Labyrinth

by Aini_NuFire

Summary

When Castiel gets snared in a labyrinth that tries to devour his soul, piece by piece, it’s up to Dean, Sam, and Jack to save him.

Notes

Well, this ended up long, haha. And it's a little strange, but it was inspired by a dream of Cas in a labyrinth, and since I rarely dream of Supernatural, I figured I just had to make it a story. It's coincidence that its creepy factor is fitting for the week of Halloween. XD

Takes place season 14, but no spoilers.

Disclaimer: Not mine. Thanks to 29Pieces for beta reading!

Castiel came to groggily, his limbs heavy and head aching. Alarm immediately zinged through him, and he tried to bolt upright. Dizziness darkened his vision and a weight on his wrists dragged his arms down. There was a dull clunk of iron, and when Castiel's vision cleared, he saw the shackles around his wrists and the separate chains looping in a large pile beside him. He frowned, and shifted to take in his surroundings.
It was dark, but he could make out stone walls hemming him in on three sides. There was no fourth wall, or a door for that matter. The alcove transitioned into a stone corridor lined with torches affixed to the walls.

Castiel glanced around once more, unsure what to make of this. He couldn’t remember how he’d gotten here—he couldn’t really remember what he’d been doing before apparently being captured.

He eyed the chains in bemusement. They had quite a bit of length, and he wasn’t locked in…

Castiel slowly rose to his feet, then turned toward the door. The chains dragged heavily behind him as he ventured out into the dark passage, and though they grated harshly across the stone floor, no guards came running. In fact, there was an eerie stillness to everything, like even the air itself was subdued.

Castiel felt his sleeve for his angel blade, but it was gone. Swallowing his growing sense of trepidation, he steeled himself and continued forward. The passageway was long, torchlight casting flickering shadows across the walls and ceiling like they were real entities writhing in tortured undulation.

He glanced back several times to check the slack in his chains, but they still hung loosely behind him. He wondered at that, wondered at this strange prison that didn’t feel quite right.

He came to an adjoining corridor and paused. Should he turn down it or keep going straight? He really had no idea.

Gritting his teeth, Castiel took the other passage. Chiseled stone blended away into wallpapered panels and torches became wrought-iron lamp fixtures. Castiel’s frown deepened. Was he in a castle or a house? He’d seen no sign of windows yet.

More passageways split and opened up, and Castiel found himself taking more and more turns until he couldn’t keep straight where he was going. Still, the chains dragged limply behind him.

There was an archway up ahead that looked like it opened up into a wider chamber, and Castiel quickened his pace toward it. But instead of coming out to an exit, the floor stretched out as a bridge into open space. Castiel pulled up short at the edge and stared in dismay at the massive cavern. Above and below were dozens of flat pathways and staircases interconnecting them. Some looked like cutouts from an old Victorian dollhouse, while others merged into stone and tunnels. Glancing down, Castiel could see a trail of chains crossing back and forth over several paths.

His heart rate kicked up, and he lurched forward into a lumbering gait. But just as he reached the middle of the bridge, which opened up onto a wider platform, the chains finally snapped taut behind him, jerking his arms and almost yanking him to the ground. He twisted around, barely catching himself on one knee. He tugged futilely at the chains, fear clawing its way up his throat. What was this place?

He felt a displacement of air, and whirled to find a figure had appeared on the platform. Long black tresses cascaded down her shoulders, and she wore a dark purple gown that fluttered just like the surrounding shadows.

Castiel drew himself up. "Who are you?"

She regarded him with a simpering moue. "I am Pasiphaë."

He frowned, not recognizing the name. "What do you want?"
"Nourishment. Satiation. We all want that, in one form or another." She paused, lips curving upward. "I've never had an angel before. And you, precious, are so full of delicious anguish and pain. Your essence is rank with it."

Castiel tensed, but he forced himself to keep his head. Casting a quick look around the cavern, he swallowed hard before turning back to her. "The labyrinth...you're a demigoddess."

"Gold star for you. Most people know the labyrinth was created for the minotaur. But I found its use quite...inspiring."

Castiel furled his hands into fists. "What do you want with me?"

She took a step closer. "I feed on emotion, on love and heartache."

She lifted a hand to trail a finger down his cheek, and it took all of Castiel's willpower not to react.

"I sensed the depths of your heart the moment you entered this town. How much you love. How much you fear. How desperate you are to protect those you cherish, and how guilt-driven you are by a haunted past." She closed her eyes and tipped her head back with a deep inhalation. "Everything I thrive on."

Castiel wrenched backward, the sensation too much like that of the being in the Empty. "No," he growled.

She laughed. "And that fighting spirit. Like the heroes of old." Pasiphaë raised her hand toward him.

Castiel braced himself to fight, but before he could think of striking out, she planted her palm against his chest and pushed. Lightning forked through him, paralyzing every nerve ending in fire. Even his breath couldn't sustain a scream as the demigoddess sank her fingers through his sternum. A shockwave ripped through his grace, and images flashed through his mind's eye, of ancient battles and wings and swords, before they were torn away like gossamer shrouds.

Pasiphaë stepped back and Castiel crashed to his knees, darkness claiming him before he fully hit the ground.

The next time he woke, everything hurt, and there was an even heavier weightiness in his bones, like someone had scooped out his marrow and replaced it with lead. He pushed himself up onto his forearms with a groan. The chains trailing from the manacles around his wrists clinked on the floor, and there was still a tautness in them where they'd finally been pulled to their max.

Castiel rolled onto his hip, and felt the weight of iron on his legs when he shifted them. Glancing down, he was confused that his ankles were now fettered as well, with a separate pile of chains that hadn't been there before. Pasiphaë was nowhere to be seen.

