Angeles

by xxenjoy

Summary

Ten years after his best friend moves away, Dean's struggling with his life. He ends up finding a job in LA where Cas moved to so many years ago, and because he's desperate, he looks him up. Dean and Cas get in touch again, but Dean's not so sure he fits into Cas' life anymore, as much as he wants to.

Written for the DeanCasBigBang 2019

Notes

I've wanted to participate in the DCBB for years and up until this year, I've chickened out every time. Thanks to all the lovely mods for keeping it going long enough for me to get my shit together, thanks to Ninjasoulreaper27 for being a great partner and creating some beautiful art to go along with this story!

Beta'd by the lovely australis290 - thanks for suffering through my excess of commas and dropped words <3
Dean's been mulling over the idea of going to California for weeks now. The job is simple enough - it's cars, and Dean knows cars - but it's not the job that's giving him pause, rather the fact that Los Angeles is halfway across the country from here. He needs the job, but the idea of traveling - especially flying - that far just for work makes his stomach churn. It's not like he has anything going on here, though, and he's pretty much exhausted the options in Lawrence. Bobby's been generous enough to keep him on part-time at the salvage yard, but Dean knows he doesn't really need the extra help and he feels bad for taking Bobby's money.

Maybe it won't be so bad. He really does need the work because his savings dried up and Sam's been paying rent which Dean really can't let go on for very long. He's constantly feeling hopeless because he can't find work, or guilty because Sam or Jo or Aaron is paying for his portion of whatever this month. He's not overjoyed about the idea, but maybe a new city is his only option - at least for the time being.

He doesn't expect Sam to be particularly thrilled about it either, but he doesn't expect it to go as badly as it does.

"Los Angeles?" Sam asks incredulously, turning to frown at him. "Isn't that a little far?"
"Sure, it's not down the street," Dean agrees, buttoning his shirt and raising his eyes to the mirror - just high enough to see Sam's expression in the reflection. "It's pretty much guaranteed, though if I go to the interview. Bobby helped the guy with something or other some years back, I don't know the details."

"What's in California that you can't do here?"

"It's a restoration project. Bobby's friend inherited a classic car collection and he's looking for someone to work on them. Bobby thought it might be good for me."

"I guess. You know it's a twenty-four-hour drive though, right? You wouldn't be able to come home unless you had two days off in a row. Even then, it probably wouldn't be worth the gas money."

"Yeah, uh," Dean shrugs, straightening his shirt before tucking it into his pants. "The thing is, I'd probably live down there for the duration of the project. Find a cheap apartment or something." He can tell Sam is hesitant about that, but he doesn't mention it.

"So what about the interview?"

"They're putting me up in a hotel for a couple nights. I'm flying out." Sam practically chokes but Dean ignores him in favour of grabbing his tie from the dresser. "Tie. Yes? No?"

"Depends if you're trying to impress someone," Sam deadpans. Dean puts the tie back in his dresser drawer and unbuttons the collar of his shirt. "You're flying though?" Sam persists, "you?"

"Yup," Dean replies, nonchalant, adjusting his sleeves.

"This isn't just about some job, is it?"

"What are you talking about?" Dean smiles as he shakes his head, but internally, he's freaking out. He knows what Sam's getting at - he's been thinking the same thing since Bobby told him where the job is. Swallowing back the anxious lump that jumps into his throat, Dean straightens up and turns to check himself out in the mirror.

"Dean, you hate flying."

"Yeah Sam, and I need a job. I've been working less the last six months than I did back in high school and I can't let you keep paying all the bills. I need to find something more permanent, even if it is out-of-state."

"Huh," Sam starts and Dean recognizes that stupid, smug tone. He always ends up getting in shit when Sam uses that tone. "Y'know, it's funny. You refused to take that maintenance job last month and now you're more than willing to hop on a plane to California for an interview?"

"Germs, Sammy. Do you have any idea how much disgusting shit is involved in maintenance jobs? Mold, sludge, slime- I don't even want to think about it. Sam's expression is doubting and tired when Dean looks at him.

"So it's all about the germs, then, huh?"

"Yep."

"And this offer is from Bobby?"

"A friend of his but yeah, Bobby told me about it."
"Restoring old cars."

"Yeah, Sam. Where are you going with this?"

"Dean, LA is so far away, especially for a job that's gonna last what? A couple of months max?"

"Depends on the condition of the cars," Dean shrugs, crossing to the closet. He pulls his navy blazer off its hanger and slips his arms through the sleeves. "Depends if I can get the parts I need, if I need to replace any of the upholstery- why are we still having this conversation? I thought you'd be glad that I finally found something?"

"Dean you know why we're still talking about this. It's LA. If it was... I dunno, New York or something, I wouldn't ask, but Cas-"

"Don't," Dean warns and the finality in his voice surprises even him. His whole body tenses up at the mention of the name and the rest of Sam's sentence is swallowed up by the blood pounding in his ears. He can feel Sam's eyes on him.

Cas is a touchy subject and Sam knows better than to just bring him up like that. He knows, so Dean doesn't know what he's trying to prove by bringing him up so casually now. Sure, maybe he's all Dean's been able to think about since Bobby mentioned the job, but that doesn't give Sam the right to just throw it out there like it's nothing; so what if Dean's making important decisions on the slimmest of slim odds? That's his problem to deal with.

Just like this stupid reunion.

"I've got to get ready," he says tonelessly and he can feel practically feel Sam sigh at him.

"Look that's another thing. What's with the whole eager to see your old classmates bullshit? You practically vowed never to see any of those people again after high school."

"A man can change, Sam. Besides, there are a few old friends I'd like to see." No mentions of dark hair and too-blue eyes, just a few old friends.

Sam is clearly doubtful, but he doesn't argue anymore and he leaves the room with a sigh. As soon as the door shuts behind him, Dean's shoulders slump and he runs a hand through his hair distractedly. He's nervous; the flight and the interview are constantly on his mind lately and he wasn't going to go to this reunion, but it's the ten-year reunion. If you're gonna go to a high school reunion, it's gonna be the ten year, right? At least that's Dean's thinking.

Fuck. Sometimes he hates how well Sam knows him; he's right, of course. Dean has always said there was nothing in the world that could get him to go to any of his high school reunions. High school was a shitty time for him and he doesn't want to see any of the people who made it that way grow up beautiful and successful. There's a very limited group of people from that period of his life that he cares about these days and of them, only one isn't living in Lawrence. He skipped the five-year without any regret - even after Jo filled him in on all the drama - but this is the big one and Dean's feeling hopeful.

Initially, he had decided against this one too, but he'd found one of his mother's old photo albums and that combined with the discovery of his old yearbook had been enough to change his mind. It's not like Cas is ever out of his mind. Hell not even 1500 miles and three states between them was enough to stop Dean from thinking about him, even after all this time. He's the one person Dean is hoping against hope to see - and the one person who probably won't be there. Still. The ache in his chest is the same as it was ten years ago, Dean can still barely look at his picture in the yearbook,
and with dreadful hope, he announced he was going to his ten-year reunion. Jo and Aaron had been remarkably neutral about it, but Sam’s been skeptical ever since - not that Dean can blame him.

He glances in the mirror one last time before shrugging his blazer off and hanging it on the back of the chair.

T-minus two hours.

The next two hours go by altogether too slowly and much faster than Dean is comfortable with. The anxious twist in his stomach is getting worse by the minute and when the time comes to actually leave, he has to force himself out the door, pretending like everything is okay so he doesn't give Sam any more ammunition than he's already got.

Even after ten years, he could probably make the drive to the school with his eyes closed and tonight he's relying heavily on muscle memory. He pulls into the parking lot, parking as close as he can with the amount of traffic. He looks up at the school and scowls at it, pushing away the flood of bad memories. Tonight will be different, he tells himself. They're all adults now and the dumb shit they used to do as kids is behind them. For the hundredth time tonight, he adjusts his collar, checking his reflection in the rearview mirror before climbing out of the car and heading for the front door.

Right at the entrance, Lisa Braeden and Cole Trenton are standing behind a folding table, handing out wristbands and name tags. Lisa smiles when she sees him, but Dean finds it hard to feel anything but guilty seeing her here tonight; they dated for a while, but Dean finds it hard to feel anything but guilty seeing her here tonight; they dated for a while, but like everyone else, she got tired of coming second to his friendship with Cas and gave up. She's married to Cole now - Dean remembers seeing the announcement in the paper a year or so back - and they're expecting their first kid. He would be lying if he said he wasn't envious, but ten years and the perspective of distance allows him to feel happy for her as well.

They don't see each other often, but Lisa is always happy to see him when they do, and tonight she comes around the side of the table and greets him with a fierce hug.

"Didn't think you'd come tonight," she says and Dean shrugs, pulling back with a grin.

"I didn't think so either."

He stays for a couple of minutes while Lisa makes up his name tag, but soon more people start to arrive and Dean sneaks off to get out of the way.

The main event is in the gym and Dean makes his way down the halls. It's funny how much smaller everything seems, but that always seems to be the way going back to places from your childhood. The gym is dark, lit only but a few strings of lights around the edges of the room and the reflection off an old disco ball that they dragged out from God knows where. It's reminiscent of the very few school dances Dean let himself get dragged along to, and as he looks around, he's glad to find he's not the only one who looks like they want to run and hide.

There are a few people he recognizes, like Chuck at the bar, but for the most part, Dean's drawing a blank. It's not like he was really close with, well, anyone back then but he thought he might recognize more of them than this. He wanders around with his drink, having brief conversations with a couple people but moving on from them fairly quickly. He comes to a stop by the folded-up bleachers, watching the few people who are actually dancing. The music is the awful 90s crap that was bad enough when it was popular but they seem to be going with a theme tonight.
Briefly, Dean wishes he hadn't spent his entire high school life at home or at Jo’s mom’s bar. Changing that, he could have been one of those people who went out and did things and then he might have things to talk to these people about now. The trade-off for the slightly lacklustre social life had led to Cas though, and considering that he wouldn’t actually change anything if he could go back

It's not that he was actively unpopular in school, but Cas definitely was and when Dean started hanging out with him, he lost the respect of anyone who may have had it for him in the first place. Maybe kids are just assholes and assume things based on who you hang around with, but maybe they knew before Dean did that his relationship with Cas was different. It's better now, the rampant homophobia isn't quite as blatant in Lawrence as it was when he was a kid - or maybe they all just grew up - but for Dean those memories are burned into his mind and maybe that's why at 28 years old, he still hasn't told anyone he's bisexual. Well, no one who didn't already know.

He doesn't expect Cas to be here. He never really did; Cas hated these people more than Dean did and he left Kansas for a reason. Dean wishes he was here though, even if just to keep him from feeling quite so secluded in a sea of people that he should know. It's like high school all over again; the feeling of not belonging, the desperate ache in his chest for something he knows he can't have - and garbage music.

He sighs and plops himself down on the edge of the bleachers. He could never blame Cas for not coming back here, especially not to something like this, and he realizes thinking about it, that he never really believed he would in the first place.

Jo and Aaron will be here in a little while - a look at his watch tells him probably sooner rather than later - but Dean's still considering calling it a night and heading home to watch Friends reruns in bed. Or they're marathoning Star Wars on the sci-fi channel and he could probably rope Sam into watching that with him. Jo and Aaron will forgive him, and they probably won't even miss him much - Jo had a much wider social circle than Dean did back then. He's weighing the pros and cons of ditching two of his best friends when someone calls out his name.

"Hey! Winchester!"

It wouldn't throw him off if he hadn’t just been through the whole gym without recognizing a damn person - not anyone who would actively call out to him anyway. He spins around, looking for a body to match to the vaguely familiar voice, scanning the crowd until he spots someone coming toward him, waving. She's short, all long hair and soft curves all wrapped up in a little black dress and Dean recognizes her immediately, but it's no wonder he didn't notice her at first. He's still gawking as she comes up and leans against the bleachers above him.

"Heya Dean," she drawls, pushing her hair back behind her ears. "Never expected to see you here."

"Me neither," he huffs. "Jesus, Meg I didn't think I'd ever hear myself say it, but it's damn good to see you. You look good."

"I could say the same about you. You still living in town?"

"Yeah, Sam and I are sharing a place with a couple of old friends. You remember Jo Harvelle and Aaron Bass?"

Meg pulls a face. "Vaguely?"

Dean huffs a laugh. "Different circles."
He's not entirely sure why he's so happy to see Meg after so long. Obviously, they've both done a lot of growing up, but they hated each other in high school - the only reason they ever had any contact at all was Cas. Being his two best friends, there were occasions when they were forced to get along for Cas’ sake, whether they liked it or not. And maybe that's what it is tonight; she and Dean are missing the same person and it's good to be able to share that with someone.

"Yeah," she agrees quietly. "So, what was it that got you here tonight? I would've bet money you wouldn't come anywhere near here ever again."

"I uh..." he contemplates lying to her, but if anyone can understand the desperation to see Cas again, it's Meg. "I was kinda hoping he'd," he shrugs, glancing up to meet her eyes. "Well, y'know."

"Yeah, I get that. Take it that means you haven't heard anything?"

"No. I'm assuming no news is good news, though - and he was with Gabe, so," Meg shifts a little uncomfortably and Dean rubs the back of his neck.

"Probably," she agrees, then pauses, "how are things with you?"

"Honestly? Not great. I'm out of work right now, but I'm gettin' by. You?"

She nods and smiles. "I bought that old art gallery building down by the park and I turned it into a coffee shop. Cas would love it. You'd probably hate it."

"You never know, I'm a lot more accepting than I used to be."

"You should come down and visit sometime."

"Yeah, definitely. How'd you end up with a coffee shop anyway?"

"My fiance used to own a bakery until his partner dropped out on him, so we opened it together. He handles the food side of things and I basically do the decorating and customer service aspect of it."

"So no plans to leave here anytime soon?" he asks.

"Nah, we're happy here. The wedding's in a couple of months and we're looking at houses so, this is pretty much it for me. How about you?"

Dean's stomach flips at the very thought of LA and he's not exactly eager to talk about it because he's not sure if he's even going to take the job yet. Apparently he takes too long to respond because Meg shoves him over and sits down next to him.

"How about you?"

"I have a potential job interview out-of-state, but I don't know. It's pretty far out just for work."

"Like, permanent work, or-? Because travelling out of state for work sucks. I did it for about a year before I couldn't handle the commute anymore."

"It's sort of a project thing, so I'd just move out there until it's over."

"Out where?"

"California. Los Angeles." He exhales slowly because Meg knows exactly what this means for him and it shows when she looks at him.
"Cali, huh?"

"Believe me, I know."

"You should do it. Go to the interview at least. It'll be good to get out of Lawrence for a little while anyway, right?"

"It would only be for a weekend for the interview, but you're probably right. I'll think about it, I've got a week or so to get back to the owner and let him know."

"Would you look him up?" she asks and Dean's been waiting for this exact question.

"No, I don't think so. I want to, but it's been eleven years, who's to say he even wants to see me." He shakes his head. "He might not even be there anymore."

"True. It'd just be good to hear from him again."

"Yeah."

There's a lull in the conversation and Dean goes back to watching the people around them before Meg asks about Sam. Dean tells her about Sam's girlfriend and how he thinks they're due to get engaged any time now. Meg tells him about her sister - the one who's on her third divorce - and it makes Dean feel a bit better about his own life. He may be single going on six years now, but at least he hasn't found the wrong person three times.

Aaron and Jo arrive a little while later and after Dean re-introduces them to Meg they get along pretty well - funny, he thinks, how ten years can make so much of a difference. The two of them stay and chat for a little while before heading out to find their own friends, but Dean stays with Meg, catching up on years of what could have been an amazing friendship. It's just after eleven when he decides to head out and Meg is nearly dozing off next to him, so she agrees.

She walks out to the parking lot with him but declines a ride home because she only lives around the block. She pulls Dean into a hug.

"I'm sorry about everything before. Wish we'd smartened up earlier."

"Yeah," Dean agrees, "but it's kinda hard to like someone when they're fucking the guy you're in love with."

"Shut up," Meg punches him in the arm and Dean smiles down at her.

"I'm sorry, too."

They exchange contact information because Meg insists on knowing how the interview goes - even after Dean reminds her that he hasn't decided if he'll do it yet - and Dean watches after her until she's out of sight before climbing into the car. He texts Jo to tell her he'll see her and Aaron back at home.

Tonight was surprisingly successful and he's feeling better after talking to Meg; she may be doing way better than he is, but their conversation made him feel like he can still make something of himself, maybe starting with a job in Los Angeles. After talking to her, he's pretty much made up his mind about it, but he decides to sleep on it and he can call back in the morning - it's too late now anyway.

