then Dean stumbled under Snoopy's weight, his bad knee giving out under them. Reality rushed him with pain and crisp cool air. From the rough stony ground he looked over the deserted ruins, to soon after dawn for any tourists, too far off civilization for anyone to hear his call for help.

Snoopy didn't move, didn't bleed either.

Back there, freshly returned to Earth, Dean thought that the bleeding stopped was a good thing.

He had thought he had done right. Getting Snoopy away from hell.

That was the problem when he was thinking all by himself.

It ended with Snoopy in an Italian hospital, Dean by his bedside, penniless, sleepless and having no clue what the friendly doctor lady meant by repeating Snoopy was doing very good—excellent condition.

He was in fucking coma, how was that excellent?!

She had to be the most phlegmatic Italian woman ever, or the famous Italian temper was utter nonsense, because she told him calm and friendly, like he had never once raised his voice against her, that his brother was doing very good. Her best patient. No need to worry.

Easy to say. She didn't have to come up with an explanation how they entered Italy without leaving so much as a trace.
If the Italian cops would be as laid back as the Italian doctors were Dean had maybe two more days before they would start to question his story of two mugged back-packing tourists. Until then he could do nothing but sit here and pull his hair out in worry. Grasping for hope at every sign Snoopy would wake up, like the sniffle he just heard-

“Dee- Dean?”

Chapter End Notes

First of all a spoiler but a necessary one: No Sam does not remember now who Dean is, calling him Dee is only a reflex and Dean overhears the childhood endearment – we have not cheated you out on the scene where they will learn who Snoopy really is, this scene will be in volume 2;

Yes, there will be a volume 2, which is the big thing I was told to keep my mouth shut about because it would’ve been a hard hint that their relation wont be revealed right now; I understand many of you have waited for the big reaveal, but the thing is, their relationship would take a drastic turn from there and it is too early for that; there are still so many ways to explore their relationship as it is in this AU; also for those who feel it is unreasonable for Dean not to see Snoopy for Sammy, I want to remind you that people as damaged as Dean wouldn’t dare to hope – he has spent months in that foster home hoping Sammy was still alive; Snoopy comes from a similar place -just imagine how many times Snoopy has whished his true father would come for him and save him and all those times no one came to save that little boy; also people like to dig their heels in about their explanation of reality, especially when others get it wrong in their opinion – so at this point you could shout the truth at the top of your lungs, Dean would turn it to be your mistake: because bloodspell. So very time someone points it out it only cements his belief to be right; people are funny like that;

Volume 2 will have Snoopy exploring earth, like Dean had explored hell. Hunters and civilians will be of the main focus, but there will be demons and other bad guys too. The style will reminisce of season 1, where the brothers had to learn each other new as hunting partners. It will be grittier and dirtier and more down to earth -in the literal sense that earth is different from hell, more real, more constraining, but in its way also bigger, more free, more anonymous, with more focus on the self – in short, the genre will lend more from road movies than from fantasy.

Due to other projects Volume 2 wont be posted any time soon. I can promise, since the concept appeals to all three of us, it will be finished and if you want to read it, it will be posted. But it could take a year or slightly(+4months) longer.

If you want, you can subscribe to mad_parnes from our dashboard to get notification when Volume 2 is up. We don’t post many stories and should there be anything posted within the next year that is not V.2 it probably will be a Sam/Dean or Sam&Dean one-
shot, so no worries about annoying floods of notifications on the wrong thing. I loved to have you all as company on this last part of the writing journey and hope you will join again sometime,  
Bye, Bee

I love you guys...I had a much, much, much longer note written for you...but I read it again and I hated it-tis is why I dont read my stuff 2nd time-Shit I am crying. Again. I just love you, it's great writing for fandom, the best. You are the best readers and I swear I will write another novel. Unless of course the world is really going to end before springtime -because Franny said its a springtime story and he knows his stuff....in that case(case of Asteroid or cockroaches), part 2 goes like this:
There are no angels coming down to wear trenchcoats, Bobby is being Bobby, Gordon is being Gordon, the Harvelles are being awesome, Dean is in love with his Snoopy and vice versa, they find out that Snoopy is Sammy and live happily ever after – I could be lying of course, but if you know me a little bit you wont be surprised Im living by Vonnegut's Great8. That in mind, if the asteroid brings alien-cockroaches that eat our brains or the internet, you will at last...at least? know how the story ended.

xxxJo

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