Castiel stared at the new set of chains for several long moments. Like the first set, there was quite a bit of length to them, giving him somewhat free range of motion. Except, the ones around his wrists had already reached their limit, so if he was going to move, it would have to be back the way he'd come. Could he find a way out of this labyrinth? Or was that Pasiphaë's game, since she seemed willing to let him roam?

Regardless, he couldn't stay where he was and just let the goddess feed on him.

Castiel reached a hand up to rub his chest where she'd plunged her fingers into his core. It ached dully, as did the rest of his body. What exactly had she done to him? There was a phantom flutter of
wings, and an echoing chime like clashing swords, but it was too faint to grasp.

Though it took a great deal of effort, Castiel managed to push himself to his feet. The shackles on his arms and feet weighed heavily on him, but he forced himself to take one step, then another, shuffling back the way he'd come.

He wasn't going to backtrack all the way to the cell he'd first woken up in, but he would try some different turns. He just needed to find a way out of this place.

A small part of his mind whispered that was impossible in a labyrinth, a warped reality where time and space was compressed and folded, as evidenced by the intertwining passages and staircases that criss-crossed back and forth over a gaping chasm of darkness.

Yet another part of him blindly drove on, desperate to escape. He stumbled across a juncture where a set of chains lay across the perpendicular corridor, and his fear mounted higher, quickening his heart rate and sending blood rushing in his ears. He took the next left, then a right, crossing more tracks of chains as he went. Up and down and upside down, Castiel clambered through the labyrinth until the chains around his feet snapped taut, yanking his legs out from under him so he crashed to the floor.

Panting, Castiel rolled onto his back as Pasiphaë stepped into view above him, her mouth quirked in amusement. She crouched down beside him. Castiel flinched as she settled a hand on his chest, her power thrumming through the contact.

The floor beneath Castiel began to creak, and suddenly a band of metal shot up and snapped around his neck like a collar, bolting his head to the ground. His heart leaped against his rib cage, and Pasiphaë grinned. He felt when her fingers began to sink into his chest again, slower this time. The pain rocketed through him, seizing his muscles. Her fingers wormed their way into his mind and drew out a thread.

"Family," she purred. "One of the strongest loves there is."

Castiel blinked through watery eyes as a mirage of Sam and Dean flickered on the air. And then it evaporated, and Castiel felt something like a cord snap inside his heart.

"Stop," he gritted out.

Pasiphaë waggled her fingers in his chest, stealing his breath again. This time the amorphous shape that wavered on the air took the form of Jack. Pasiphaë hummed, and tugged, and the image dissipated. Castiel screamed inside his head where he could feel those pieces crumbling out as through a sieve. He tried to hold onto them, desperately grasping to keep them from being taken away, but he was paralyzed and as helpless as when Naomi had torn into his head and wiped it clean.

Pasiphaë ripped those memories away, too.

"You sure this is it?" Dean asked gruffly, giving the run-down warehouse a dubious look.

"Trust me," Rowena replied. "The power wafting off this place is immense."

"It was the last place Cas's cell phone pinged before it went off the grid," Sam added.

"Fine, so let's get in there."

"You canna just go barging in," Rowena protested incredulously. "It's a labyrinth. It's meant to keep
people trapped there for eternity."

"You got any other ideas?" Dean snapped. He wasn't gonna leave Cas in there, if that's where the angel had gotten himself lost in.

"Didn't the Greeks use a thread when they went in to find their way back out?" Sam said.

Dean snorted. "You wanna get a ball of yarn?"

Sam rolled his eyes in annoyance. "Rowena's right, we can't just go in there and risk getting lost ourselves."

The witch had her mouth pursed ruminatively. "I could cast a spell to make a magical thread connecting us. I'd stay out here, of course, and you could use it to find your way back out."

"Okay, do it," Dean said without hesitation. Anything to get Cas back.

"I'm coming too," Jack spoke up.

Dean started to shake his head, but before he could say why that would be a bad idea, Jack barreled on,

"I can help. I may not have my powers, but I believe I can still sense Castiel. Won't finding him in a maze be difficult on your own?"

Dean exchanged a look with Sam, who shrugged. Kid did have a point. And they could probably use all the backup they could get, having no idea what they'd be walking into.

"Alright," Dean relented. He turned to Rowena. "Cast the spell."

He almost shook his head at himself that they now trusted the scheming witch implicitly to actually help and not harm them.

Rowena said a few words in Latin, and the air bent and refracted as a strand of golden light snaked into existence. One end darted toward Rowena, plunging into her chest, while the other end split into three and shot out toward the Winchesters and Jack. Dean gasped as the energy pierced his sternum, but it was surprising more than painful, and quickly settled so that he barely felt it. If he concentrated, though, he could feel a faint tug toward Rowena.

This had better work.

"You can undo this when we get back, right?" he checked.

Rowena sniffed disdainfully. "Of course. You think I want to be tethered to you boys permanently?"

"Right."

Bracing himself to be ready for anything, Dean strode toward the warehouse door, angel blade in hand. Sam and Jack followed on his heels. Rowena had already cracked the magical seal so they could slip inside.

It was like walking through a portal. One moment they were out in the sun; the next they were in a dark and dingy tunnel with medieval torches ensconced on the walls. Dean pulled up short as the passage immediately forked into three separate branches. He turned to Jack.

"Okay, you're up, kid."
Jack's throat bobbed nervously, but he squared his jaw and nodded, then closed his eyes.

Dean fidgeted slightly as he waited, gaze constantly roving over the dark tunnels in search of a threat. The lore always had some kind of monster inhabiting places like these, and something must have snared Cas here to begin with.