He pulls out of the parking lot, turning down the radio to think on his way home. When he gets there, Sam is already in his room - Jess is probably over - and Dean makes for his own bedroom,
stripping out of his clothes and spending the time to hang them up before getting into bed. The sheets are cold, but he doesn't bother getting up to turn the heat on. He's exhausted and they'll warm up soon enough.

The next afternoon Dean calls Benny's assistant to let her know he'll be out for the interview. She's far more excited than Dean thinks she should be, but he's glad for it because it encourages him.

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With the hard part over, the next eight days pass in a blur of nervous anticipation. He's had a couple of shifts with Bobby to make some extra money for the trip because even if the hotel is being paid for, he'll have to feed himself at some point. He packs and unpacks so many times he can't even remember what he's bringing with him and he asks Sam so many times if he'll be okay while Dean's away that Jo actually comes up into his room and reminds him that she and Aaron live there too, and if Sam really needs anything, they can help.

She's overly sarcastic about it and Dean turns away from her with an exaggerated scowl while Sam just shakes his head at the pair of them and reminds them that he is, in fact, an adult and can take care of himself.

On the morning of his flight, Dean wakes up early, pulling on jeans and a comfortable shirt, and doing his best to act like he's not on the verge of throwing up at the prospect of sitting on a plane for three and a half hours. He heads for the kitchen, banging on Sam's door on his way down the hall.

"Rise and shine Sammy, I'm making bacon and I'm not waiting for you if you're gonna sleep all day."

Outwardly, he's impressed with his facade, but inwardly he feels like a five-year-old who's just starting kindergarten and his mother has left him alone for the first time. He glances up at the clock in the kitchen; three hours until they have to leave, and even if it's likely to come back up again, he's determined to eat something before he flies.

Sam makes an appearance half an hour later - when Dean's already sitting down and eating his own breakfast - in time to avoid doing dishes. Dean would be more annoyed about it if he wasn't looking for any and every excuse not to think about his impending flight. He finishes the last of his bacon and pushes himself up, crossing over to the kitchen sink.

"So," Sam starts, swallowing a mouthful of toast, "you excited?"

"Not exactly the words I would use, but I am looking forward to the interview." It's not totally a lie, but they both know he hasn't been able to stop moving for the past two days, and right now the only thing he's thinking about is the journey there. Sam nods and takes another bite of his toast, but there's something he's not saying.

"What is it?" Dean asks, turning around to look at him.

"What?"

"Don't play dumb Sam, tell me what you're thinking."

"It's just- you know Cas is in LA."

"I know Cas moved to LA," Dean agrees.

"Are you gonna meet up with him while you're there?"
"No," Dean says certainly. He's not; it's been too long and Dean's a different person than he was back in high school. Cas doesn't need any reminders of that time and Dean isn't totally sure he wants to know what Cas is up to; he's fully prepared to find him married with kids and he's not sure even ten years apart could prepare him for that. "It's been too long Sam, things have changed - he probably doesn't even remember me."

"Doubtful," Sam scoffs and for the sake of keeping the peace, Dean pretends like he doesn't hear him. Truthfully, he does want to see Cas, though preferably from a distance. He still feels an innate need to check up on him, to make sure he's okay, but he doesn't want Cas to see him because that would make things too complicated.

When he's finished the majority of the dishes, Dean heads back to his room to get the last few things together, leaving Sam to clean up after himself. He's got a book and his phone for music, though he doesn't think either of them will actually be enough to distract him on the flight, and he kind of wishes he was bringing someone along with him. Half an hour until they have to leave for the airport and the anxiety has him pacing, so he double-checks that he has everything and goes to help Sam finish tidying up the kitchen.

Dean drives to the airport because this is the last thing he will be able to control for a while and to his surprise, Sam doesn't even complain but he does give him a concerned look as he slides into the passenger seat. The radio is on and Dean does his best to focus on that, listening intently as they describe the forecast for the next couple of days. Sam waits with him at the drop-off zone, staying long enough to say goodbye and to insist that Dean calls him when he lands, then he slides into the driver's side and pulls away from the curb. Dean watches after him, adjusting the bag on his shoulder, and then turns into the building, heading for the departure zone.

Meg is waiting for him just in front of the check-in area and Dean flashes her a quick smile, strolling over to meet her. After cancelling their coffee date three times due to panic or stress or the inability to leave his house due to exhaustion, Meg had insisted she at least see him off before he headed out. It works out better this way anyway because airports make him anxious and on top of the job interview and going to LA in general, Dean doesn't need any extra stress.

"Excited?" she asks and Dean gives her a look.

"I hate planes."

"That's fair. At least it's only a couple hours, right?"

"Yeah, true."

"Are you gonna look him up when you get there?"

Dean chuckles and pushes his hair back, resting his hand on the back of his neck. "Sam asked me the same thing this morning."

"And?"

"I don't know. I might," he shrugs, "but I'm not gonna see him."

"How come?"

"I uh, I want to see him. More than anything. I... I miss him so damn much but I don't want to just show up unannounced. He's got a new life now and I don't fit anymore."
"You really believe that?" she asks. "After everything, I think of all people, he'd want to see you."

"Yeah, maybe." Dean checks his watch; honestly, he doesn't know how Cas would react to seeing him again after so long and he's not sure he wants to find out. "I should probably get going."

"Way to avoid the question. I expect you to let me know how things go okay?"

"Yes ma'am," he grins, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. "Thanks for coming, I'll see you when I get back."

"I'm serious!" she calls after him, "call me when you're settled, let me know how things go! Say hi to Cas for me!"

Dean shakes his head and grins to himself as he heads for the check-in counter. He remembers Meg being stubborn, but he's never really been on the receiving end of it and it's a wholly different experience than listening to Cas groan about it. Still, he's thankful he has her to talk to.

He checks in and the attendant gives him a wide smile before wishing him a good flight and Dean offers him a smile in return before heading for his gate. When he gets there, the seats are far from full, but he takes a seat in the corner anyway, hiding himself away. He's joined by a woman with two small children, a teenager who - surprisingly - looks less comfortable with the whole situation than Dean is, and a young couple sitting on either side of a service dog. The guy smiles when he catches Dean looking at them and Dean smiles back, ducking his head and turning back to his phone.

He flips through the music until he finds *The Rain Song* - if that doesn't calm him down, nothing will.

There's only a fifteen minute wait until his plane starts boarding, but in that time, the gate becomes crowded, and all Dean can think about is how much all these people will weigh inside a giant metal box.

He joins the line to board, handing over his boarding pass when asked, and finding his seat quickly. He's in the aisle, so he doesn't have to look out the window as they take off, but he grips the armrests a little tighter than strictly necessary.

He shuts his eyes and tries to focus on his music, but nothing can distract him from the fact that he's about to be thousands of feet in the air in a vehicle that should not at all be able to fly. He hums along to the music, outwardly projecting the look of an enthusiastic passenger, but the image of flames and twisted metal push themselves to the forefront of his mind.
When he wakes up, Dean is hunched over with his head on the table in front of him and his back aches when he tries to straighten up. He groans and checks the map on the seat in front of him, but it won't load. He has no idea how long they've been in the air or how long he was asleep, but every muscle in his body complains when he tries to stretch - not the easiest thing in a cramped airplane - and he winces at the sensation. Around him, people are pressing their faces up against the windows, and Dean assumes that must mean they're close; there's no other good reason to look outside of a plane while you're still in the air.

There's a dull ding-dong and one of the flight attendants comes over the speaker, announcing that they will be landing shortly in Los Angeles and for everyone to put on their seatbelts. Dean's hasn't been undone since his ass hit the seat, so he just settles further back into his seat and waits as patiently as he can, given the situation.

As they start the descent, his stomach flips and he grips the armrests tight. Thankfully, his neighbour is understanding and she doesn't complain about having nowhere to put her right arm. Part of him wishes he was drunk right now because it would make the next fifteen minutes a whole lot easier, but there's a bigger part that says if he ends up running into Cas - he pretends not to realize how minimal the odds of that happening actually are - he'd rather be sober. God knows he'd probably make an idiot out of himself anyway, he doesn't need the added help. Bitterly, he sits through the landing sober.

By the time they do touch down, he's glad he decided against staying an extra day. While it would have given him longer to prepare himself for the interview, it would also have given him extra time to think about Cas. As it is, he’s already anxious about being in the same city - potentially - he doesn’t need any extra time to dwell on it. He’s anxious, sure, but having spoken to Benny’s assistant a couple of times, he’s sure he’ll be comfortable enough with her to not blow the entire interview. Besides, it's not the interview that’s tying his stomach in knots.

He’s past the hardest part now, though. All he has to do now is check in to his hotel and he can spend the day relaxing in preparation for tomorrow. It’ll go well, he tells himself, and then he’ll be able to actually enjoy his time in LA for a little while before flying home.

When it's finally his turn to leave he rises and apologizes to the woman next to him, but she's unfazed, and just wishes him a better flight on his way home. He shuffles into line and makes his way slowly off the plane. Once his feet are back on solid ground he feels a lot better, though the underlying current of anxiety doesn't go away, and he'd be an idiot to pretend it had anything to do with flying.

He stops in the food court at the airport because although it may be more expensive, it’s easy to find and he'd rather not make too many stops along the way. He's exhausted despite his nap, or maybe because of it, and he just wants to crash but eating will make him feel better. He stops for a few minutes to find a wrap to go, eating it on his way out to the parking lot and by the time he's finished, he's already feeling better. Dean shifts his bag onto his shoulder as he makes for the exit; with any luck, he can catch a cab right from the airport and end up right at the hotel without any hassle.

When he steps out onto the sidewalk, the sun is shining brightly and it's warmer than he was expecting, so ends up shrugging off his denim jacket as he hails a taxi. A green car pulls up alongside the sidewalk and Dean ducks into the back seat, giving the driver the address of the hotel.

Dean's staying at a place downtown and settles with his head against the window to watch the cars
and buildings flash by. He’s never been this far west and though the scenery is different the people walking down the street and driving the other cars are still clearly just people. His thoughts fight out of his control and soon he’s trying to find what it was that drew Gabriel and Cas to this city. He ignores the itch that has him staring in each car, trying to find his old best friend. There are millions of people here; no use staying vigilant because of false hope.

They arrive at the hotel and Dean pays for the cab before making his way into the lobby. Check-in is quick, but the room isn’t ready for him yet so he leaves his bag with reception and heads out into the streets to explore before he can come back and get into his room.

The second he steps out into the sun his mind escapes his control again and all he can think of is Cas - what if he runs into him? does he live around here? maybe works close by? He tries to keep his mind focused on his surroundings and to not act on every random impulse he that crosses his mind. He does pretty well - he even considers going down to the beach for a little while, but then he passes an information center and his carefully constructed determination crumbles to the ground. Before he knows what he's doing, he crosses to the road to the little place on the corner and he's pushing the door open.

The center is just a small room with a large desk dividing the room in half with as many map books and pamphlets crammed into the space as possible. There's a cheerful-looking blonde woman standing behind the counter, leaning over a tear-off map of the city and when she sees Dean, she grins widely at him.

"Good morning," she says, "how can I help ya?"

Dean approaches slowly, considering what he's going to say to make himself sound less like a stalker than he feels. "Hi," he smiles, "you don't happen to have a local phone book, do you?"

"You betcha." She ducks down behind the counter, returning with a thick book and placing it on the counter between them.

"Thanks uh," he looks down to the nametag on her shirt, "Donna."

"Not a problem. Let me know if you need anything else, alright?"

Dean nods and as Donna turns away, he pulls the phone book closer with trembling hands. He's so close to potentially tracking Cas down, to getting a phone number or an address - and what is he going to do with that? He doesn't think too much about it before opening to book and flipping through until he finds the M section. He scans each page carefully so he doesn't accidentally miss it, then looks it over again. There are a couple of Miltons, even a Cas Mitchell, but nothing that matches what he's looking for. With one final look, he shuts the book and sighs.

He feels defeated, but there was never much hope to begin with; it's been ten years and the chances of Cas still being in LA and slim especially considering it was never his choice to move out here in the first place. There's one more option, and it's even more of a long shot considering Cas isn't in the phone book. He could always search for him online but chances are if Cas isn't listed anywhere he can call him, he doesn't want to be found and Dean's going to respect that. But first, he's going to call the operator.

"Mind if I borrow your phone?" he asks and Donna turns to him with a smile.

"Go for it," she chirps, sliding the phone closer to Dean.

"Thank you." Dean picks up the receiver and inhales slowly, almost afraid to complete the call. He
could do this at any time, he could wait and call from outside on his own phone, but this way feels more anonymous and he doesn’t know whether he’s really prepared to face Cas yet so anonymity is what he needs. When the voice picks up on the other end, Dean barely remembers to speak.

"You've reached the operator."

"Hey, uh, hi. I'm looking for a phone number, the name is Castiel Milton." There's a few moments' silence before the dull voice returns.

"I have no number for that name."

"Right, okay. Thanks." He replaces the receiver with a downhearted sigh and tilts his head to the woman behind the counter. "Thanks for letting me use your phone." At least now maybe he can focus on the interview and stop worrying about a reunion that won't happen.

"No problemo."

Dean turns to leave, but Donna stops him.

"I didn't mean to overhear, but did you say Castiel?" Dean's eyes flash up to hers and he nods. "I don't know any Castiel Milton, but there's a Castiel Novak at the university a couple of blocks over. He was my best friend's Lit professor last year. I don't think there are too many Castiel's in the city."

"No," Dean agrees, "me neither."

"Friend of yours?"

"Old friend, yeah." Dean grins despite himself, rubbing his hands on his thighs, "thank you, Donna."

"I'm here to help," she beams. Dean wishes there was something more he could do to convey his appreciation, but he doesn't quite know how. Donna scribbles down directions to the university and tells him it's only a fifteen-minute walk away. Her smile sticks with him as he heads back out onto the street.

Right now he has two choices; he could continue on his way, wandering around the city until his room is ready or he could go to the university now and see if this Castiel Novak is his Cas. The sun is hotter than he's used to beating down on his shirt and he regrets wearing black, but he needs to think and outside in the fresh air is the best place to do that. For now, he keeps to the sidewalk, heading in the general direction Donna gave him but not directly toward the university.

If he gets this job, this is where he's going to be living for a while and it's not like he's working twelve hours a day. This could be his life - he can't exactly hide away in some hotel or apartment every day. He knows Benny’s assistant - Charlie - is going to be his partner on the project, maybe they'll hang out sometimes; get drinks after work or go down to the beach in the evenings. Hell, maybe Dean could even start dating out here. Lawrence isn't the smallest city in the world, but it's sure as hell not Los Angeles and there are significantly more people here, who knows what could happen.

It's a nice thought, but he doesn't even have a job yet and he should probably worry about that first before he considers the rest of his life here. Once again, he’s glad he doesn’t have the extra time he had planned on because Castiel Novak lives in LA and now that he knows this, it's the only thing he can think of. All he has to distract himself from this though is his new fantasy of living in LA - something that might not even happen - and that wouldn’t get him through an additional twenty-four hours.
But what if he's wrong about this whole thing? What if Cas would want to see him too? There was a point when it felt like the two of them against the world, and at least as far as Dean was concerned. No one else was more important to him. He likes to think that Cas would want to see him, but this would be so much easier if he could just call him.

He thinks about it a lot, weighing the pros and cons of visiting the university when he almost stumbles into a fountain and looks up to find a building looming over him with a sign to his right that reads ‘Welcome to University of Southern California’. His stomach feels like it's about to jump out of his throat. Well, if there was ever a time to do this, it's now. With a steadying breath, he jogs up the front steps amongst the dozens of other people coming and going.

Time seemingly skips again and he's standing in the Admin Building shifting anxiously from side to side as the receptionist finishes talking on the phone. Her name tag reads Karen and she seems friendly enough judging from the call, but she's the only thing standing between him and potentially seeing Cas again, and Dean's heart is thudding against his ribcage. She flashes him an apologetic smile and Dean returns the gesture with some effort, hoping it comes across the way he means it to.

When she finally hangs up, she smiles up at him. "So sorry about that, how can I help you this morning?"

"I'm looking for someone," he starts, straining to keep his voice steady, "um, Castiel Novak?"

Karen nods assuringly, "Doctor Novak is delivering a lecture at the moment, but he shouldn't be too much longer." She gives him directions to the auditorium and Dean nearly stumbles into the counter as he thanks her.

Doctor Novak. Holy shit. The new information does exactly nothing to ease the churning in his stomach, but it swirls with something like pride.