After several long minutes in which Dean started to think Jack's conviction was greater than his actual ability, the kid finally opened his eyes and turned toward the passage on the far left.

"This way. I think."

Dean almost told him to be sure, but the fact was that without Jack, Dean and Sam would have had to pick a random direction to head on their own. So he didn't comment and instead just motioned for Jack to lead the way, though Dean stayed half a step ahead of him in case they ran into anything.

But so far the labyrinth was still and quiet, save for the subtle swish of the torch flames.

A few paces ahead, the scenery changed from dungeon-esque to old mansion, with gas lamps to light the way, though dimly. Wainscoting lined the bottom half of the walls, while gilded paintings hung every few feet or so. Dean paused at one depicting faceless figures draped in white shrouds, with massive wings spanning the width of the sky. They bore swords and spears as they descended on grotesque shapes with deformed bodies and black eyes.

Sam stopped beside him. "Huh. That's not exactly classical Greek art."

"It looks like angels and demons," Jack commented.

"Yeah," Dean said. "Someone here must think they have a sense of humor. Let's keep moving."

They did, but the more paintings they passed, the more unnerved Dean was getting. All of it was angels. And the depictions of Hell...some were ringing eerily familiar bells.

"Hey, check this out," Sam spoke up.

Dean turned from one of the art pieces to find his brother crouching down and fingering something on the floor. As he drew closer, Dean realized it was a length of chain. Two of them. He hadn't seen them in the dim light before, but the set stretched up and down the hallway with no end in sight, and underneath each painting, a link was pulled up and screwed into a hook underneath the frame. An explicable chill ran through Dean's gut.

"Jack, you getting anything more?" he asked.

Jack was a few yards down the corridor, staring at another painting. "It's you," he said.

Dean frowned. "What?"

Sam stood up, and the two of them made their way over, only to pull up short at a portrait of them hanging on the wall. That knot of tension in Dean's stomach tightened further.

"I don't like this," he said, gripping his angel blade harder. What the hell was going on with this place?

"We need to find Cas," Sam agreed.

Jack tore his gaze away from the picture and furrowed his brow in contemplation. "This way," he said, more confidently than before, and started down another corridor.
Dean had lost count of how many turns they'd made, and quickly shifted his focus inward to see if Rowena's thread was still there. It pinged in response to his prodding, and he could have sworn he caught a brief glimpse of a golden trail floating in the air behind them. So their exit route was still secured. Good.

But he was beginning to worry that may end up being the easy part.

They wove through more and more passages, some the house hallways, some stone tunnels. Dean started noticing the chains tracking the floor was the only consistency between them. And then there were the paintings containing more and more familiar scenes from their past, along with ones that Dean didn't recognize personally, but could name figures in. He'd bet money this was Cas's life story being displayed in some twisted art collection.

Jack suddenly quickened his pace. "I can sense him!"

"Jack!" Sam called urgently, rushing after him.

Dean broke into a run to keep up, passing under an archway, and nearly crashed into Sam and Jack when they abruptly halted on the other side. They had come out into a massive cavern with a webbing of bridges above and below. Chains also stretched across the expanse, and Dean caught glimpses of yet more paintings decorating the walls around the chamber. Many were ones they'd already seen, like the hallways they'd traversed were somehow split open in the center here for them to see.

He hated pocket dimensions.

"Castiel!" Jack shouted.

Dean's gaze whipped toward where the kid was now sprinting. Out in the middle of the bridge they were on was a large platform, with Cas chained spread-eagled in the center of it. Dean bolted into a run.

"Castiel, we found you," Jack was saying, having already reached him. "I did it. I knew I could."

But Cas didn't respond. Dean dropped down beside him, setting his angel blade aside and taking Cas's face in his hands. "Cas?"

Cas's pupils were dilated to the max; not even a rim of blue irises remained. Dean quickly turned to search for an injury, but he couldn't see any blood or wounds. Just chains wrapped round and round Cas's torso and limbs before they stretched out into the air to connect to the various platforms above and below. There was a collar around his neck, and shackles on his wrists and ankles. Dean tried to find a lock he could pick, but there was nothing; all of the cuffs were one solid band of metal.

"Dammit, how do we get him free?"

Sam had crouched down and was examining the chains as well.

"Castiel?" Jack kept calling. "Please say something."

Cas blinked, gaze shifting slightly toward him, but Dean couldn't tell if he was actually seeing them. "C-Castiel," he rasped. "That-that's my name…"

Dean's blood ran cold, and he exchanged an alarmed look with Sam.

"Of course it is," Jack said in all seriousness. "We're gonna get you out of here." He looked to Dean.
and Sam hopefully.

"Working on it," Dean replied tensely. He glanced at Cas, who had turned his eyes on him, and though weak, there was still an unnerving intensity in them.

"I know your faces," he whispered, looking at Sam next, though his voice quavered with a ring of uncertainty. "I…I think I know them…"

Jack’s expression finally shifted into terror and he whirled toward Dean and Sam. "What's wrong with him?"

A muscle in Dean's jaw ticked. "I don't know, but we'll figure it out. First, we need to get him out of here."

"I'm going to have to object," a new voice said.

Dean instantly snatched up his angel blade and surged to his feet. A woman stood halfway down the bridge, long hair melding into the shadows behind her. He frowned. "You don't look like a minotaur."

Her eyes flashed darkly. "I am Pasiphaë, mother of the minotaur. And you were not invited here."

*Mother* of the minotaur? What the hell did that make her?

"You took our friend," Sam responded, retribution heavy in his tone.

The woman smirked, gaze briefly flitting down to Cas. "So the love he feels for you is returned. How touching. I suppose I should have expected you. All those memories of you two as the heroes, coming to the rescue. Not that it matters here."

Dean drew his shoulders back and raised his blade. "Oh, it matters. Because I'm going to kill you."

Pasiphaë gazed back at him blandly, and then flicked her wrist. An invisible force punched Dean in the stomach and threw him backward through the air. He hit the floor and slid across it, stopping right at the edge. He heard Sam shout his name, and then a grunt, and Sam hit the ground next.

Dean saw Jack leap at the woman, but she backhanded him so hard he went crashing to the floor.

"Give it up, boys," she said, gliding forward and bending down next to Cas. She settled a palm on his chest, and he went rigid, back arching against the chains holding him down. "You have no power here."

"Why are you doing this?" Jack demanded.

"Every living creature needs to feed," she replied blithely. "And this one has so much to savor. So much heart. So much self-loathing. You'd think it impossible for a single vessel to contain so much passion, yearning, and pain."

"What are you talking about?"

Dean gritted his teeth. He knew Cas had his share of struggles, but the angel didn't need them aired like this, especially not to Jack, the kid who looked up to Cas like a father.

Pasiphaë canted her head. "I sense it in you, too. That almost desperate drive to be good. The war you wage between denying and proving yourself. So strong for one so young. Maybe I'll seek you out in a couple hundred years, make you a labyrinth of your own."
Jack stared at her, eyes wide.

Dean pushed himself to his feet, but Pasiphaë barely glanced at him before he was knocked down again, the oxygen punched from his lungs.

"You two I don't need," she said coldly. "And since you were looking for a minotaur, perhaps I'll send my son a care package. Two nice and crunchy humans for him to enjoy. And then I will feed on your angel for the next thousand years."

She shot her hand out, and Dean gasped as something compressed his lungs. A few feet away, Sam dropped to his hands and knees, trying to gulp in ragged breaths.

"NO!"

An explosion of power erupted from Jack, ocher waves cascading through the air and slamming into Pasiphaë. She screamed as she was lifted off her feet and thrown across the bridge where she landed in an ungainly heap.

Dean sucked in a sharp breath as the pressure on his lungs ceased, and he shot a startled look at Jack, who looked equally shocked. Cas had said his grace would regenerate; it just hadn't shown any signs of doing so yet.

Jack gaped at his hands for a beat, then furled them into fists and turned toward Pasiphaë. "You will not touch my family," he said, voice deep and rumbling like thunder.

Pasiphaë struggled to push herself up onto her hands and knees as she glared at him. "It's too late," she spat. "He's already too entangled. He and the labyrinth are one now."

Dean's heart dropped into his stomach, even as a part of him roused to vehemently deny it. They'd faced worse than the likes of her, and would not be beaten by this bitch.

Jack raised a hand, eyes glowing gold for a split second, but then he stumbled expression slackening in bewilderment.

Pasiphaë began to laugh as she rose to her feet and limped back over to him. "You pathetic child. Always trying so hard but always failing."

Jack stood frozen, eyes wavering as he stared at his hand.

"You're useless," she sneered.

Dean pushed himself up and charged. Pasiphaë barely turned just as he plunged his angel blade into her chest and straight through the heart. Her eyes blew wide and the breath punched out of her throat.

"It's called teamwork," he grunted, giving the blade a good twist.

Pasiphaë let out a gargled gasp, and then Dean yanked the blade free, and her body dropped lifelessly to the ground. He planted his boot against her shoulder and shoved her off the bridge, her body plummeted into the abyss. Then he turned to Jack, who continued to just stare.

"I mean it," Dean said. "You weakened her enough I could finish her off. That's how we do things in this family. Together."

For a moment, Jack just looked devastated, but finally he squared his jaw and nodded. Dean clapped
him on the shoulder.

"Guys," Sam called, and they turned to where he was kneeling next to Cas again. "The chains aren't coming loose."

Dean hurried over, reaching for the angel. Dammit, he'd been hoping ganking the bitch would have nullified whatever magic she'd been using in this place. But Cas still had a glazed look in his eyes like he wasn't fully aware of them or what was going on.

Dean flipped his angel blade into an overhanded grip. "Then we break them."

"No," Sam sputtered. "We can't do that. Remember all the paintings? The labyrinth must have somehow…absorbed Cas's memories. If we break the chains, we'd be breaking him off from them. Maybe permanently."

"We can't just leave him like this!" Dean rejoined, voice rising an octave. He was not losing Cas to this. Not like this.

He glanced at his friend's face, knowing for certain now that Cas didn't recognize him. Didn't remember him.

"Can we get Rowena in here?" Dean said.

"What if we unwind the web?" Jack put in tentatively.

Dean looked up at the yards and yards of chains criss-crossing the cavern. How much of Cas's billions of years had Pasiphaë torn out and turned into souvenir portraits? Was it simply a matter of unwinding the chains binding him here? Would that return his memories?

Sam's mouth was pressed into a thin line, but he slowly nodded. "I think we should try that."

"What if it doesn't work?" Dean countered.

Sam's jaw ticked, and there was a haunted look in his eye. "Then at least the chains will be off and we can get him out of here. Then maybe Rowena can help."

Dean's chest constricted at the implication. But what other choice did they have?

He let out a heavy breath. "Yeah, okay. It's gonna take a while, though. I mean…" He glanced up at the insurmountable web of chains and corridors containing paintings.

"It will go faster if we split up," Jack said.

Dean automatically shook his head. "No way. Just because mother minotaur is gone doesn't mean this place isn't still dangerous."

"But we all have a tether back to the exit," Jack persisted. "So we can't be lost forever."

Dean's mouth turned down. Kid had a point. Again.

"Except we're gonna have to find our way back to Cas when we're done, and you're the only one who can do that."