He finds the door to the auditorium after asking a passerby if he's headed in the right direction and he can't stand the anticipation, so pushes the door open as quietly and slowly as he can, slipping into the back of the room and taking an aisle seat with no one next to it. There are two empty chairs before the next person, and the guy in question gives him an approving up and down before turning back to the front of the class. The second Dean turns away, the guy is out of his mind completely and he can barely hear himself over his own heartbeat. His mind races with thoughts of what he's going to say - explanations of why he's here - and Dean has to remind himself more than once to keep breathing.

He freezes when he finally brings himself to look down at the front of the room, and looking back, he'd say he actually stopped breathing altogether. The students have been talking, asking questions and commenting on the lecture, so he hasn't heard him speak yet but to look at him, the man in the front of the room is unequivocally, unmistakably his Cas.

He's noticeably older - ten years will do that to you - and his hair is darker now, almost black, but fuck, that's him. The clench in Dean's stomach gives way to a swell of pride, seeing Cas up there in front of all these students who hang on his words. Cas turns in his direction and Dean's heart skips. Cas was beautiful when they were together, but he was a lanky blonde kid whose clothes were too big for him and now- god. One of the students in the front row says something and Cas' whole face brightens, his nose crinkling as he smiles and Dean's struggling to keep his composure.

He could cry; Cas looks so beautiful, so happy in this new life and Dean is so intensely happy for him. He has to leave.

Without hesitation he moves to stand back up again, to leave Cas where he's happy and successful and go back to the hotel to see if his room is ready. Because this is all he wanted - to make sure Cas is okay. Cas' eyes flick up for the briefest moment before he glances back at his papers and for a split
second he freezes; Dean can actually pinpoint the moment that Cas realizes who it is staring at him from the back of his class. He hides it remarkably well, but Dean can see the shadow of a smile cross Cas' face before he collects himself and returns to his students.

What is he supposed to do now? He can't leave, he knows that much, because Cas has spotted him and leaving now would be a dick thing to do. Is he ready to face Cas though? After seeing him, the chances of throwing himself at him are significantly higher and he doesn't know how any of these kids get any learning done with a fucking sex-on-legs professor like Cas.

Dean's considering his options when the lecture comes to an end and there's a general scuffling while people collect their things and shuffle out of the hall. Cas catches his eyes again from the front of the room, shaking his head with a smile and gesturing for Dean to meet him outside so Dean slips into the stream of people heading out into the hall. There's no way he's turning the offer down now.

Dean leaves the room amongst the crowd, slipping off to one side to wait for Cas. Now that he's here, he has no idea what he's going to say; what do you say to someone you've been pining after for ten years? He fidgets with the hem of his shirt, tapping his foot impatiently against the floor and trying not to pass out.

"Hello, Dean."

_Jesus christ._

He spins on his heel, looking up so quickly that he almost unbalances himself, and when he actually sees Cas, he nearly stops breathing. Yeah, he looks older, but damn does he look better for it and whatever Dean was feeling before; anxiousness, fear or Cas' rejection - it's all gone now and he finally takes a deep breath in. There are so many things that he wants to say, that he wants to ask, but his mouth seems to have stopped working. Luckily, one of them still seems to be functioning like a regular person, and when Cas moves into his space, wrapping his arms around Dean's shoulders, Dean slips into the empty space, pressing his fingers into Cas' coat.

"Fuck, I missed you," he mumbles, and what a fucking time for his mouth to figure out how to work again.

"Me too," Cas hums, and the warmth of his breath against his neck does things to him that Dean doesn't even want to think about right now. He laughs uncertainly, trying to calm himself down before Cas realizes exactly what's going on in his mind. He never wants to let him go again, but they're just standing here in the middle of the hall, and they're already pushing the boundaries of _too long_. He squeezes Cas a little tighter before pulling away and readjusting Cas' glasses, reaching up without thinking to straighten them.

"These are new."

"I got old and my eyes got old with me," Cas jokes, pushing them back up. They're still standing too close, and Dean is acutely aware of it but he doesn't want to move, and when he speaks again, his voice betrays him, soft and altogether too intimate for Cas' workplace.

"They look good," he breathes, "you look good. A little stuffy, but good."

Cas looks down at himself and frowns. "Oh. Oh, no- I had a meeting this morning," he explains, shoving his hands in the pockets of his trench coat and flapping it outward, "this isn't-"

Dean huffs a little laugh, running his fingers over the lapels of his coat, "I was kidding. I mean, it's awful, but it suits you." Cas just watches him, the faintest of smiles tugging at his lips.
"I never thought I'd see you again."

"Yeah," Dean nods solemnly, "me neither. You changed your name."

Cas laughs, a beautiful sound that Dean so rarely heard in the past and he can't help the stupid grin that crosses his face. His cheeks hurt from smiling so damn much, but he can't help himself.

"I did," Cas grins back, "not long after we moved out here, Gabe and I both changed our names." His nose crinkles when he smiles and Dean is trying so hard not to want to kiss him, but Cas is making it incredibly difficult for him.

"Good for you," is all he manages to get out, not trusting his own voice.

"I," Cas starts softly, shaking his head, "there are so many things I want to ask you, and as much as I enjoy standing in the hallway, I have lunch any time now, if you want to grab coffee?"

"I'd love to."

Cas takes him to a little cafe a couple of blocks over, assuring him that it's the best place within walking distance. What he doesn't know is that Dean would happily sit in the dirt on the side of the road if it meant spending even a few more minutes with Cas. They order drinks and sandwiches and sit at a corner table away from everyone else. Cas points out the artwork on the wall attempting to give Dean some sort of explanation of it, but it only serves to remind him of Meg and how he hasn't texted her yet. There is a quick flash of guilt but he's sure when he tells her what happened, she'll forgive him for the delay.

"So," Dean starts, "questions?"

"Uh, yeah-" Cas sits back in his seat, "first of all, how did you find me?"

"I uh," Dean huffs a laugh, "accidentally, sort of. I was looking for Castiel Milton, and someone said you were a professor at the university."

"You were looking for me," Cas says, like he's trying to figure out why.

"I'm in town for a job interview, I couldn't just not look you up."

"What if I had moved?"

He doesn't have a good answer for that. "Dunno, I just kinda hoped for the best."

A sly smile crosses Cas' face, "I'm glad you found me." Dean's heart nearly leaps right out through his throat, and he takes a sip of his water to try and counteract it. "What's the interview for?"

"It's a- well, Bobby's got a friend out here who's inherited a car collection that needs to be restored. I'm here to restore them. Hopefully."

"I'm sure you won't have any trouble with that."

Dean doesn't know what to do with himself; he can't stop smiling, and if he doesn't stop soon Cas is going to start asking very different questions. At least, for the time being, he seems just as happy to see Dean, and honestly, that's all he could ask for. Almost. There's now a little voice in the back of his brain that is constantly whispering to him that Cas is right there, and if he leaned in, just a little, he could kiss him. Dean wants to, more than anything he wants to, but he knows that's not what this is.
"What's wrong?" Cas asks, and he realizes the near-permanent smile has dropped from his face.

"Nothing," Dean grins, and really it's not a lie. So he can't kiss Cas, and that's not exactly ideal, but he's here with him after ten years and nothing could make him happier.

Their food arrives, and their conversation turns toward other things; Cas' students, Dean's life back home with his roommates. It's remarkably easy to talk to him, even after so long, and Dean gets lost in Cas' stories. He doesn't talk much about his early life in Los Angeles, but Dean doesn't blame him. The only thing he reveals is that he was living with Gabriel while he was at school, helping out in the bakery that he bought.

"Of course he owns a bakery," Dean laughs, "does he actually sell anything or does he just eat it all?"

"He got kicked out of the kitchen by his own staff because he couldn't keep his hands out of everything."

"Naturally," Dean grins, "how's he doing?"

"Good. He's really good." Their conversation fades out as they finish their food and Cas checks his watch, muttering a curse as he looks back up at Dean, "I've got to be back at work in five minutes. I'm sorry to run off- um-" he pauses awkwardly, halfway out of his seat. "This might be a little forward, but if you're not busy do you want to come by my place later? If you're in town, I'd love to-"

Dean just barely stops himself from making a stupid joke, smiling up at Cas as he pushes himself out of his seat, "I've got nothing to do until tomorrow."

"I'm finished with work at four if you want to meet me back at the school?"

"I'll be there," Dean promises, and the smile Cas flashes him nearly stops his heart. He stands up and Cas pulls him into a hug that lasts just a little too long, before jotting down his phone number on a napkin. He walks through the front door, waving again through the window, and Dean watches until he's gone before collecting his things, shoving Cas' number in his pocket and heading out after him.

When he's out of sight, Dean fucking beams. Cas is so fucking beautiful, and he's so happy, which is really all Dean ever wanted for him. Even if today is all they ever have, he's good with that because he's just so fucking happy to see his best friend again.

When he gets back to the hotel, his room is ready and as soon as he gets in, he flops down on the bed and pulls out his phone. His intention is just to input Cas' number into his phone, but instead, he finds six new messages and two missed calls.

Shit, he also forgot to call Sam.

Ignoring the singular message that's not from his brother, he calls Sam quickly, apologizing profusely for not calling as soon as he landed.

"So what have you been doing that's so exciting you forgot to call?"

"Took a walk on the beach and passed out early, no big deal."

"And you were too busy to call?"

"I know, I'm sorry." Dean shuts his eyes and hopes that Sam will just drop it. He doesn't like lying to
Sam, but he's not about to tell him that he's been in California for less than twenty-four hours and the very first thing he did was to track down his old best friend who he very well might still be in love with.

"Huh," Sam says, his voice heavy with doubt, "I take it you're enjoying yourself then. You gonna want to live there?"

"Actually," Dean starts, pulling the now crumpled napkin out of his pocket and smoothing it out on the bed, "I think I could get used to it."

"Good, I hope your interview goes well. Any big plans for tonight?"

"No," Dean winces, lying through his teeth again, "probably more of the same. I'm gonna grab dinner at four and probably head to bed early. I should go though, I promised Meg I'd give her a call, and I want to have a shower before I grab dinner."

Sam huffs a laugh at the other end of the line, "Meg huh?"

"Yeah, I know, I ran into her at the reunion and we got to talking. I'll give you a call tomorrow, let you know how things go."

"Yeah," Sam agrees, "let me know. Have a good night, Dean."

"You too." Dean ends the call, quickly tapping out a text to Meg before kicking off his boots.

>> You aren't going to believe the day I've had.

<< How is he?

Dean can picture the look on her face - probably somewhere between unbearably smug and absolutely thrilled - and he smiles to himself.

>> He's so fucking good, Meg. He's great, he's beautiful.

<< He always was.

<< I can't believe you found him.

>> Me neither.

<< How are you holding up?

>> I'm good actually, really damn good. I'm meeting Cas for dinner tonight but if I make it through this trip without doing something stupid, it'll be a miracle.

<< Good luck with that. Say hi to him for me.

<< If you're not too busy.

>> Shut up.

>> I'll call you tomorrow, I'm just about to have a shower.

<< Of course you are. Talk to you tomorrow.

<< Have a good night, Dean.
He taps out a quick you too and sets his phone on the side table. Just a few more hours and he'll be heading back to the university to meet Cas, and then going home with him. It feels like he's walked into an alternate dimension and if he hadn't been there to feel Cas' warmth against him, to see his face for himself, he would almost believe it. He crosses to the bathroom with a stupid grin plastered on his face.

He strips down in the doorway, tossing his clothes back on the bed and trying to keep Cas out of his mind, but the undercurrent of excitement running through him is affecting him in all the wrong ways. His attempts to not think about Cas fail miserably and his cock starts twitching against his thigh. He groans as he steps into the shower stall, turning the water on colder than he normally would. The cool water does nothing to quell his growing erection, and Dean tilts his head back against the tiled wall. He should not be thinking about Cas right now; he should be the furthest thing from his mind while he's contemplating jacking off in the hotel shower. But he can't seem to not think about him; those piercing blue eyes and hair so perfectly placed that he just wants to mess it up just for the sake of it.

Fucking hell.

It's for the best, he tells himself, pushing his palm against the curve of his erection. With everything going through his mind and the overabundance of excitement, it'll help keep him calm when he visits Cas. The last thing he needs is to go and make things awkward now. He shuts his eyes, pulling up the memory of a porn video he watched a few weeks back - a couple of girls at the gym - something as far away from Cas as he can think of right now. He slips his hands over his stomach, rocking his hips into nothingness and tries to keep his mind on the video, holding out as long as he can without touching himself.

When he finally does it's like every other sensation dulls and all he can feel is the brush of his fingers around his cock. Lifting his head, he leans back against the wall, bracing himself with his shoulders and pushing his hips out. He lets his fingers trail up his length, moaning quietly as he rocks into the tunnel of his fist. It's not ideal; a little too wet and not quite smooth enough, but it'll do for now, and it'll hopefully keep him from popping any inappropriate boners when he's with Cas. He groans at the thought, and suddenly the girls in his head turn into a man, well-built with bright blue eyes and a mess of dark hair plastered to his head and fuck. This is not what Dean needs.

He's always thought Cas was beautiful but he's really grown into himself, and the addition of glasses does terrible things to Dean's libido. God, he wants him so badly, with those stupid eyes, and arms that look like he could easily pick Dean up and fuck him against the wall, which jesus christ-

He squeezes the head of his cock, slipping down the wall at his mind plays with the idea of Cas lifting him off the ground and shoving him up against a wall, his hips snapping hard as he fucks into him roughly, his mouth moving impatiently over Dean's neck and jaw.

"Oh fuck."

Dean reaches down between his legs, pushing his hips forward to give himself better access and pressing one finger through the ring of muscle. It burns a little but that only adds to the illusion of Cas fucking him, and he pushes deeper, sitting back on himself as his other hand slides down over his hip and curls back around his cock. He slips another finger in next to the first and presses into himself, gasping as he brushes over his prostate and jacking his cock faster. His balls tighten and he's so fucking close, his imaginary Cas slamming him into the wall and panting against his neck. The thought of Cas coming, balls deep and shaking, is what pushes him over the edge. Dean's orgasm hits hard, knocking the breath out of his as he twists his wrist, stroking himself through the waves of pleasure wash over him.
Dean's gasping when he comes down and his legs are shaking so hard that he finishes sliding down the wall, pulling his fingers out of his ass and dropping his head against his chest. He slips his looped fingers over his cock again and his hips jump at the sensitivity before he lets his hand fall to the floor. Breathing heavily, Dean lets his eyes flutter open and tries to block the inevitable rush of guilt before it hits because he knows it's coming. But he feels really fucking good right now, and at least the rest of his night should go fairly smoothly. The last thing he needs is to go and make shit awkward between him and Cas because he's so ridiculously attracted to him.

It takes him a couple of minutes to catch his breath again, and then he hauls himself up and manages to actually clean himself, washing his hair and rinsing off in even colder water. Eventually, he stumbles out of the bathroom on still-shaky legs and collapses onto the bed face first, loose-limbed and satisfied. He shuffles up the bed until his feet aren't hanging off the edge and curls one arm under his pillow, burying his face in it.

He's done all of nothing so far today, and he's already exhausted.

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When Dean wakes up, he's sprawled over the entire bed, and his mind is still reeling from a particularly vivid dream. He manages to pull himself up and get dressed, and then he heads for the bathroom. One look in the mirror makes him regret falling asleep immediately after his shower because his hair is sticking up in every direction, and even after he wets it again and tries to push it down it refuses to cooperate.

It's still only three, and he doesn't want to head down to the school in this heat just to arrive early and have to sit and wait for Cas for another half hour. He flops down on the couch instead, flicking on the TV and hoping for something to distract him. He flicks through the channels for a while until he finds something that holds his interest for more than five minutes, but even then it's short-lived and he ends up calling a cab early.

The self-doubt doesn't set in until he's been waiting for about five minutes. He's walking down the street towards the Admin building when he asks himself what the hell he's doing here. He was never supposed to meet up with Cas like this, and as much as he wants to see him, he's starting to wonder if maybe Cas forgot about him. His panic is soothed when Cas rounds the corner and his face breaks into a wide smile.

"You're early," Dean quips, and Cas shrugs.

"I told you four because I didn't want you to have to wait for me if I ran late. I wasn't even sure you would show up."

"I-" Cas spins around as a hand clamps down on his shoulder.

"Hello, Cassie."

Dean's eyes follow the sound of the voice, so distracted by Cas that he hadn't even noticed the other man approach. He smiles down at Dean now, and his eyes crinkle at the corners.

"You've got a friend," he adds.

"Yes, this is Dean," Cas says slowly as if trying to convey something that Dean isn't privy to, "Dean Winchester - Dean, this is Balthazar, he teaches Biology."

Balthazar's eyes light up, "the Dean Winchester?"
"No," Castiel deadpans, "I know many Dean Winchesters, this is just one of them."