"I'll stay with Cas," Sam interjected. "Once you've gotten the last chain undone, make for the exit, and I'll carry him out."
Dean's instinct to protest flared up. "And how are you gonna know if we got all the chains?"

His brother shrugged. "They're powered by the labyrinth, right? If you disconnect them all, the manacles should just...come off."

"You don't know that."

Sam leveled a sympathetic look at him. "I have to believe it."

Dean shook his head in frustration. Sam was right. If doing this didn't free Cas from the chains, there'd be no way to get him out.

"Fine," he said gruffly. "Jack and I will try to undo all the chain anchors, and then we'll head for the exit. But if you and Cas aren't out within ten minutes, we're coming back in."

Sam nodded. "Be careful."

"You too," he grumbled, rising to his feet. He cast one last look at Cas, pale and hollow looking on the floor, and then turned to head back toward the corridors.

Jack hurried to keep up until they reentered the hallway. It branched off in two directions, both with chains and paintings hanging from the walls. Dean exchanged a look with the kid.

"You got this."

Jack nodded soberly. "Good luck."

Dean gave him a clipped nod in return.

They were gonna need it.

Sam felt the weight of silence like a heavy pall once Dean and Jack had gone. He kept craning his head up and down to scan the various platforms and bridges in search of them coming out another passage, but while the labyrinth seemed to be mishmashed in this central chamber, Dean and Jack didn't appear in them. When the three of them had first ventured inside this place, they'd only seen the inside of the hallways as if they were normal space, but the center of the labyrinth must have a distorted perception or something. Sam wished he had someone to discuss it with.

He turned back to Cas, heart clenching. Maybe if Dean and Jack made progress freeing Cas's memories, the angel would start coming back to himself. Sam couldn't imagine the horrors of having pieces of yourself stripped away bit by bit. Cas had been missing for days before they'd finally called Rowena in to help, and she'd detected the presence of a pocket dimension in town. And not just any old one, but one straight out of Greek mythology.

Sam wondered if Pasiphaë had just happened to ensnare Cas, or if she'd been hunting him. She'd made it sound like she had very specific tastes in victims.

Sam ran a hand down his face. How much of Cas's pain that she'd mentioned was current in the angel's mindset? Sam knew it'd been there in the past, had seen glimpses of it. Saying yes to Lucifer was the biggest sign. Trying to find Kelly and deal with Lucifer's unborn child had been another...

Sam thought things had been better since then, though. But maybe it just came back to the same old thing, of Cas throwing himself into a crisis and ignoring everything else. Jack had taken off after Cas had barely been back on Earth and alive, and then the angel had been taken prisoner by Asmodeus.
Then Jack was lost in the Apocalypse world and they were trying to find a way over there, and then Dean and Michael… That had been hard on all of them. And Cas had been so focused on being there for everyone else, was there ever any time for someone to be there for him?

Sam had tried, when Dean had been missing. But Cas had always been good at only letting people see what he wanted them to. Some habits, even after a decade among humans, were still hard to break.

Cas suddenly made a low keen in the back of his throat, and Sam straightened.
"Cas?" he called, hoping for a response.

Cas blinked at him several times, nothing registering, until the lines around his eyes started to pinch and his gaze turned watery. A tear slipped free to slide down his cheek. "I know you," he said hoarsely, voice tight and distraught. "I know I know you."

Sam quickly took Cas's hand and squeezed. "Yes, you do. I'm Sam. Sam Winchester. We've been friends for ten years, but we're more than that. We're family."

Cas gazed at him in silent desperation. "I..." He licked his lips, trying to move his head but unable to with the collar. "I can't remember who I am."

"You're Cas. Castiel. You're an angel. You're one of my best friends. You're Dean's best friend. And you're like a father to Jack. They were just here, remember? They went to find a way to get you out of these chains."

A furrow creased Cas's brow. "I... Those names...they mean something."

Sam swallowed, only managing to nod as his own eyes blurred.

Cas closed his eyes, another tear track cutting through the grime on his face. "I lost them," he whispered brokenly.

Sam held tightly to Cas's hand with both of his. "We're gonna get it all back," he promised. They had to.

"Just stay with me."

Cas pried his eyes open to gaze at him with stark vulnerability. "Sam," he repeated, testing the name.

"That's right. I'm right here and I'm not leaving. Not until we're both getting out of here."

Cas furrowed his brow. "There- there was a cage. And I swore not to leave without you?"

Sam nearly choked on an upwelling of emotion. "Yeah. Yeah, you got me out of the Cage."

Cas frowned and tried to shift his gaze around. "This isn't the same one, is it?"

"No. It's a different one. But same deal, Cas. We're both getting out of here."

Cas's eyes wavered, and he whispered, "Okay." And then his face scrunched up and he let out a strained moan.

Sam gripped his shoulder, terror ratcheting up. "Hang in there, buddy," he urged.
Jack yanked another hook from the wall, dislodging the chainlink. The painting above it melted into vapor and disappeared, just as the others had every time he broke the anchors. He could only hope the paintings disappearing was a good thing, and not that the memories they encased had vanished into nothingness. He wouldn't be able to bear it if he'd destroyed Castiel's mind and everything that made him who he was.

Except, some of these memories were...horrific. Terrifying.

...Abominable.

Though they were just paintings, they were somehow...alive. Speaking. If he stared long enough, some of them even almost looked like they were moving.

Jack had gazed at a picture of Castiel standing before a raging vortex, covered in blood while Dean and Bobby looked on. And there had been such pain and grief. Remorse and guilt. They had practically oozed off the canvas and seeped into Jack, stirring up his own similar feelings, and he'd yanked that hook out of the wall in a flash of anger.

It all seemed so incongruent with the Castiel he knew.

But then there were images of Sam and Dean, of Mary. Of Jack. He came upon a painting of the two of them sitting at a table, talking. It'd been the first night after Castiel's return from the dead. Though Jack had been amazed and grateful, things had still been...awkward between them. Instead of Castiel being there from the beginning, they'd had to start getting to know each other in the middle of everything else. There had been some flailing on both their parts.

But this painting...it exuded love and protectiveness as Castiel gazed at Jack with nothing but genuine fondness and acceptance. Things Jack hadn't noticed at the time.

Hot moisture pricked at his eyes, and he reached a hand up to run a finger down the canvas. He needed this memory to survive. Needed to safeguard it. But the only thing he could do was break the chain in the wall and hope the feelings captured within that painting hadn't just floated away, never to be recovered.

Jack clenched his fist and dug deep down for his grace. It'd flared to life when Sam and Dean and Castiel were being threatened, but then had seemingly winked out again. Maybe he'd exhausted what little had finally regenerated after all this time.

But he needed his powers. He'd once woken Castiel all the way in the Empty, which led to him coming back to him. To all of them.

Jack needed his powers to bring Castiel home again.

But his grace was dormant.

Jack moved on to the next painting, and the next. There was an endless line of them, weaving in and out of corridors. He hadn't even crossed Dean's path again after they'd separated, and Jack had no idea how many more were left to go.

But he wouldn't quit. He would save Castiel. He would save his father.

Jack strode to the next painting and grabbed the chain, giving it a rough yank and ripping iron and
plaster from the wall. The picture melted into smoke.

"Go back to Castiel," Jack willed, projecting every ounce of intention toward it as it dissipated. The good, the bad, the pain and suffering, the heartache and joy. Jack began to see that it all mattered; that was why Pasiphaë had stolen them.

And the more he strode through Castiel's memories, the more parallels Jack began to see in his own struggles.

He didn't know how long he moved from passageway to passageway. It felt like hours, maybe longer. But he refused to stop or slow down.

Finally, at long last, he came to a dead end in a stone corridor and found the set of chains bolted into the floor. There were no paintings in this alcove. It was the end of the line.

Jack hesitated only a moment before gripping both chains in his hands and pulling with all his might. At first they didn't yield, and he gritted his teeth and let out a cry of exertion. Something cracked, and then he was stumbling backward as the chains broke. He caught his balance against the wall, and gaped in astonishment as the chains suddenly whisked away into smoke. Had he done it? There was only one way to find out.

Though he was tempted to find his way back to Sam and Castiel, or at least wander a bit to see if Dean had completed his track, Jack knew he had to follow the plan. So he closed his eyes and reached inside for that subtle hum of energy that didn't belong to him. It pinged in response, and Jack felt a tug toward the left.

He turned and followed it. Now that he'd activated it or whatever, he could make out a thin gossamer thread glinting gold ahead of him, guiding his steps.

After several more turns, he stepped through a darkened archway and squeezed his eyes shut as he was suddenly bombarded with bright sunlight.

"Ach, don't tell me you got separated," a Scottish lilt said, exasperated.

Jack blinked white spots from his vision until they bled away and he could make out Rowena.

"We did it on purpose," he said. "We found Castiel, but he'd been tangled in the labyrinth and we had to unwind the chains."

Rowena blinked dubiously at him. "I have no idea what that means, but I haven't felt the connection to either of our two knights get severed, so they must still be alive and kicking."

Jack nodded. "We killed the woman who made the labyrinth."

"Did ya now? There's a nice feather to put in your cap."

Jack squinted, not sure he understood the idiom. It sounded like something to be proud of, though. His heart fell and he almost mentioned that Dean had actually been the one to kill their adversary, but he held back. Dean said teamwork had defeated her. Just as teamwork had freed Castiel.

Hopefully.

Jack turned back toward the door to the labyrinth anxiously, but it was only another few seconds before Dean came barreling through.
The hunter looked around anxiously. "Sam?" he asked.

"Not yet," Jack replied, biting at his lip. "He's probably coming. He had farther to walk than we did, and Castiel might be weak…” He trailed off, his own worry beginning to gnaw at his stomach.

Dean let out a strained breath, but nodded. "Yeah, we'll give him a few minutes."

It was almost a longer few minutes than traversing all of the labyrinth combined, and Jack was becoming antsy, but just as Dean looked on the verge of charging back in after them, the door of the warehouse was shoved open, and Sam staggered out, bracing Castiel in a fireman's carry over his shoulder.

Jack felt a flare of relief, then dread. He and Dean ran forward to meet them.

"How is he?" Jack asked anxiously.

Sam put a little more distance between them and the warehouse before stopping and easing Castiel off his back. Dean helped cradle the angel's head as they lowered him to the ground.

"He was getting his memories back," Sam said. "And then the chains all suddenly disappeared and he passed out." He flashed Jack a quick smile. "You both did it."

"Rowena," Dean said, a tad harshly. "Is he gonna be okay?"

The witch came over and crouched down, reaching out to hold a hand over Castiel's forehead, then slowly moved it down to his chest. "His essence feels like it's taken some damage," she said. "But it otherwise feels whole. I imagine he'll need some time to recover."

"But he will, right?" Dean pressed.

Jack, too, wanted explicit confirmation.

Rowena shrugged. "I make no promises, dear, but I wouldn't lie to you. Not about this, anyway. Take the tweetie-pie home and bundle him up. Rest is the only thing for soul wounds."

Dean huffed. "Yeah, okay. Thanks," he added almost as an afterthought.