"You've heard of me?" Dean asks, lifting an eyebrow in Cas' direction. Cas pointedly ignores him, but he meets Balthazar's gaze for just a moment before Balthazar smiles and turns to Dean.

"Everyone's heard of you, Dean."

Cas clears his throat not-so-subtly and Balthazar backs down, but Dean interest is piqued as to why all these supposed people know who he is.

"We should go," Cas says casually, and when Dean looks up at him, he's smiling faintly and he looks remarkably unfazed by the whole ordeal. "I'll see you tomorrow, Balth."

"Oh fine," Balthazar huffs, "I hope to see you again, Dean."

"You too," Dean replies, unsure of what actually just happened. Cas turns and he follows after him, heading down the hall toward the front doors.

"I'm sorry about him," Cas says quietly, "it's not really how he makes it sound. Balthazar is very... forward, and he likes to inflate everything."

"It's all good," Dean shrugs, though he's itching to ask Cas how anyone in LA knows who he is.
Chapter 3

Even from the outside, Cas' apartment is nice - worryingly so - and Dean can't even imagine living anywhere like this. They're less than a block from the beach and looking up through the passenger window at the levels of reflective glass, Dean feels a little insignificant. It must cost an absolute fortune to live here.

"You live here?" he asks and Cas looks at him out of the corner of his eye, shifting a little uncomfortably.

"It's not quite so pretentious on the inside."

"Are you sure?" Dean asks, quirking his eyebrows at him. Cas presses a button on the dash and a gate in front of them rises up, giving way to an underground parking lot and Dean sinks back into his seat, hoping Cas is right about the rest of the building. Cas pulls into the spot of the far left, right next to a staircase door and kills the engine, turning in his seat to face Dean.

"Is something wrong?" he asks and Dean feels like an idiot for not knowing how to answer that question.

"No," he mumbles, "it's nothing, I just--" I'm traveling halfway across the country for an interview because it's the only job I can find and the man I've been in love with for eleven years lives on the fucking beach in Los Angeles.

Maybe coming to see Cas was a bad idea after all. It doesn't help that he's been a little on edge since the Balthazar thing - he's pretty sure if nothing's going on with him and Cas yet, it's bound to happen. His skin itches, like he's trapped in it and he needs to get out; he wants to make up an excuse to leave because everything in him is screaming you don't belong here, but he just opens the door with a shrug. "It's nothing." Cas very obviously doesn't believe him and he feels even worse for it.

He follows after Cas to the middle of the parking lot where there's an elevator and as soon as the doors open, he presses himself into the corner to lean back against the wall. An hour ago it would have been almost impossible for him to resist stepping forward and kissing Cas, but now he's feeling more than a little out of his league. The elevator lurches up and once they get above ground Dean realizes the walls are glass, and on one side you can see right out over the beach. It's a good thing Cas' condo is only three storeys up because Dean's not crazy about heights to begin with and being able to see everything that's underneath you is a little unsettling.

They reach the top with another jolt and a ding and Cas leads the way down a hallway to the left. Every bit of outside wall has a window and even in the evening, the hall would be well-lit without the ceiling lights. It's hard for Dean to believe that this is Cas' daily life because this place looks like one of those fancy hotels that Dean wouldn't consider staying in because they're so damn fancy and out of his price range.

Cas unlocks the door and pushes it open, standing back for Dean to walk through first. The first thing he sees is a big grand archway leading from this room to the next and at first he thinks they're entering the living room, but then he notices the fireplace - one of those big, freestanding ones that he's only ever seen in TV shows - in the adjoining room and he's not so sure.

The floors are dark and the walls are bright where they aren't covered with framed art or wall hangings and Dean can't see into the rest of the place from here, but he knows it's expensive.
"What do you think?" Cas asks and when Dean turns to face him he's shifting from foot to foot, just barely noticeable, but he looks almost anxious and Dean can't understand why. He can't think of what to say that won't come out sounding like he's jealous or thinks Cas is too good for him now, so he just says,

"Show me the rest first?"

Cas nods and locks the door behind him, pointing out the guest bedroom on the left and the bathroom next to it. He makes his way through the archway and the living room spreads out in front of them, leading into an open dining room and, to the left, the kitchen. All of the exterior walls are like the hall outside - floor to ceiling windows that reveal the beach and the ocean in all their glory and not for the first time today, Dean feels a little like he's stepped into an alternate universe.

Cas doesn't talk much as he shows Dean around, and Dean holds back from asking how the fuck Cas can afford this place that looks more like a Tony Stark condo than a Castiel Milton condo. *Novak*, he reminds himself, he's Castiel Novak now.

He's silent, lost in all of this when Cas comes up behind him. Dean shudders as Cas' hand presses against his back and he barely resists leaning into the touch.

"There's a balcony off the kitchen with a beautiful view of the ocean, but there's something else I want you to see."

Dean follows quietly, still numb from the revelation that this is where Cas - *his* Cas - lives his day-to-day life, and he can't imagine what's coming next. It's already difficult enough for him to imagine Cas as a professor, but to know that he's grown up so beautiful and smart and respected, and on top of that, he lives *here* - it's a lot to take in and it leaves Dean feeling a little left behind.

"You live alone?" he asks desperate to fill the silence and get out of his own head.

"I don't like having a roommate and I don't really have time to date. Balth and Gabe set me up a couple of times - or at least they tried to, but dating history post-college isn't exactly impressive."

Dean knows he shouldn't feel nearly as gleeful as he does about that, and it's hard to hide the smile that crosses his face. "Oh?" he asks, trying for sympathetic.

"I've been on something like six dates in the last three years and none of them were repeats."

He'd be lying if the fact that Cas' dating life sucks doesn't make him just a tiny bit giddy, but Dean manages to keep quiet about it as he follows Cas up the stairs and down to the end of the landing, bypassing what he assumes is Cas' bedroom. When Cas pushes the door open he stands back, letting Dean go in ahead of him again. He slips past him into the room and turns back to look at Cas before looking around the rest of the room.

"This is my favourite room," Cas says, smiling softly back at him. He shuffles back and forth a bit, looking again like he's seeking Dean's approval.

The room is much bigger than Dean anticipated, although the main section is sunken into the floor about six inches. The first thing he notices, it that it's nothing like anything else in the rest of the house - he could almost call it rustic, whereas everything else is unquestionably modern; like it's been transplanted here directly out of a small beachy town. The flooring is the only thing that ties it to the rest of the house, although in most places, it's splattered with various colours of paint.

The second thing he notices is that there is stuff everywhere. Canvasses lean against any available wall space and countless jars and tubs of paint cover the few surfaces that can still be identified as
tables. The only thing that is clean and seemingly uncluttered is a folding cot along the right side of the room, and Dean smiles at it. He knows it's there in case Cas works too late and makes himself too tired to walk the ten feet to his bedroom because that's why he spent so much time at the Winchester's house as a kid; he just exhausted himself and couldn't work up the energy to go home.

"Are all of these yours?" Dean asks, gesturing to the multiple pieces in various states of completion. Cas comes up next to him, standing just out of Dean's line of sight.

"Yes."

"I didn't know you painted."

"I didn't before. I've been drawing for a long time, doodling mostly, but I only started painting after I moved here. My counsellor suggested it."

Dean's brain sticks on the word counsellor, but instead of feeling guilty, he's a little overwhelmed. Gabriel took him away and got him to a goddamn counsellor and if Gabriel was here now, Dean would kiss him. He smiles at Cas and steps down into what appears to be the work area.

"You know I've never really been much of an art person," Dean admits, "but these are beautiful."

"Thank you. I um- I don't normally bring people in here, but for a long time you were the reason I kept up with my art, and I wanted you to see what became of it."

"I'm glad you never stopped."

"Me too," Cas smiles at him, and all of a sudden the million dollar condo and Cas' degrees mean nothing because he's still just the same guy he was ten years ago, just in a better place. He's too close, and Dean has to stop himself from pressing right up against him or doing something even more stupid than that. He tiptoes around the clutter in the room, sitting down on the edge of the cot and looking around.

There's a faded guitar case sitting at the end of it, and Dean runs his hands over it. "I didn't know you played."

"I don't," Cas admits sheepishly. "That was one of my earlier distractions and then I felt bad because Gabe bought it for me and I couldn't get rid of it."

"And the piano downstairs?"

"I play occasionally. When I'm not working or painting."

"Would you play for me?" Dean asks, testing his luck. Cas just gives him a look and turns to leave the room with a muttered we'll see.

They end up ordering pizza because Cas doesn't want to cook, and he claims to have no food in the house anyway. It takes nearly an hour to get to them, but Cas fills the time telling Dean about his art and his students and Dean is starting to realize what Meg was talking about when she said Cas would love her cafe. When they were young, Dean never really saw that side of him; he was there for the bad times, when Cas would show up at his door bruised and bloody and Mary would sit him on the edge of the bathtub and clean him up. Dean remembers countless hours sitting and watching before they'd hole themselves away in Dean's bedroom to watch movies or play video games or whatever it took for Cas not to think. A lot of the time that involved sex.

Dean shakes his head, pushing the thoughts away because Cas is better now, Cas is good now and
he's treated with the respect he deserves. He's not the same kid he was and neither is Dean.

"I went to our ten-year reunion," he says, switching gears in his brain.

"You did," Cas says; like he can't believe it. "How was that?"

"Surprisingly not terrible. I ran into Meg Masters and we talked for a couple hours. Turns out we both had a lot of growing up to do. She's actually pretty awesome."

"I'm glad," he smiles, "how is she?"

"She's good. She bought a cafe with her fiance, some artsy place she thinks you'd love."

"You talked about me?" Cas asks, one of his eyebrows lifting as his lips curl up at the corner.

"You came up."

Cas leans just a little closer, "what did you talk about?"

"Not a lot," he lies, "we uh, we both miss you. She says to say hi, by the way."

"Tell her the same next time you talk to her."

Dean nods, and they fall into a comfortable silence. He shifts over, leaning back into the corner of the couch, and kicking his feet up on the coffee table.

"I missed you too," Cas says abruptly, "I mean, I missed both of you, but I thought about you every day, I still do most days."

"Why did you stop emailing?" Dean asks before his verbal filter can kick in.

"I felt guilty."

"Man, I wouldn't have cared. I loved you more than anything-" he stops himself short, internally berating himself for being so fucking stupid.

"That's why I felt so bad- Dean, I walked out on you when you were the only person who would ever love me for who I was, how could I just go back to normal after that?"

"You know that's not true, Cas."

"I didn't know it then. Back then it was you and me against the world." Dean can't help the little huff of a laugh, and Cas smiles at him.

"Besides," Dean starts, picking his words carefully this time, "look where you are now, you wouldn't be here if you never left."

"Well we wouldn't be here right now," is all Cas gets the chance to say before the doorbell rings. "Pizza," he says, standing up and crossing to the door. Dean turns on the TV for background noise while Cas takes the pizza into the kitchen to get them plates.

When he returns, their conversation turns back to Meg and the reunion then slowly drifts to Sam and then Gabe and how they're both doing and what they've been up to, and for Dean, it feels like nothing's changed at all.

"How's your mom?" Cas asks and suddenly the illusion is gone and he remembers just how much
Cas has missed.

"She uh, she died a couple years back now. Cas crash."

"I'm sorry-"

"Don't be," Dean shakes his head, "you didn't know. I guess there's a lot you don't know."

"Catch me up," Cas says simply. "Tell me everything I've missed."

"In ten years?"

"Well, maybe just the highlights."

Dean smiles despite himself and nods, "I can probably manage that."

He gets through the first couple of years boring Lawrence history and when they check the time again, it's past eleven and Dean nearly falls out of his seat.

"Is it seriously that late?"

Cas just leans back into the couch and chuckles, "I warned you over an hour ago that it was getting late, but you just waved me off." He looks altogether too smug about it and Dean can think of many ways to wipe that stupid look off of his face, but he doesn't have time.

"I'm sorry, I gotta get going. My interview is at nine and I still have to get back to the hotel." It's the last thing in the world that he wants because what if this is all he gets, just this one night?

"I-" Cas starts, then backtracks, making a face like he's weighing his options, "you could stay. If you want." He avoids looking Dean in the eyes, and damn there it is. With Cas, there was always that moment when Dean couldn't draw the line; he always went one step too far and ended up regretting it because he loved Cas and Cas never felt the same. This is that line, and he knows in his mind what the answer is but as always, his heart is the one who makes the decisions. At least this time he tries.

"All my stuff is back at the hotel-"

"Dean," Cas says, and all of his determination is gone in that one word. Whatever Cas says next, he knows he's going to submit. "How much do you really have with you for a few days? Do you really need it for one night?"

Dean mulls it over for all of five seconds, "yeah, okay."

"We can move the cot from my studio if you'd prefer that to the couch," Cas offers, "I'd leave it where it is but I'm in there in the middle of the night sometimes, and I wouldn't want to wake you up."

"It's fine, Cas, I can bring it in."

"Let me help you."

Dean relents, and between the two of them, it only takes a couple of minutes to get the cot downstairs, tucking it between the couch and the fireplace. It's bigger than he'd thought it was, with plenty of room even for two people, but he tries not to think too hard about that, and instead sets himself to straightening out the sheets. While he focuses on his bed, Cas goes around pulling curtains over all the windows and turning on the floor lamp instead.
"I didn't realize how much light you get in here just from the city."

"Yeah, I can go a lot of the time without turning my own lights on in the summer. It gets dark earlier in the winter, but there's still a lot of light. Do you need anything else?"

"No, I'm good."

"Alright, well, I'll let you get some sleep then. Goodnight, Dean."

"Night Cas. Thanks." He watches after Cas until he disappears through the archway, but he can still hear his footsteps heading up to his room. Dean strips down to his boxers, folding his clothes neatly and setting them on the arm of the couch before slipping between the sheets.

Now that he's alone, the idea of Cas sneaking into bed with him in the middle of the night like he used to crosses his mind, but when his body picks up on it too, he shuts it down quickly. He's not about to jerk off in Cas' house, and he'll never get to sleep with an erection, so he rolls onto his stomach and thinks about the day he's had. He shouldn't have said yes to staying here tonight, regardless of how tired he is. It's obvious now that whatever feelings he had for Cas are lingering, even if he tried to deny it for years, and it's concerning, to say the least.

Leaving Cas is what's right, he tells himself. They're different people now, and Cas doesn't need him like he used to. With a resigned sigh, he makes up his mind; tomorrow morning he'll say goodbye to Cas and then whatever happens with his interview, he'll move on with his life. Maybe while he's still in LA they can get together occasionally, but they'll be friends. He can't ask for more than that, and Cas never wanted more than that anyway.

They can be friends, and Dean can be okay with that.

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He's okay with it until he wakes up in the morning. The living room curtains are still closed but the ones in the kitchen are open, and there's sunlight pouring into the room. Cas seems to be gone already, but there's fruit in a bowl on the island and a container of muffins and a fresh pot of coffee waiting for him. Dean smiles to himself. He wishes Cas was here so he could thank him properly, but if he got his way that would likely involve pushing him up against his stupid marble island and kissing him senseless.

Okay, so maybe the friends thing isn't going to be as easy as he thought.

He pushes the thought of kissing Cas out of his mind as he pours himself coffee and takes a seat at the island. The view really is spectacular, and he debates for a few minutes whether or not he should text Cas before pulling out his phone and biting the bullet. He shoots off a quick good morning and thank you, then stuffs his phone back in his pocket, pushing himself up off the stool.

"Good morning to you too," comes a voice from behind him, and Dean spins to find Cas standing in the entranceway. He's got his shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows and his hair is sticking up in every direction; the only part of him that looks anything like the image he presented yesterday is his glasses and Dean's mouth goes dry when he sees him.

"Hey," he manages, "I thought you'd left."

"Not yet, I'm just about to head out. Do you need a ride?"

"No," Dean shakes his head, "it's pretty far out I don't wanna make you late."
"I've got about an hour and a half, Dean. It's not a problem."

"Maybe just to the hotel then?" Dean asks. "I've got to get changed and maybe have a quick shower before I head out."

"Of course."

They head out shortly and when they arrive at the hotel, Cas still has lots of time to get to work. Dean’s relieved, though he’s not quite ready to say goodbye.

"Let me know how it goes?" Cas asks, and Dean nods.

"Yeah, for sure. Thanks again, Cas. Talk to you later." He waits until Cas is gone before heading into the lobby and up to his room.

He showers quickly and changes into new clothes before heading back down to the street and hailing a cab. When he arrives at the address Benny gave him, there's a woman leaning against a big red truck. When he approaches, she smiles at him. She's bright-eyed and much more awake than Dean, but he puts that down to the travel mug in her hand because as he gets closer the smell of coffee permeates the air, and he severely regrets leaving the half-full pot at Cas' apartment.

"Hey," she grins, "you must be Dean, right? You're here for the cars?"

"That's me."

"I'm Charlie," she holds her hand out for him to shake, "have you met Benny yet?"

Dean shakes his head. "No, I just got here. He's the owner, right?"

"Yeah. C'mon I'll introduce you two."

The interview goes better than expected. It's a little informal, but he likes Benny right off the bat. He and Charlie are willing to give him anything he needs while he's in the city, including somewhere to stay if he needs it. After seeing the cars - at least fifteen of them - there's no way he's turning this job down, though he doesn't expect it to last as long as he was initially hoping. The cars are all in pretty good condition, a few weeks’ worth of work and sharing this opinion with Benny gets him an impressed look in return. Then when he brings up the Impala, Benny's face lights up and he practically throws the job at him.

He stays for a while and they talk about how things will work before Dean catches a cab back to the hotel. He doesn't take the job right away and Benny gets it. He's coming from so far away and moving is not the easiest decision for temporary work, but Dean does let them know that he's interested and he will get in touch within the week.

He sits through the entire cab ride back, thinking and re-thinking about what he's going to say to Sam and - more importantly - what he's going to say to Cas. He's antsy like he hasn't been since before meeting up with Cas yesterday, and by the time he gets back to the hotel he has shredded a random piece of paper he found in his pocket.

He presses the button for the third floor and taps his foot as the elevator rises slowly. He searches through his contacts until he finds Cas' name; everyone else can wait until later, right now he just wants to talk to Cas. He presses the call button as soon as the elevator stops, and Cas picks up before he even gets to his room.
"Hello?"

"Hey," Dean says, still caught off guard by the familiar voice.

"Dean." He can practically hear the smile in Cas' voice. "How did it go?"

"I've got the job if I want it."

"And do you?"

"I have to think a little more. But probably."

"Congratulations. We should celebrate."

Dean huffs a quiet laugh, "I have an early flight tomorrow."

"I promise I won't keep you as late as I did last night. We don't even have to go out, you could come back here, we could have dinner on the beach."

And if that doesn't sound romantic as fuck. "Yeah?" Dean asks.

"Of course. Come by and pick up my key so you don't have to wait for me. I'll pick up Chinese and wine on the way home."

Dean should say no, because he's already said yes too many times on this trip and Cas and wine is a bad combination, but he continues on his stupid streak and says yes anyway.

"You need me to grab anything?"

"No. I'll handle everything."

"Okay," Dean says and he can't help grinning like an idiot. "I'll see you in a bit then."

When he hangs up with Cas, he calls Meg and Sam. He leaves his plans for the night out of both conversations, and when he's off the phone with Sam, he gets his things together quickly before heading down to catch a cab.

He stops by the school a little later, and there's no one around so he stops by the admin desk to ask about Cas, only to find out he's teaching a class. He shouldn't really be surprised, but he gets directions to his office and leaves the office and heads down the hall.

The fact that Cas has his own office does nothing to quell the rioting in his stomach that's been there since their reunion. He's always had kind of a thing for authority, and Cas having his own office is all kinds of hot. He tries his best to focus on where he's going, but he ends up wandering the halls aimlessly until he finds a familiar face.

Balthazar smiles as he walks up to him, "you look a little lost, Dean."

"I uh, I got turned around trying to find Cas' office."

"You did," Balthazar confirms, "Cassie's office is back the other direction. Here, I'll show you."

Dean follows him back down the way he just came, and he can't help but wonder about the nickname. Cassie isn't exactly something he can imagine calling Cas, but Balthazar does know him better than he does now. The thought that makes his stomach flip uncomfortably and he supposes there are a few things he still doesn't know about Cas - another thought that he's not overly fond of.
"Hey-" he starts, thinking back to their first meeting, "I was wondering," Balthazar looks over at him, but neither of them stops walking, "you said before that everyone knows who I am. What did you mean by that?"

Balthazar pauses where he stands, smiling and running his tongue over his teeth, "I don't think that's my place to say," he smirks, clapping a hand on Dean's shoulder, "but you should ask Cassie about his art." He gestures to the door behind him, and when Dean looks closer, he realizes the name on the window is Dr. C. Novak.

"He shouldn't be too much longer," Balthazar winks, "good luck."

It takes Dean's brain a couple of minutes to catch up with the doctor before Cas' name, but he manages to thank Balthazar and push the door open, dropping onto the loveseat on his left. Cas' desk is directly across from him, and surprisingly, it's a complete disaster.

He distracts himself thinking about what he's going to do tomorrow when he gets home, and before long the door is opening inwards and Cas appears at his side.

"Balth said you were waiting. I've got another class in a couple minutes, but I'll give you my key."

"So, uh, doctor huh?"

Cas ducks his head, pulling one key off the ring and handing it to Dean, "yeah. I'll be home in a couple of hours, feel free to help yourself to anything in the meantime, and if you think of anything else you want, just text me and I'll pick it up on my way home. Oh- and you'll need to disarm the alarm when you get in. It's just on the right and the code is 0124."

"Thanks, Cas. I'll see you later." He pushes himself up and flashes a quick grin at Cas before walking out the door and into the hall. He's having a good day and even the thought of mixing Cas and wine doesn't discourage him from humming to himself as he heads outside to call a cab.

It's just after two when Dean gets back to the apartment, and unlocking the door on his own feels wrong. Walking into the house he's not exactly uncomfortable, but he probably should be. He types the code into the alarm panel, waiting until it stops beeping at him to head into the living room. He flops down onto the couch and he thinks about Cas.

It doesn't take long before his mind wanders, and this time it goes back to his conversation with Balthazar. Twice now he's been particularly vague about his knowledge of Dean, but this time he dropped a clue; though Cas isn't exactly around for Dean to ask him about his art right now. However, the studio is just upstairs, and it's not like Cas was private about his art. He could just go in and look around a bit and see if he can figure out what Balthazar was talking about. Dean holds himself back for another half hour before pushing himself up and heading for the stairs.

The door is still open from last night so Dean steps into the room, glancing around at all the canvasses. The blinds are still down but it's bright in the room and he ignores the light switch, stepping down into the center. He doesn't move anything for risk of doing any damage or seeing something that Cas has hidden for a reason, and he's disappointed to find that his answers aren't immediately obvious.

He's about to just give up and head back downstairs when he spots the guitar still leaning in the corner of the room. Cas said to help himself to anything, and that he barely plays, so he wouldn't get mad if Dean decided to dust it off, right? He sits down on the ledge and pulls the case into his lap,
opening the clasps and gently lifting the guitar out to rest it on his knee.

It takes a little while to tune, but it comes back to him easily even though Dean hasn't played in ages either. He thinks now about getting back into it, but that means buying a guitar again and that's not really an option at the moment. He picks out the first few notes of *Ramble On* as a warm up. The familiarity of it calms him, and it's much easier to put Cas out of his mind when he's concentrating on the lyrics instead, humming along to the tune. Sun shines in on him, warming his skin, and Dean shuts his eyes, letting his fingers do the work.

His breathing slows as he finishes the song and a thought occurs to him; a song he hasn't so much as thought of in years. He remembers it now, accompanied by the memory of sitting in the backyard with Cas one summer night.

It's not often that he sings but there are a few exceptions, and this song is one of them.

*Someone's always coming around here trailing some new kill*
  Says I see your picture on a hundred dollar bill
  What's a game of chance to you, to him is one of real skill
  So glad to meet you
  Angeles

*Picking up the ticket shows there's money to be made*
  Go on and lose the gamble that's the history of the trade
  Did you add up all the cards left to play to zero
  And sign up with evil
  Angeles

*Don't start me trying now*
  'Cos I'm all over it
  Angeles

*I could make you satisfied in everything you do*
  All your secret wishes could right now be coming true
  Spend forever with my poison arms around you
  No one's gonna fool around with us
  No one's gonna fool around with us
  So glad to meet you
  Angeles

Dean's got his eyes shut, still humming along when a sound from behind catches his attention and he turns to find Cas standing in the doorway, a large paper bag in one arm and a soft smile on his face. An uncomfortable heat prickles at the back of Dean's neck and he avoids meeting Cas' eyes.

"I haven't heard that song for years," Cas breathes, "don't think I've ever heard you sing."

Dean shifts awkwardly, lying the guitar down on his thighs and turning back to Cas. "Uh, no, you wouldn't have. I never sang until uh... after you were asleep."

"You sang to me?"

"Once or twice," he mumbles, but he knows the colour in his cheeks betrays him. Truthfully, it was the only time Dean used to sing - when no one could hear him because it was meant only for Cas.

"You have a beautiful voice."
"Uh, thanks," Dean stumbles, "did you pick up dinner?"

"I did. And wine." Cas smiles at him and Dean can feel the flush spread all over his body. "I'll be downstairs. Come down when you're ready."
It's all very comfortable, sitting in front of Cas' massive fireplace and eating Chinese food from the carton. It feels too much like a date, although that could just be the wine considering Dean's finished two glasses and they've moved on to drinking straight from the bottle. They're sitting on either end of the couch, but Dean is laser-focused on everything Cas does. It is hardly his fault when Cas is still wearing his stupid shirt with the sleeves rolled up and every time he moves his arm, Dean's afraid the fabric is going to tear around it.

There's a weird tension between them tonight and as much as Dean wants to blame it entirely on the wine, he knows that's not the case. The troubling part of it is that it doesn't feel like it's just him this time; Cas' movements are short and calculated and Dean's brain immediately considers whether Cas might not stop him if he tried to kiss him tonight.

When Cas' phone goes off they both move to answer it, but Dean realizes shortly that it's not his phone and Cas grins down at him as he settles back against the couch. Dean's breath catches in his throat as Cas gets up off the couch to answer the phone, putting it up against his ear and shooting Dean a look. If Dean's level of sobriety is anything to go by, Cas is way too drunk to be talking to anyone and for his sake Dean hopes it's only Gabriel on the other end of the phone.

"Hello?" he answers, and Dean is impressed by how sober he sounds.

"Yes, speaking." He doesn't know how Cas manages to sound so professional when he's shitfaced, especially considering ten minutes ago they were laughing so hard he nearly fell off the couch.

"Hello April."

Dean frowns to himself. Whoever April is, Cas doesn’t seem overly pleased to hear from her. Dean watches as the expression on his face changes from confusion to something like distaste.

"No, I'm sorry, that would be inappropriate." And wow. There's nothing Dean likes about that sentence.

"Yes," Cas continues, "I'm sure I'm not interested. Goodnight, April." Cas ends the call and sets his phone on the arm of the couch, turning in Dean's direction. "Not a word."

"Was that-"

"What?"

"Was that one of your students?"

"It was," Cas says slowly, quirking an eyebrow at him pointedly.

"Do your students often ask you out?"

Cas' questioning look turns to amusement, "are you jealous?" It's supposed to be a joke, but Dean takes just a second too long to respond, and he can see the exact moment when Cas realizes what he's thinking. "Dean?"

"No," Dean scoffs. He tries to correct himself, pushing himself up in his seat, but Cas is watching him and it's obvious by the look on his face that Dean isn't being nearly as effective at covering up his slip as he thought he was. "You want me to be jealous?" In his head, it sounds like a defense but
when the words come out of his mouth, it comes across as more of a challenge and Dean swallows hard as Cas cocks an eyebrow at him. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

Cas kneels on the couch in front of him and then he's crawling up to Dean until he's situated between his thighs, his face just inches from Dean's. Heat prickles up the back of his neck, and Dean has to remind himself of every reason why all of this is the worst idea ever but it doesn't do anything to keep his dick under control, and he can feel himself swell before Cas even touches him. He tells himself that this is just the effect of the wine. Anything that could have been between him and Cas died years ago and if they were sober, none of this would be happening. But Cas leans in, close enough that his lips brush against the curve of Dean’s ear and Dean’s forced to reconsider.

He needs to stop this now before they do something that neither of them can take back, and if he was in a better state of mind, he would. But then Cas’ breath is hot on his skin and he's been craving for this for years - to have Cas against him, soft and warm and real. With one final act of determination, he presses his palms to Cas' chest and presses lightly.

"I can't," he whispers, but he's breathless and the thudding in his chest belies his words.

"I'm sorry," Cas huffs, falling back against the couch. He doesn't sound much better off than Dean does and it makes getting up off the couch all that much harder.

"I should go-" Dean mutters. He hates himself for it, but the other option is making a mistake that both of them will regret in the morning. Dean doesn't know if he's even taking the job yet and kissing Cas now would just make things more complicated. "It's late and-"

"Early flight," Cas nods.

"Thanks for everything."

"Anytime."

Dean makes for the front door, slipping his boots on and Cas stands by, waiting patiently. When Dean turns Cas is looking at the floor.

"It was really good to see you again," Dean breathes.

Cas smiles softly. "You too. If you decide to take the job, let me know. I'll be around if you need anything at all."

"Thank you." Cas steps forward, expecting Dean to take a step toward the door but he doesn't and then he's face to face with Cas, just inches apart, and he wants to kiss him so badly. He can feel Cas' heat radiating off of him and all it would take is the slightest tilt forward for their lips to press together. Instead, Dean takes an awkward step back and steps through the door, back out into the hall.

He turns as soon as the door closes and curses himself. If there was ever a chance he and Cas could have had something again, there definitely isn't now. He waits until he's back outside on the street to call a cab and it arrives shortly, carrying him away from Cas and back to his empty hotel room.

In his room alone Dean tries to sleep, but he keeps going over the events of the day. He has a job opportunity now to consider and back at Cas' - Dean sighs and flips onto his stomach, pressing his face into the pillows. Cas tried to kiss him, there was really no good reason for Dean to push him away and now he's regretting it. He's lying in bed in a strange hotel room when he could be wrapped around Cas in that fancy fucking condo - *what the fuck was he thinking?*
When he wakes up in the morning, he has a headache and he's been so busy with everything else that he's forgotten that he has to fly home today. He has to get back onto a plane. Instinctively, he looks at his phone to find out the time, and there's an unread message from Cas that makes his heart skip.

<< I'm sorry about last night, I was drunk and I wasn't thinking. If you're still interested, I'd like to see you again if you take the job. Have a good flight home.

Dean reads it six times before he can fully comprehend. He thought Cas would be mad at him for pushing him away last night, but he isn't. Instead, he just sounds like he's sorry he did it in the first place and it makes Dean feel bad about rejecting him. With a sigh, he gets out of bed and showers before heading down to the hotel restaurant for breakfast.

He doesn't think about Cas again until he's on the plane, but he doesn't reply to the text message. He doesn't even know if he's going to take the job, so he'll take a couple days to clear his head and then make a decision about both issues.

When he lands Dean goes through the motions in a haze, still thinking about what could have been if he wasn't such a damn coward. He makes his way to the arrivals gate and very nearly walks past Sam.

"Hey," Sam says, his grin morphing into something more like a frown, "is everything okay? I thought the interview went well."

"It did," Dean shrugs, pulling up a fake smile, "I just need to worry about finding somewhere to live and packing all my stuff and whatever. It's fine."

Sam takes his word for it but the drive home feels long and quiet. The feeling is his gut could just be the swirling of guilt from lying to his brother, but he feigns illness when they get home and he heads straight for his room to reunite with the view of his ceiling. He pulls out his phone and sends off a quick text to Meg - lunch tomorrow at Seymour's? - then finds Cas' name and his fingers hover over the screen as he tries to think of what to say.

<< Everything's cool.

<< I'll let you know what I decide about the interview. It was really good to see you again.

There's so much more he wants to say, but he doesn't know how to put it into words and he doesn't want to risk saying too much. Before he has the chance to figure it out, his phone buzzes frantically next to him and he lifts it up to see Meg's name and number scrawled across the screen.

"Hey," he grins.

"Hey yourself. How was Cali?"

"I... don't know how to answer that right now." He presses the speakerphone icon and sets his phone down on the bed next to him. Just as he does, a text from Cas pops up over the call.

<< You too. I'd like to see you again if you come back down. Tell Sam I say hello. I'm glad you made it home safely.

It takes everything in Dean's power not to respond immediately, but he doesn't want to interrupt his call with Meg, so Cas can wait a couple of minutes - it's not much to ask after ten years.
"Alright," Meg says slowly, "that's cryptic. How's Clarence?" Dean groans and he can hear Meg's muffled laughter in the background. "That good, huh?"

"Yeah, he's... fuck Meg, you wouldn't believe him. His house is fucking unreal, he's got a goddamn doctorate, he- He's hot as hell and I'm- I can't stop thinking about him."

"So... same old, same old?"

"Shut up," Dean huffs.