"You're welcome. Oh, and…”

She said a short word in Latin, and Jack jolted as a golden thread abruptly snaked out of his chest. Three more slithered from the Winchesters and Rowena, curling together and then winking out. Then she pointed at the warehouse door and said another incantation. The door slammed shut and there was a brief purple fizzle before it also faded.

"Did you seal off the labyrinth?" Sam asked.

She nodded. "You may have killed the one who created it, but those things can take on a life of their own. Best no one else decides to take a gander inside." She picked up her bag. "Now, if you'll excuse me."

"Thank you, Rowena," Sam said sincerely.

She paused, looking torn between acceptance and haughtiness. She seemed to settle on just a nod of acknowledgement, and then headed off to her car.

"Let's go home," Dean said, slipping an arm under Castiel's shoulders.
Sam helped him lift the angel and carry him to the nearby Impala, gently laying him down in the backseat. Jack climbed in next to him, shifting his legs around so they might be more comfortable, and twisting slightly so Castiel's head and shoulders could rest in his lap. He settled a hand in the hollow of Castiel's throat and felt both the physical pulse and thrum of grace just beneath the surface, assuring him Castiel was alive.

Whole was another matter, though they had every reason to believe they'd succeeded…

They were silent for the drive back to the bunker. Dean didn't even turn on his music, whether because he wanted to let Castiel sleep or the morose air was too thick to try to depress.

Jack worked his jaw for several miles before finally speaking up. "Dean, the paintings…Castiel's memories…"

"Listen, Jack," Dean interrupted. "Whatever you saw, those things were a long time ago. And I'm not gonna lie and say Cas never made some mistakes. He did. We all have. Just like you have. The important thing is Cas learned from them and changed. And even when he screwed up, it was always because he'd been trying to do the right thing."

Jack mulled that over silently. It sounded…very much like what he'd been feeling lately, actually. Why had Castiel never told him? Maybe he wouldn't have felt so alone if he'd known he wasn't the only one to mess up so badly…

Except, he remembered Castiel trying to share that, that he knew what it was like to hurt those he cared about, trying to relate and empathize. Jack had been too caught up in guilt over killing an innocent to really listen, though.

His chest tightened as he thought about another set of paintings he'd seen. Did Sam and Dean know about them? The Winchesters hadn't been in any of the images, save for Dean, but there had been many replicas of him, so maybe it wasn't real. Was it right for Jack to mention them?

Well, Dean had probably seen lots of memories he'd hadn't been privy to before. Perhaps it was a gross violation of Castiel's privacy and trust, but Jack felt a worming knot in his stomach at the thought of keeping silent.

"Did you know about the angel who brainwashed him?" he asked quietly.

Sam and Dean exchanged a glance before looking over their shoulders at him.

"You mean Naomi?" Sam asked carefully.

"I don't know the name. There was a white room and Castiel strapped to a chair while she…" He cut off, the image still haunting his memory, along with the feelings of terror that painting had evoked. "She did things. She forced him to practice killing Dean over and over again."

Dean threw a startled look at Jack, then swore under his breath.

Jack swallowed hard. "You didn't know." He shouldn't have said anything.

"No, we did," Sam said hurriedly. "Just, uh, not all the details. Cas didn't- he didn't share them all."

Jack glanced down at the angel still unconscious next to him. "I understand why."

Dean took in a sharp breath. "I can't believe that bitch is still alive. And all those times Cas went to Heaven to talk to her…" He shook his head with a growl. "What the hell was he thinking?"
Jack quirked a confused brow at him. That angel was still alive? And Castiel was meeting with her?

"He was thinking about how to save you," Sam put in softly. "And how to keep Heaven from collapsing. You know he'll always put the greater good above himself."

"Yeah, well, I wish he'd take care of himself for once," Dean retorted. "You didn't see, Sam...all the times he was alone and hurt, or being tortured, and we weren't there for him..."

"We were there for him this time," Sam countered.

"You really think that makes up for all the times we weren't?" Dean said bitterly.

"No. But all that matters is that we're there now. From now on. We learn from our mistakes and do better. That's all we can do."

Jack thought about how he'd been trying to do that ever since he'd come into this world. Always trying to do better, always feeling like it wasn't enough to make up for his parentage or the mistakes he'd made. He'd missed that his teachers had been down this road, missed that they were still on it sometimes. Yet still they poured their energy into him.

He'd been too self-absorbed lately. His family was trying to be supportive, trying to encourage him; he should be doing the same for them.

Jack glanced down at Castiel again and draped an arm carefully around the angel's shoulders. He'd do better now.

That was all he could do.

Castiel woke slowly, drifting in a half sleep state for a bit before sounds became more crisp and he finally inhaled deep enough to expand his lungs fully. Alarm shot through him, and he immediately jerked to see if he was still in chains, if he'd woken up yet again in that terrifying labyrinth. But no weight dragged at his limbs, and after a second, he registered the soft cushion molded beneath his body.

"Castiel?" a familiar voice called.

Castiel's eyelids fluttered as he struggled to fully wake. "Jack?" he croaked, blinking back blurriness until smudged shapes coalesced into the young nephilim sitting in a chair by the bed. Sluggishly, Castiel's brain noted the walls of his room at the bunker. How had he gotten here? Was this even real?

He struggled to push himself upright, and Jack hurried to grasp his arm and help him sit back against the headboard.

"You remember me?" Jack asked worriedly.

"Of course. What-" Castiel swallowed around a dry throat. "What happened?"

"Do you remember the labyrinth?" Jack continued.

Castiel's heart stuttered with the memory, and a phantom dread chilled the blood in his veins. He remembered losing pieces of himself—his friends and family. Remembered them being torn away and shredded, and how he could only watch helplessly as a glacial numbness so bereft and all-encompassing settled in to take their place. But a quick stock of things instantly brought to mind the
warm memory of the Winchesters, and Jack was here.