"Why don't we do breakfast tomorrow and you can tell me all about it, lunch doesn't work because I'm down a server at the cafe, but I can get up early if you want to meet me there?"

"Yeah, for sure. I really need to try and clear my head about this job thing. See you tomorrow. Eight o'clock."

Dean ends the call and sets his phone down with a groan. He was looking forward to sleeping in tomorrow after the last couple of late nights, but he's also looking forward to talking to Meg. If he's honest, he's glad that she's the one who knows what's going on with him and Cas and the job; she can understand better than anyone what he's feeling right now. He quickly sends off a text off to Cas and pushes himself up off his bed to go and do laundry.

Sam finds him a little while later to tell him lunch is ready, and Dean feels instantly guilty about lying to him. There's too much swirling around in his brain, and he just needs to sort it out, but everything seems to depend on something else happening first and he can't figure out where to start. All of this would be so much easier if he could just sort out his feelings about Cas, but that's going to have to wait until he goes back to LA - if he decides to take the job.

Dean finds the cafe quickly and looking up at it, he knows Cas would absolutely love it. He pulls out his phone and snaps a couple of pictures to show him before heading inside. Meg is sitting at a booth with two mugs in front of her and Dean slips into the seat across, gladly accepting the drink.

"Good morning," she grins.

"Morning."

"So, tell me about the trip."

"Oh you know, it was good. Had some fun, got a job, made some terrible life choices. Cas says hi, by the way."

"Oh does he?" she beams, and Dean can tell she's just as glad to hear about Cas as he had been.

"Yeah, and he's doing great. God, you should see him, you probably wouldn't even recognize him anymore- and he's a fucking professor. Doctor Castiel Novak."

"Novak?" Meg asks, raising an eyebrow over her mug.

"He and Gabe changed their names apparently. Can't say I blame 'em."

Meg shakes her head in agreement, "Fair. So, tell me more about those terrible life choices."

"I wasn't going to meet him. I was gonna look him up, see how he was doing and that would be that, but when I snuck into his lecture at the university, he spotted me and, well, I ended up back at his
place just talking about... everything."

Meg is grinning at him and she looks genuinely happy for him, but Dean has a headache. All of this is so much, with Cas, and the job, and potentially moving out West. It's hard enough to deal with any one of those things on its own, but all three of them combined - he doesn't know what to deal with first.

"Are you gonna take the job?"

"I don't know. I want to, but it's not just a job, y'know? I told Sam it was no big deal, but it- I've never lived outside of Lawrence and LA is great. But it's so far away from everyone."

"What will you do if you don't take it?"

"That's the problem..."

"Do you want to go?"

"I don't know how to feel right now. I want a job, I want to..." I want to be near Cas. It's so easy to think about it, but saying it out loud for someone else to hear is next to impossible. He sips his coffee and sighs.

"Have you asked Sam's opinion on all of this?"

Dean tips his head up and the look he gets in response is questioning. "Yeah, Sam doesn't know about anything other than the job."

"What?"

"Sam doesn't know. Sam never knew about me and Cas- Sam doesn't even know about me."

"What do you mean?"

"Sam doesn't know I'm bi. You know and Cas knows and Gabriel. That's it. I never told anyone else, so how do I explain tracking Cas down after so long and how do I explain why it's so damn hard to figure out what to do?"

"Wow."

"Yeah," Dean nods. "Welcome to my life."

"Okay well step one. Tell Sam. You don't have to out yourself to him, just say you were with Cas, he knows you guys were close, tell him it's hard to figure things out. Sam can help, probably better than I can."

"How much do I tell him, though? I mean, I can't tell him about the past, I promised Cas I'd never say anything, but I just don't know. It would have been fine, I could have made up some story about running into Cas and spending the night at his place-"

"You stayed at his place?"

"Uh yeah, sorry, thought I mentioned it."

"You did not."

"Then I probably didn't mention that he almost kissed me, either..."
"You definitely did not," Meg pauses, and a small grin spreads across her face. "You idiot. You're gonna take that job, and you're gonna text him the second you get down there and tell him how you're feeling."

"I can't. I already made up my mind about Cas. I just want to be friends. I just feel bad about lying about everything, I feel like nothing I say is true anymore."

"Unless you're talking to me, which, weird."

"Right?"

"Okay, look, I have two things to say to you. First, I may not know Sam personally, but I don't have to to know that he has always looked up to you. No one loves you like he does, and believe me, regardless of who you love and what stupid-ass decisions you make, he'll support you."

"You sure about that?"

"A thousand percent, Dean. I promise if you tell him, he'll be cool with it, there's nothing for you to worry about. And besides, what are you gonna do, lie to Sam your whole life? You're gonna have to tell him at some point, may as well be now."

"Okay," Dean nods, "you're right. What's the second thing?"

"Being friends with Cas is stupid. It was stupid ten years ago and it's still stupid now. Don't try to force something that wants to be more, just wait and see, and if he tries to kiss you again? Let him."

Dean huffs a laugh, "I make no promises."

"Fine, but if something happens, don't fight it. I gotta get into the kitchen though, you want anything? On the house."

"Surprise me," Dean mumbles, lifting his coffee to his lips. Meg slips out of her seat and startles him by resting a hand on his shoulder.

"You'll figure it out, Dean. Cas is worth it."

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It's not until a couple days later, when Dean has had a chance to talk to Cas about things a little bit more, that he decides to talk to Sam. He can't tell him everything, but he can tell him he lied about being so confident about this job and he can get Sam's advice on what to do about it.

Sam's in the kitchen, making lunch for himself and Jess; Jo's at work and Aaron's downstairs so there's no one to interrupt and he figures it'll be better to get this over with. He slips into the kitchen and peeks over Sam's shoulder.

"Whatcha up to?"

"Making lunch, Jess and I are going out when she's finished her class."

"Ah, nice."

"Mmhm."

"Can I talk to you about something?"
Sam turns expectantly, leaning back against the counter, "shoot."

"This um, this job? I don't know what to do, Sam."

"What do you mean, you were all for it last time we talked."

"Yeah and... you were right. I wanted to see Cas- I still want to see Cas, he's just... he's more important to me than I ever really told you. There are times that I sit and I realize I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for Cas... so yeah, I was excited because it was LA and that's where he is, probably, but now that I'm facing going there, I don't know."

"How come?"

"It's just really far y'know? From everyone- you and Bobby and... everyone."

"It's only temporary though, right? You said you'd just be there for the job and then you'd come home?"

"Yeah," Dean agrees, but he can't exactly talk to Sam about Cas and part of him is worried that if he does go, he's not going to want to come home.

"You should do it," Sam smiles.

"You think so?"

"Yeah, like you said, you need the work, it's a job you're good at - something you even like doing - and who knows, maybe while you're out there, you'll run into Cas."

"Shut up."

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When Dean wakes up he's feeling better about everything, and while he's in the shower he decides two things. First, he's going to take the job. He needs the work and Sam was right, it's something he enjoys doing and maybe a change of scenery will be good for him. Secondly, he is going to see Cas while he's there, but he's going to keep himself in line and they're just going to be friends. For real, this time.

As soon as he gets out of the shower, he calls Benny to tell him he'll take the job, and they discuss arrangements for moving in. The apartment won't be ready for a little while, which is fine, but Dean chooses to stay in a hotel for the time being rather than stay with Benny because he's definitely going to need to have an adjustment period where he can just be on his own for a little while. When he gets off the phone, he texts Cas and Meg to let them know the good news. He's looking forward to going back now and having said yes, a huge amount of stress is off his shoulders. That night, for the first time in a long time, Dean actually gets a good night's sleep.

By the time May rolls around, Dean's feeling a hell of a lot better. Being home has allowed him to clear his head and while he still thinks about Cas and the almost-kiss every single day, he's also feeling a lot better about going into things differently when he gets back. He and Cas talk every couple of days, usually only for a little while or a few texts here and there, but a few Friday and Saturday nights Dean's been up all night while Cas fills him in on the events of the day or is up painting and wants some company. Dean doesn't focus too much on the warm fuzzy feeling he gets because Cas is thinking of him when he's up all night, and not one of the people he's known in California for years. He's refusing to let himself be drawn back in again, because he wants this to be a fresh start for him and that means no more pining over something that never existed to begin with.
He can worry about that later though, tonight they're having a barbeque in the backyard as a going away party for him, and Dean still has work to do.

It wasn't going to be a big thing, just the four of them in the house and a couple of friends coming by to say goodbye before he takes off, but somehow in the last week the guest count has risen to over fifty people. Dean and Aaron have been in the kitchen for over an hour now, cutting vegetables for burgers and putting salads together while Sam and Jo get the back yard set up.

When they're finished with the food, Dean heads into the backyard to help and people start arriving before he's even finished setting up the barbeque. Friends and family stream into the yard, congratulating him on the job and asking if he's excited about it, to which, he replies yes and thank you and he thanks them again for coming. It's weird thinking that he probably won't be around the next time they do this, and it twists at his heart a little, but sometimes there are things more important than backyard barbeques.

For the first little while, it's easy to keep up conversation as he hasn't seen many of these people in a while, but after a bit their questions get tedious and when you've got fifty people asking if you're nervous about something, you start to wonder if maybe you should be. Usually, he loves this, being surrounded by his friends and flipping burgers on a grill, but tonight he's not feeling it. Tonight he just feels like something is missing, and while he knows what it is, he doesn't want to think too much about it. Tonight is supposed to be fun and he's not supposed to be miserable. Fortunately, he isn't left alone long to think because Aaron shows up with a list of who's eating what and Dean can distract himself with cooking and not have to think about anything more distant than the next five minutes.

He has a small break in between when most people have gotten their food and Dean's had one too many beers and he pulls out his phone to find an unread text from Cas.

<< Are you excited for tomorrow?

>> I don't know yet. So many people have been asking me if I'm nervous tonight that I don't really know how to feel anymore.

<< So many people?

>> We're having a going away party there are like fifty people here.

<< Well don't let them worry you. It's going to be great for you, Dean and if you need anything you know you can always call me.

>> Thanks Cas.

>> I wish you were here.

Dean's barely hit the send button before Meg shows up, grinning at him and offering him another drink. He takes it gratefully.

"Good party," she says and Dean nods his agreement. "But somehow I feel the guest of honor isn't enjoying himself?"

"Nah, it's good, I'm just thinking."

"About the job?"

"About driving out tomorrow, moving into this new place, the job, Cas-" he shrugs, "everything."
"Dean," she says firmly, "stop worrying. You're gonna go out there and you're gonna do a great job and on the weekends you're gonna drink beer on the beach and have your own place, be able to do things the way that you want. And then when you come back- well, you might not even want to come back."

Dean just snorts at her and takes another drink. "Thanks, Mom."

The remainder of the night passes too quickly and before he knows it, everyone is heading out and wishing him good luck in his venture. Meg stays to help tidy everything up, but she and Sam kick him out and send him to bed. He intends to sleep, too, when he gets up to his room, but then he finds his suitcase half full on his bed and remembers he's barely done any packing at all.

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The next morning, a bleary-eyed Sam helps him pack all of his things into the Impala and practically force-feeds him eggs and toast before letting him go out the door. They slept in, so Dean's a little behind schedule, but he doesn't start work until the day after tomorrow, so as long as he makes it to LA tomorrow, he'll still be alright.

He stops overnight just outside of California, staying at the cheapest motel he can find; a run-down little place with a metal partition in the shape of corn cobs. He holds back from texting Cas because it's late but he calls Sam so he doesn't worry, then drops onto the bed and falls into a restless sleep.

The next morning, he's tired, but he drives straight through to the border, arriving just before noon. He sets a route in his phone to get him to the hotel and follows the directions out to the edge of the city. It's somewhere in between where he was before and Benny's barn so he'll be closer to work, but further from Cas. It doesn't really matter though, because this time he has the car so he can get around a lot more easily than before.

He parks along the side of the road and goes to check in so he can get a key for the parking lot and not have to worry about his baby being stolen or damaged while he sleeps. Check-in goes quickly and this time his room is ready right away so he parks the car and hauls his bags up into the room. There isn't much point in setting up because the apartment is supposed to be ready for him soon and he doesn't want to unpack and then have to pack up again by the end of the week. Living out of suitcases isn't awful short term.

Lying on his bed, he considers texting Cas to let him know he arrived in the city, but he doesn't want to seem too forward, so he texts Meg instead and then calls Sam to check in - God knows after last time he'd be in shit if he forgot to. Sam's in a rush when he calls and when Dean calls him out on it, all Sam does is shrug it off and promise to talk to him tomorrow then hang up. Either Dean caught him in the middle of sex, or he's got a date. He doesn't want to think too much about either of those things, so he flicks on the TV for something to keep him occupied.

After three episodes of Friends, the last half of Godzilla - the 1998 one - and far too long watching infomercials, Dean caves and texts Cas. He's been avoiding it because if he lets himself text Cas, he might ask to see him and then he might kiss him and who knows what else. So he's playing it safe and not testing fate. Or at least, he was.

>> Hey. Thought I'd let you know I made it okay.

<< Glad to hear it. How's the hotel?

Shit, he wasn't expecting a response this quickly and now he can't not reply or he's going to look like a jerk. He thinks for a few minutes before texting him back.
Nicer than the last one. Thinking I might grab some dinner and head to bed.

What's for dinner?

I have no idea.

That, at least, gives him an idea and Dean pushes himself up off the bed, slipping on his boots and heading out into the hall. He continues texting Cas as he makes his way down the street to find something to eat. On his way, he stops at a drug store to pick up melatonin because god knows he's not going to be sleeping well on his own. He settles on fast food because he doesn't feel like sitting down to eat and then he heads back to the hotel.

Dean wakes up early the next morning and after trying to fall asleep again six times, he gives up and gets up to shower. There's an empty feeling in his stomach that, for once, has nothing to do with Cas; it's just nerves. He can find his way around a car easily - he's built and rebuilt the Impala more times than he can count and he's good with cars. He's just nervous.

He showers to try and calm himself down and he picks up coffee and a quick snack from a bakery on the corner before heading out to Benny's. He pulls up the address on google maps and after a few minutes of driving, most of the anxiety has worn off.

Twenty minutes later, he pulls into the dusty driveway leading up to the barn and when he gets there Charlie's already waiting, leaning on her truck just outside. She waves Benny over as Dean pulls up and parks next to her and as Dean climbs out he catches both of them eyeing the Impala.

"Very nice," Charlie comments, running her hand over the hood. Dean just smiles at her.

"This one yours?" Benny asks, lifting his eyes from where he's been inspecting the grill.

"Sure is." Dean pats the roof of the car and shuts the door. "Inherited her from my dad when he passed. Still got the lego in the vents from when he left me sitting for more than five minutes when I was a kid."

"'67?" Benny asks.

Dean can feel the smile stretching his cheeks and he leans against his car proudly. "She is."

"I've got a red '63 in the barn, you wanna come see?"

Charlie shakes her head like this isn't the first time Benny's gotten overexcited about showing someone his cars, and she holds out her hand to Dean in a you go, I'll follow gesture. Dean heads after Benny, following him toward the barn, and Charlie does comes up behind clapping him on the shoulder as they make for the open barn doors.

Most of the cars look like they're in fairly decent condition but there are a couple that are pretty ancient looking, even though they can't be more than forty years old, and all he can think is how eager he is to get his hands on them and make them shine.

"My Impala's over here," Benny says, gesturing to his right. He stops at the third car in the line and sits on the hood. Dean follows him, moving around Charlie to circle the car, bending over to inspect it closely. The Impala looks like it was well taken care of at one point, but has been sitting for too long, and though it's not one of the worst cars in the barn, it's going to need a lot of work.
"'S nice," Dean comments, giving Benny a look. "Gonna need a lot of work."

"Yeah," Benny sighs, "a lot of the older ones ended up left in the dust when the new ones came around, so," he shrugs, "friend of mine has the newest model, you seen it?"

Dean raises a questioning eyebrow and leans in to look at Benny's phone, where he's pulled up google and is typing into the search bar. The pictures that come up are of shiny silver boxes that look nothing at all like his baby or the car they're leaning against.

"That thing is gross. Baby would be ashamed to be related to it."

Charlie snorts a laugh as Benny doubles over and Dean just shrugs it off. They sit and chat for a while and Benny offers him a room again, but Dean declines, assuring him he's okay in the hotel until they can figure out the apartment situation.

When Dean is finally left alone to work, it ends up being mostly hands-off. He grabs an old notebook from his glove compartment and makes a list of all the cars and what is wrong with them. He puts them in order of which ones need the most attention, and which he needs to start on first to get everything done as smoothly as possible. The last couple pages he dedicates to parts; which cars might need them, which part, and - with a little help from Benny and Charlie - where he can get them from.