He swallowed again, coughing to clear his throat. "Yes. How- how did I get out?" He curled the fingers of one hand in the blankets, feeling their texture to make sure this was real.

"We came and found you," Jack said proudly. "We needed Rowena's help, but Dean, Sam, and I went into the labyrinth to get you. We killed the one who'd trapped you there, and then had to undo all the ways she'd bound your essence to the maze, but we managed it." Jack paused. "You do feel alright, don't you?"

Castiel blinked some more as he took in the rapid report, then took a moment to turn his senses inward and examine himself. He felt…alright. Exhausted and weary down to his core, a little frayed around the edges, but he felt whole. Or at least thought he did. How would he know if memories were missing?

"I think so," he decided to answer honestly.

Jack nodded sagely. "We tried to make sure we released all your memories in the paintings, but I was worried we may have missed some."

"Paintings?"

"The woman who captured you, she took your memories and turned them into paintings for the labyrinth. She said she was going to feed on them."

Castiel couldn't suppress a shudder as he remembered the sensation of fingers burrowing into his chest, down to his grace. He reached up to place a hand over his heart, feeling it beating within. It was over and he was safe and back home, and it sounded like Pasiphaë was dead now.

Jack stood. "I should tell Sam and Dean you're awake. They've been worried."

"Thank you, Jack," Castiel called as he headed for the door.

Jack paused, then turned around, shifting his weight awkwardly. "Castiel, the memories…I know I wasn't seeing the whole story, but I saw a lot, felt a lot from them…"

Castiel tensed. What memories exactly was he talking about?

Jack looked uncomfortable as he wavered near the door. "You've told me you've made mistakes, that you understand what it's like to hurt someone you love."

Castiel nodded carefully. "Yes…because it's true."

"Why have you never told me the stories behind them?"

He looked away. "Jack, I… I'm sorry. I'm ashamed of many things in my past, and I wanted to be a good teacher to you, like you seemed to think I'd be."

"Why would you assume the truth would make you a bad teacher?" he asked. "Dean said you learned from your mistakes, that you always tried to do the right thing. That's all I want, too."

Castiel's heart broke with empathy for the boy. "I know, Jack. I was just afraid that if you knew some of the things I'd done…" He shook his head. "The Winchesters have been very gracious to forgive them, but that's a reflection on them and not me. I didn't want…" He sighed, shoulders sagging with resignation. "I didn't want you to despise me the way the rest of the angels do."
Jack frowned, and he moved away from the door to retake his seat. "I could never despise you, Castiel. From the moment I felt your grace, I knew you were good. Knowing about the times you weren't, it makes me feel like we have a lot more in common than I could have ever realized. It reaffirms my belief that my mother was right to trust you, that I was right to trust you. That…there is more that unites us than divides us."

Castiel stared at the young boy, maturing more and more each day. He smiled. "You're right. I'm sorry I didn't trust you with some of those things earlier. I didn't want you to make the same mistakes I did, but keeping silent about what those were isn't going to achieve that. I'll try to be more open from now on," he promised.

Jack nodded, seemingly satisfied, and stood up again. "I'll get Sam and Dean."

Castiel thought about getting out of bed and going to find them himself, but just sitting up had winded him and he'd rather not face plant on the floor. But then as Jack left, Castiel's heart sank with sickened horror—what memories had Sam and Dean seen in the labyrinth? They had seen him at his worst, of course, seen some of the things he was most ashamed of. But there were plenty of others, too…

Footsteps jolted him and he looked up as both Winchesters entered the room, their faces lighting up with relief.

"Cas, hey," Sam breathed. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired," he admitted. "But grateful to have woken up here instead of…that other place."

A haunted look flickered in the brothers' eyes for a split moment before they quickly cleared it.

"You hungry?" Dean asked.

Castiel smiled softly. Food was Dean's primary method of caregiving. "Maybe later. You're all okay? You weren't hurt in the labyrinth?"

Dean rolled his eyes. "We're fine. You were the one we almost lost."

The unspoken and grief-stricken again weighed palpably in the air.

"I'm sorry."

"It wasn't your fault," Sam immediately responded. "I'm just glad we found you in time."

A flash of Sam holding his hand and urging him to hold on flitted through Castiel's mind.

"How did you find me?" he asked, still astonished by that.

"When you went dark, we went looking for you," Dean replied, tone a tad stiff. "Couldn't find anything. It was like you'd just disappeared into thin air. But since you weren't near the Heaven portal and we'd talked about you going up there without telling us, we figured it was something else. So we called Rowena, and she found the labyrinth. Cast a spell so we could find our way back out and not get lost ourselves."

That was a relief. Castiel had been so caught up in finding himself back home he hadn't considered the Winchesters and Jack could have recklessly lost themselves while coming to look for him.

"Thank you," he said.
Dean's expression was grim. "You know we'd always come for you, right?"

Castiel blinked. "Of course."

"I mean really," he pressed. "I know we haven't always been there in the past…"

Castiel closed his eyes in mortification. Right, the memories.

"Things are different now, Dean," he said. "I know what you and Sam would do for me. We're family."

Dean swallowed roughly. "Okay. Just wanna make sure."

Castiel gazed at him sympathetically. He knew in the past the Winchesters might not have looked for him. Dean might have yelled at and berated him when—if—he'd eventually found his way back. He knew if he had managed to escape the labyrinth on his own, he wouldn't even have mentioned the ordeal to them.

But that was before, and they'd all learned, they'd all grown. As friends, as brothers. And they would share that wisdom with Jack in the hopes that he would do better, too.

And no matter how lost one of them became, the others were always there to find them and bring them home.

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