It takes everything in him to make sure the list is complete because he’s eager to get to work now that he sees the cars. Taking this job was definitely a good idea.

The whole time he has an eye on the cherry Impala, but the thought of it is almost uncomfortable like he's cheating on his baby by working on this other car. It's an absurd idea, he knows, but he avoids looking directly at the car until the very end just the same.

Charlie joins him a little after two holding up a garbage bag in one hand and a dust mask in the other, "looks like I'm on cleaning duty," she grins, "how goes the car work?"

"It's gonna be a big job, but it'll be fun."

"Sure you don't wanna switch?"

Dean grins, looking between the garbage bag and her hopeful expression, "pretty sure I'm good."

"Worth a try?"

"Not really," he chuckles.

The rest of the day passes quickly because Charlie's moved into the same space as him. They share work stories and commiserate about the heat - Charlie's originally from Chicago, and despite being here for a year already, she handles the heat even worse than Dean does. They don't see much of Benny until the end of the day, but by five o'clock, Dean's already decided that Charlie is amazing.
Chapter 5

Dean blares the music as he drives back into the city. He doesn't have any food at the hotel, so he picks up dinner on the way, but he's feeling pretty good after his first day and the extra expense is a minor one. He considers driving straight through to Cas' place, but he decides against it, keeping to his plan. He gets back to the hotel just after seven and after dinner and a shower, he's in bed before ten.

He wakes up thinking about Cas. He thinks about him all through breakfast and all the way out to the barn. He's been doing so well, but this morning he can't think about anything else and he even heads to work early to try and keep his mind off of it. He finds Charlie already in the barn too, prepping the walls to paint and she gives him a questioning look as he walks over.

"You're here early."

"Yeah, uh, I've got a lot on my mind, wanted something to keep it occupied."

"You want to talk about it?" Charlie offers and Dean is tempted to say yes, but he thinks better of it.

"No. Thanks though."

Dean gets through two hours of work before giving up. He takes a quick break to drink some water and have a snack and then he goes back into the barn.

"Hey, uh- if you're still up to chat, I could use some advice?"

"Yeah, what's up?"

"There's uh- I've got this friend in the city. He moved away when we were kids and when I visited last time I saw him for the first time in ten years. Now I'm-" he doesn't know how to explain everything without either sounding like an overly attached creep, or telling Charlie that he's in love with his best friend from ten years ago. Neither of these are viable options.

"Can I ask you something before you continue?"

"Go for it."

"This friend. Is he a... boyfriend?"

"Uh, no," Dean mumbles, but he knows he's blushing now and he hates it. "He um. It was never like that."

"Sorry, I-"

"No, you're right. I'm not really open about it yet, but I- we used to fuck around when we were kids. It was never anything serious, just like... I don't know, a couple of kids in a shitty situation and all we really had was each other, but I loved him." He sighs, turning toward Charlie and leaning on the door of the Chevelle he's pulling apart. "I kinda still do." His heart is thudding heavily against his ribcage and he's waiting for Charlie to shut him down, but she doesn't. Instead, she huffs a little laugh and wipes her hands off on a rag.

"Yeah, I've been there. What's this advice?"

"I don't know if I should see him when I'm here."
"How come?"

"Because the last time I saw him, he almost kissed me and I'm afraid if we spend any time alone together I'm gonna fall for him all over again and not know what to do when it comes time to go home."

"Makes sense, but do you really think you're doing yourself any good secluding yourself?"

"No," he argues, "but-"

"I think you're right about not starting something when you're only here short-term and you don't know if he's into it to begin with. But if you really want my advice? Don't keep yourself from being happy just because you're afraid of falling for him. Be friends, hang out. Don't let Benny and I be the only people you see while you're here." She laughs lightly and Dean smiles at her. She's right. He knows this, and it's basically what he's been wanting all along yet he just can’t trust himself when it comes to Cas.

"Thanks," he mumbles. With a quick smile at Charlie, he gets back to work. The rest of the day goes fairly smoothly, despite the unsettling feeling of having let someone in on his big secret. He's stopped thinking about Cas, but he's anxious now for different reasons though his worries are swayed at the end of the day when Charlie invites him for dinner with Benny.

"Are you two-" he falters, not quite knowing how to phrase it, but Charlie just grins at him and shakes her head.

"No. Benny and I have known each other for a hundred years, but he's not exactly my type."

"Oh."

"Meaning, he's a dude."

"Oh."

"What?" she asks, turning to shut the barn door behind them, "you thought you were special?"

"Shut up," Dean mumbles, but he smiles as Charlie follows after him.

She and Benny take him to an old style diner for dinner and over burgers and milkshakes they talk about everything from work to music to their families and Dean's glad to know he's not the only one with a bit of a mismatched family.

When he gets back to the hotel that night, he's feeling better than he has and he's happy to have Benny and Charlie to work with because they're easy to talk to and other than Cas, he doesn't know anyone else in the city. He showers before bed and checks his messages before climbing into bed and hoping tomorrow will be as good as today was.

Wednesday goes well, despite a couple of bumps in the road that Dean was fully expecting working on old cars, but Thursday is another story. Benny is waiting for him when he gets to work, which he hasn't done since he started, and he doesn't look particularly happy. Dean knows he's been doing everything properly, and he's barely even touched the cars yet, so it can't be about his work, but it doesn't stop the sinking feeling in his stomach. He pulls up next to Benny and climbs out of the car trying not to look too nervous.

"Something; wrong?"
"Sort of," Benny admits, "my buddy called this morning, the apartment manager. Turns out that the whole place needs to be re-wired and they're not accepting new tenants until the whole thing is done." Well, fuck.

"Okay, well..." Dean exhales slowly, "that's not the end of the world, right? I know it was cheap and convenient, but I'm sure I can find somewhere else."

"We will, yeah. Charlie 'n' I will do whatever we can and you can always stay with me in the meantime."

"Thanks, I'll um, I'll see what I can find tonight." Benny gives him a smile and claps him on the shoulder before turning back toward the house.

"You want a coffee or anything?"

"If you're offering."

That night, when he gets back to the hotel, Dean pulls out his laptop and starts searching for apartment rentals in the city. It takes less than ten minutes for him to lose hope. There's nothing anywhere nearby that's less than $2,000 a month and he knew it was going to be expensive, but he was hoping that outside the city might be a little more affordable. He starts looking further away, but by nine o'clock he's given up hope of finding his own place and he's considering taking Benny's offer of a room. It's not ideal. He doesn't particularly like living with people he doesn't know and after having three roommates, he was hoping to have his own space. But Benny wouldn't be charging him to stay there, which is a hell of a lot better than the rent he can find anywhere else.

Dean goes to bed early and tries not to think too much about his living situation until the morning.

When he does get up it's because his phone is buzzing next to his ear. He groans and rolls over to answer it, but by that time whoever it is has already hung up and texted him instead. He unplugs his phone and lifts it above his face, squinting at the brightness of the screen as he opens the message. The call is from Benny and so is the text, so he ignores the missed call for now and checks out the message instead.

<< Road's out to the barn for construction. Don't worry about coming in today because you won't make it. See you Monday."

Well, that's something. It gives him a little while longer to find somewhere to live rather than accepting Benny's offer right away, but it also means he's got three whole days to try and distract himself.

He skips breakfast in the hotel, opting for something cheaper, and makes his way down to the beach. It's a bit of a drive from where he is now, but it's worth it to get out of his own head for a little while and out into the fresh air.

He takes a book and settles himself in a little spot down in the sand as far away from the rest of the crowd as he can - something that's not particularly easy, even in early May. He reads for a little while and then just sits and watches the waves rolling in but he's itching to move around so he gets up and wanders around the city. He window shops at interesting stores and spies into restaurants until his stomach reminds him that he hasn't eaten since breakfast.

All day his phone has been a heavy presence in his pocket and he's been fighting the urge to text Cas and see what he's up to. He knows the answer because it's still a weekday and Cas probably just finished work but he might not even be home yet. Dean could probably find the university if he tried,
but instead finally gives in to his phone’s silent demands. As soon as he gets back to the car, he pulls out his phone and shoots off a quick text to Cas asking if he's free for dinner. Dean’s feeling a little alone, especially with his new housing problems, and he could use some company.

By the time he's back in the hotel parking lot, Cas has replied and Dean's heart thuds in his chest at the prospect of opening the message. What if he says no? What if he says yes? He doesn't even bother getting out of the car before checking the text.

<< I am definitely free and I'd love to have dinner with you. I'm still at work, but I can meet you somewhere if you like?

>> Send me the address and I'll come pick you up.

If Dean is driving, it gives him control and it means he has to take Cas back to the university to get his car so he won't end up back at Cas' place again because he doesn't trust himself. Cas gives him the address and Dean puts it into his phone and heads back out onto the road.

He's closer to the university than he thought and it's only a few minute's drive to meet Cas, though the traffic holds him back and it takes twice as long to get there as it would normally. When he does arrive, Cas is waiting out on the front steps with his rolled up sleeves and black slacks and Dean has to remind himself that they are just friends. Even ten years from now, Dean could see him every day and still be overwhelmed by his eyes and his smile and the way his clothes always seem like they're struggling to stay on him. He can't imagine what he looks like naked. Considering the way his body reacts just at the idea of it, that's something he should keep out of his mind as much as possible.

Cas comes down to the car and Dean can feel his fingers tense instinctively around the steering wheel. There's a brief moment of panic as Cas opens the door but then he just slips in next to Dean, smiling over at him and Dean's whole body relaxes.

"So," he asks, "where should we go?"

"I know a nice little local place not far from here. It's about ten minutes from home."

"Sounds good," Dean grins, but his stomach twists at the thought of home because he could so easily get swept up and end up back at Cas' place again because he doesn't trust himself. Cas gives him directions and Dean follows along easily enough and they end up at a little standalone place right on the beach. It's small, with a little patio out on the front and when they get inside, it's so similar to Meg's place that he's a little taken aback.

Cas has them seated out on the patio because it's a warm evening and the wind is low, and Dean feels more like he's on a date now than he has on actual dates. It makes it hard to focus on anything for very long because he keeps getting distracted by the way the breeze ruffles Cas' hair or the way his nose wrinkles when he smiles. Cas is good at getting him back to reality and after they order their food he asks about work.

"It's been good so far. I get to work with Charlie most of the time, so I'm not out there on my own and it's pretty basic work, nothing I'm not used to."

"You're enjoying it?"

"Yeah, I am."

"And the city? Are you settling in okay."

"I'm still at the hotel for now," he sighs. "I was supposed to be moving into an apartment next week
or so, but that's been pushed back."

Cas frowns. "What happened?"

"Turns out the electrical in the building wasn't up to code, so now they're rewiring and I'm looking for somewhere else to live. The only problem is everywhere is expensive unless I want to be way the hell out of the city."

Cas doesn't skip a beat, he doesn't even look up from his drink before he says, "you could stay with me."

Dean flounders because at first he's not sure he heard Cas properly, but then when he looks up, and Cas is watching him expectantly. Oh, he's serious. "Cas, I couldn't."

"Obviously, you can," Cas smiles, "or I wouldn't have offered."

"Cas-" he doesn't know what he's saying because he can't think straight. Obviously, staying with Cas would be a terrible idea, but he's running short on options and Cas did say he has a spare room. "Are you sure?" he asks, which is perfect because that means his brain and mouth are working separately because he did not decide on this.

"Yes," Cas assures him.

"I thought you didn't like having roommates."

"I like you."

Oh. Well. He pauses for a second because he knows this is a terrible idea, and as quickly as he can, he runs through every possible excuse he could use not to stay with Cas that isn't going to offend him. "I don't know," he says finally, "it's a little far out."

"Think about it," Cas insists. "You're free to stay any time, even if you just want a break from the hotel for a couple of days."

"Cas, you don't have to do this."

"I know but I want to."

"You're too good to me."

Cas just hums his obvious disagreement, but their dinner arrives a moment later and the argument ends there. They eat mostly in silence except for when Cas checks to make sure he likes his food and makes it feel even more like a date than before.

After being stuck in his own head for the duration of their meal, Dean excuses himself to the bathroom and sneaks away. As soon as he gets there, he locks himself in one of the stalls and pulls his phone out. He only has a couple of minutes at best, providing Cas doesn't come in after him. He opens his text conversations and luckily Meg is right up at the top.

>> Please tell me you're free tonight, I really need to ask you about something.

<< Another crisis? Haven't you reached your limit?

>> Apparently not. Cas just asked me to stay with him while I'm here.

The bathroom door opens and Dean panics and shoves his phone back in his pocket, flushing the
toilet for good measure. Apparently he's losing his damn mind, because when he opens the stall, there's no one else there and he sneaks back out and strolls over to where Cas is sitting at their table - with two plates of pie sitting in front of him. If Cas is trying to convince him to stay, he's doing a damn good job of it.

"What's this?" Dean asks, sitting back down again.

"Dessert. They have the best pie in all of LA."

"You sure about that?"

"Yes," Cas says certainly, "do you know how many slices of pie I've eaten since coming here?"

"So what then, this was just a bribe?"

"No," Cas huffs a soft laugh, "I just knew you would appreciate it."

Dean's spent enough time around people who only do things because they want something from you that he doesn't entirely believe this isn't some sort of bribery, but he eats his pie anyway because he's not about to waste it. Cas is right, even after just the first bite, this is the best damn pie he's ever tasted.

"Fuck Cas, this is amazing."

"I told you," he grins smugly.

"Okay, you win. No bribes, just fantastic pie." He finishes eating and leans back in his chair, looking past Cas out the window because he can't bring himself to look at him.

"Hey," Cas says, "you want to go for a walk? Along the beach?"

Jesus Christ, why is everything with Cas so goddamn romantic. It's like someone is trying to make him suffer. "Yeah. I've got no plans for the evening, why not?"

What Dean is expecting to be a short walk along the beach ends up taking two hours and by the time they get back to the car, he's exhausted. Cas is keeping close to his side and Dean is definitely glad now that he didn't drink at dinner because the temptation to slip his hand into Cas' is already overwhelming enough. It's not until they get back into the car that he's totally sure he won't do it.

"Do you have to go back to the university?" he asks and Cas hums at him in surprise, turning to face him.

"What?"

"To get your car?" Dean offers.

"Oh, yeah. Sorry, I was just thinking." If he didn't know better, Dean would think he looks a little embarrassed, like he just caught him doing something he shouldn't. He pulls out of the dusty parking lot and makes for the university again, regretting that he has to leave Cas at all. By the time they arrive, he almost considers asking Cas to come back with him, but there's a difference between asking someone to come back to your house and asking someone back to your hotel room. He keeps his mouth shut.

Cas gets out and shuts the door, but he leans back over the open window, smiling over at Dean. "I had a good time tonight. Think about my offer, okay?"
"Yeah, okay."

"Goodnight, Dean."

"Night, Cas." He doesn't feel great about it, but he can't help but watch as Cas walks away, staring after him until he's out of sight. When he disappears around the corner, Dean drops his head onto the steering wheel and sighs. If it's going to be like this every time he's with Cas, it's going to be next to impossible to live with him.

He pulls away from the curb and he just drives. It's funny, really, how for so long he just existed on his own, knowing Cas was somewhere out there and happy in the knowledge that wherever that was, it was better for him than Lawrence. Then the moment he pops back into Dean's life he's all he can think about and that emptiness inside him is starting to feel remarkably Cas-shaped.

He gets back to the hotel just before nine and it's the first time he's checked his phone since the restaurant. There are 6 new messages from Meg.

<< Are you serious?

<< Are you going to?

<< Dean?

<< Where did you go I swear to God.

<< You can't just tell me that and leave.

<< If I don't hear from you tonight, it had better be because you're fucking him.

In hindsight, maybe that wasn't the best thing to leave off on before disappearing for a couple of hours.

>> I won't be fucking anyone tonight, sorry to disappoint.

<< Clearly, you're not trying hard enough.

<< What did you tell Cas?

>> Told him I'd think about it. I don't think it's a good idea.

<< Are you still stuck on just being friends with him?

>> I'm only here for the summer, I can't start something.

>> I can't lose him again.

<< I know this is gonna sound crazy, but maybe you should just see how things go? Maybe give living with him a chance and if you don't like it you can figure something else out. Stop killing yourself trying to not be with him.

Dean frowns to himself and rereads the message. Maybe Meg is right and he should give things a shot. After all, Cas is the one who tried to kiss him last time- but then what is he supposed to do when this job is done and he has to go back home? What if Cas only wants what they used to have? Dean can't do that, not again; it didn't even work well for them when they were kids and they're adults now and Dean wants more than just a fuckbuddy.
"Dean?"

>> I don't know. Maybe. I'm gonna think about it over the weekend.

He does think about it; in fact, he spends all weekend doing nothing but thinking about it and texting Cas and hoping he doesn't ask again because he doesn't have an answer for him. The weekend seems to drag on forever as Dean locks himself in his hotel room and reads or watches TV but he doesn't leave except to eat and he doesn't talk to anyone other than Cas and Meg via text.

On Monday when he gets to work, he knows he has to make a decision. Tomorrow is his last night in the hotel and after that he's either going to have to stay with Benny or Cas, and whoever it is is going to need at least a days' notice, so it has to be today. His stomach flops as he walks the path to the barn and as soon as Charlie sees him, she knows something's up.

"You look... exhausted. What did you do all weekend?"

"Literally nothing."

"Something going on?"

"Not really, just this apartment thing. Benny said I could stay with him and then Cas said he's got a room too and I just don't know what to do."

"Cas, is he the one you told me about the other day?"

"Yeah," Dean confirms, "he's my best friend, but it's complicated. I have to decide tonight though because I need to let them know what I'm gonna do."

"Okay well, why wouldn't you want to stay with Cas?"

"Because sometimes it's hard to be around him and I don't want to risk doing something stupid."

"Understandable." Dean's expecting to be told he's overreacting or that he should just not do something stupid, and it's refreshing to be told he's not overreacting for once. "That can be a tough situation, but it's also free. How would he feel about giving it a try for a week or so and see how it goes?"

"He'd probably be open to pretty much anything."

"Maybe suggest that then? Then at least if you want to leave after you still have somewhere to stay until you find something. And Dean, if he's your friend, he should be understanding that all of this is a big thing for you."

"Uh, yeah, except he kinda doesn't know anything about it."

"What?" Charlie asks, "I thought you guys had a thing or something?"

"Only when we were kids, and it was never anything serious."

"Oh. Well, I'm sure it wouldn't be too bad. Just to try."

Dean thinks about it and Charlie is right; what he and Cas do or don't have is a complicated mess and honestly, as close as he feels to him, maybe Cas doesn't even really see them as friends anymore. He did offer to let Dean stay with him though, so there's that; they'll have to sit down and talk about it one night because Dean's mind is too all over the place to not talk to Cas about it.
"You're probably right. Maybe I'm thinking too much about all of this. Cas has always been great."

"You've got a lot to think about," Charlie agrees. "Just try not to worry too much. And if it doesn't work out, you can always stay with me, too, if Benny's too intimidating." She grins at him and Dean shakes his head as he gets back to work.

"Thanks, Charlie."

Work passes quickly because he's enjoying himself today and Charlie is good at distracting him when he gets too far into his own head. Sam always goes on and on about Jess and how he feels like he's known her forever, and until he met Charlie, he'd never experienced that before. He's more comfortable with her than a lot of people he's known his whole life and she just sort of gets him. Plus, she's hilarious and arguably nerdier than Sam, so they have a ton in common.

At the end of the day, she wishes him luck with his decision and she drives off before Dean. He watches her drive off and sits in the car for a moment with the stereo on, thinking. He's thinking too much about all of this, and he's stressing himself out more than he needs to. He calls Cas before he can think twice about it and when he hears his voice, he's glad he did.

"Hi," Cas says softly and Dean can't help but smile at him.

"Hey. Look I'm just on my way back to the hotel, but is that offer still available?"

"Of course."

"How do you feel about having a roommate?"

"I'd love to have a roommate. When do you need to be out?"

"I'm paid up until tomorrow, but if that's too-"

"Not at all," Cas interrupts, "why don't you bring your things over in the morning so you don't have to pay for an extra day."

"Yeah, I can stop by before work."

"I'll see you then."

"Thanks, Cas."

"It's my pleasure, Dean. I'll see you in the morning."

"Talk to you later." Dean breathes a sigh of relief as he tucks his phone away; one big problem dealt with and having agreed to stay with Cas, the prospect of it seems more exciting than anything and he finds he's really looking forward to going back there tomorrow.

The drive back to the hotel seems like nothing and for the first time, Dean doesn't feel so bad about going back to his room. It's nice as far as hotel rooms go, but it's a bed and a bathroom; with Cas, he'll have his own room and - presumably - the rest of the house to run around in. He gets to work packing his things up right away and flops into bed earlier than normal because he still has to check out and drive over to Cas' place in the morning before heading out to Benny's for eight.

In the morning, he's tired and excited and nervous and today is going to be a long damn day. He starts with a shower and finishes gathering his stuff together, but he doesn't have time to grab breakfast on the way, so he skips that step for the time being. Worst case, he'll stop at McDonald's on
the way out to work.

It takes him a few minutes to load the car and check out and then he's on his way to Cas'. Cas meets him just outside the elevator in a pair of lounge pants and an oversized sweater, but he's smiling as Dean approaches and he comes over to help him bring his things inside. He looks like he's just woken up and his hair is sticking up in every direction; it's fucking adorable and doing exactly nothing to stop Dean from wanting to kiss him.

"You didn't have to get up for me," he mumbles, trying - and failing - to hold back the smile that breaks through.

"I wasn't going to let you haul this all upstairs on your own."

"Oh no," Dean jokes, "how would I get up the elevator on my own."

Cas just gives him a look and picks up Dean's duffel bag from his feet. "Besides, I had to come and let you in. I wasn't kidding when I said the code lock is broken. Do you have everything?"

"Yeah, this is all of it."

Cas smiles and nods toward the elevator and Dean follows after him, pulling his rolling suitcase behind him. They ride up to Cas' floor and walk down the hall, but Dean knows if he goes inside now, he won't want to leave.

"Do you mind if I just leave this for now, I've gotta head out to Benny's-"

"Yeah, you go," Cas smiles brightly at him again. There's a tension in the air and Dean can't quite place it, but he feels like he's not the only one who can feel it. He gives Cas a quick smile before thanking him again and heading back down to the parking lot.
Chapter 6

Work that day is just as difficult as expected. He only gets halfway through before giving in and checking his phone and there's a message from Cas: **If I'm not home before you, try the code and if it doesn't work just come and get my key.** Dean can't explain the exact feeling he gets reading it, but it reminds him of the jokes they had as kids that Sam was never privy to - some little thing that belongs to just the two of them. Charlie catches him smiling at his phone, but she doesn't say anything and Dean's glad because he doesn't want to ruin his good mood by explaining that he's a sappy piece of shit.

After what seems like ages, Dean gets back to find Cas' car is already in the parking lot and when he heads up to the condo he can smell dinner cooking from outside. The door is unlocked and he lets himself in, though it feels a little weird just walking into this fancy-ass apartment without knocking. His bags are gone from where he left them in the morning, and a quick check tells him Cas already put them away in the bedroom for him. He puts his bag down and barely makes it to the living room before Cas peeks around the kitchen wall and the smile on his face shifts into something unreadable, but the way his eyes roam over Dean's body is undeniable.

Dean's suddenly aware of the fact that he's covered in dust and grease and he probably stinks. Cas seems less than concerned, but Dean feels uncomfortable and makes an attempt to duck away.

"I'm gonna have a shower if that's okay?"

Cas nods slowly. "Go ahead. Dinner will be ready soon."

"I'll make it quick." Dean turns back to the entranceway and locks himself in the main bathroom, pressing his head against the door. Okay, so this is going... not as badly as he anticipated, though he's about to get naked in Cas' bathroom and a little part of him wants Cas to walk in on him. So while it could be going better Dean can hardly be blamed for wanting someone like Cas to come in the shower with him.

He makes it quick and when he gets out he has the sinking realization that his clean clothes are all in the bedroom, so he wraps a towel around his waist and sneaks out into the hall. As much as he's prepared for Cas to walk in on him in his fantasies, the actual thought of it makes him a little anxious. He changes quickly into comfortable clothes and heads back out into the kitchen to see Cas. He's got dinner laid out already - Burgers and fries with salad - and when he spots Dean, he nods toward the balcony.

"You want to eat outside?"

Dean nods and takes the offered plate and glass of water and Cas holds the door open for him as he follows him out onto the porch. They sit on the sofa and Dean looks out over the water, trying to picture the rest of his summer here. So much for just giving it a chance.

Cas asks him about work and Dean makes light of the fact that he's a filthy disaster but Cas doesn't seem to care how he comes home, and he's more interested in whether Dean is enjoying himself. After a couple of hours, Dean excuses himself and takes their dishes to the kitchen to tidy up before bed. Cas tries to stop him but Dean assures him that if he's going to be staying here for free, he's certainly going to be helping to clean up.

"Okay," Cas relents, brushing a hand down his arm before heading into the living room.
Dean washes everything by hand and dries it all, hunting down the correct cupboard to put everything away before packing up the leftovers. He's just finishing up when Cas comes back in.

"I think I'm gonna call it a night," Dean says. He was up early and his lack of sleep is making it harder for him not to do or say anything stupid to Cas. "Thanks for dinner. I'll see you in the morning?"

"Yeah, I'm usually up pretty early. Sleep well, Dean."

"G'night, Cas."

Dean heads off to his room; he hasn't had time yet to organize his things so he puts on some music, turning it down low so he doesn't disturb Cas, and he does that now. The unit the TV is sitting in has closet space on either side and he starts there, hanging all of his shirts before folding the rest of his clothes to put in the drawer. It doesn't take nearly as long as he's expecting so he changes into something more comfortable and tucks himself into bed. It's definitely homier than the hotel, but he's still a little uncomfortable though he puts that down to being in a new place away from home.

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Work the next day is one of the best so far; first thing when he pulls in there's a delivery van there and Dean seems to be the first one there so he heads over to see if he can help with anything. The guy, it turns out, is not only super hot - but he's got the parts Dean's been waiting for. He's not subtle about flirting with Dean and after he's gone, Dean finds a phone number scrawled on the top of the invoice.

The encounter gets him through the rest of the day and despite Charlie's constant pestering he doesn't mention it to her. He considers mentioning it to Cas, just to see how he'd react, but he thinks better of it and the phone number and the invoice stay at work.

When he gets home, Dean is starving. As soon as he gets in, he dumps his bag in his room and quickly gets changed into something a little cleaner before heading into the kitchen to see what Cas is up to because he can hear him banging around in there. Hopefully, that means food, and Dean goes to see if he can do anything to help. Maybe he'll subtly mention his delivery guy and see what happens.

As soon as he turns into the kitchen, Dean stops dead and all thoughts of the delivery guy are gone. He realizes he must be staring because when Cas notices him, he stops and lifts an eyebrow at him. Dean can hardly be blamed though; Cas is wearing nothing but a pair of black jogging pants and the last time he saw him this naked, they were fifteen. Cas has most definitely grown into his body. "Sorry," he says, "it gets pretty hot in here when I have the oven on." Dean only now realizes there's a shirt tossed over the back of one of the bar stools and he just nods because he doesn't trust himself to speak.

There's something dark on the back of Cas' arm and the light's in the wrong place for it to be a shadow, so Dean tries to sneak a look at it. He doesn't have to try hard though. As soon as Cas turns back to the cutting board, his back is in full view and Dean can't help the little wow that tumbles out of his mouth because of the huge black wings spreading out from Cas' shoulder blades down the backs of his arms.

"I'm making nachos," Cas says, jolting Dean back to reality. "Is that okay?"

"Yeah," Dean agrees absent-mindedly, "yeah, sounds good." He's still fixated on the tattoo and he
walks up behind Cas; he stands too close and he can hear Cas' little huff of amusement as he realizes what he's doing. He spares only a quick glance over his shoulder before he goes back to chopping and Dean barely resists reaching out and tracing the delicate lines inked into his skin.

"Go ahead," Cas says softly and Dean doesn't know how Cas knows what he's thinking, but he doesn't question it. He reaches out tentatively, brushing his fingers over the outline, pushing up from his shoulder blades and. He spreads his fingers over Cas' shoulders, running his palms down the backs of his arms and back up again.

"They're beautiful," he whispers. It surprises him a little when Cas responds with a quiet thank you, just as soft and breathless as Dean is. "When did you get them?"

"Year or so after I moved here. Gabriel told me we were free out here, that we'd finally get a chance to spread out wings- that I could whatever I wanted now."

"And you did."

Cas hums and Dean realizes he's still touching him, but the ripple of Cas' muscles under his skin is intriguing and now that he's got permission to touch him, he might never let go.

"Why didn't you guys get out earlier?"

"It was hard. Gabe was only working part-time and I wasn't old enough to go on my own. And I was afraid. They were my family and I didn't know how to tell anyone."

"Except for me," Dean points out. He moves forward unintentionally, but Cas makes no attempt to move.

"I trusted you. I didn't trust a lot of people."

Dean shuts his eyes, sliding his hands up Cas' shoulders and down his back. He tips his head forward, resting between Cas' shoulders and he breathes softly against his skin. There's still so much in their past that he feels guilty for - for not being able to do more, for not getting Cas away from the people who hurt him most - it's a little overwhelming to hear that Cas still trusted him most, despite all of it.

Cas shudders a little under the touch, but neither of them moves or acknowledge the gesture out loud. Dean needs to move though, he needs to let Cas finish dinner and he should probably stop touching him so much.

"I'm gonna-" he leaves it open-ended, backing away, but his fingertips brushing gently against Cas' skin and Dean hears his soft little sigh that escapes Cas' lips. He pretends not to and he slips away quietly.

"Dinner's almost ready. Do you want to eat on the deck?"

"Yeah, sounds good."

As Dean walks back toward his room, his fingers long to slip between Cas', holding him firm so Dean can pull him close and kiss him. He may not be good at voicing how he feels, but he can sure as hell show it, and he wants nothing more than to show Cas just how loved he is. He wants to show him how wrong his brothers were - how wrong everyone was - and just how wonderful he really is. If he could, he'd go back to highschool and suck it up and tell his parents he was bisexual. He would take Cas home with him so that they would have never ended up in the situation where Cas had to suffer.
He escapes to the bathroom and splashes some water on his face. When he goes back, Cas already has everything set up on the balcony. Like everything in Cas' home, the balcony decor is sleek and modern, despite being nearly overrun with trailing plants. Dean slips into the seat across from Cas' and they eat in silence: or rather, Cas doesn't seem to have anything to say and Dean can't quite tell if it's awkward or not, so he keeps his mouth shut too. Instead, he listens to the sounds of the city - cars and planes and the occasional shout from down at the beach that's loud enough to be heard from the apartment. He's thinking about going down himself, taking a blanket and a book - or maybe Cas - when Cas interrupts his thoughts.

"I'm sorry I stopped emailing," he says suddenly, and when Dean looks up, Cas is staring down at his plate with severe concentration, "I never wanted to stop, and I wasn't lying when I said I felt guilty, but it was more than that. My feelings for you were... not as platonic as originally planned, and I felt bad that you had to take care of me all the time."

"And what if I wanted to?" Dean blurts before he can think better of it, "what if I felt the same way?"

"Did you?" Cas asks, looking up at him finally.

"Yeah," Dean says, "I did." His heart is racing, thudding so heavily against his chest that he's certain Cas can hear it. Now would be the perfect time to blow his whole plan to shit, to chuck it out the window and just flat out ask Cas is he still feels the same, but the thought alone scares the shit out of him and he silently chews his lip instead. Cas, apparently, doesn't have the same hang-ups.

"Do you still-" is as far as he gets though, before Dean's phone goes off rather loudly, interrupting him. Dean wants to ignore it and pretend it never happened, but the moment is gone now and it's Sam's ringtone blaring from his pocket, so he sighs in resignation and rises out of his chair.

"I should get this," he huffs, and Cas nods up at him, watching after him as Dean slides the door open and shut again, stalking toward his room as he answers the call.

"What?" he asks impatiently, holding the phone up to his ear as he drops onto the end of his bed.

"Bad day?" Sam asks, sounding a little wary down the line.

"No, my brother just has the worst timing possible. What's up?"

"Should I call back later?"

"No," Dean sighs, it's fine. He wanders back through the house, shutting himself in his room.

"What's up?"

"Just called to see how you're settling in. How's work?"

"Work's good. Charlie - the girl I'm with - is awesome, I think you two would get along great. I'm actually really enjoying it out here."

He fills Sam in on all the details of his work, and Sam listens patiently despite Dean's near certainty that Sam doesn't give a crap about the cars he's working on. When Sam's fully caught up, he tells Dean about life back home and both Aaron and Jo say a quick hello. For the first time since he came to California, he feels really homesick.

For a little bit he sits and mopes in his room but sitting around thinking only makes things worse and he heads back out to the kitchen to see if anything needs to be cleaned up. He knows this is only temporary, and right now he's actually happy where he is - he likes staying with Cas - but he misses
Sam and their friends and it's weird knowing only three people in the entire city.

Cas is still out on the balcony when Dean goes into the kitchen, tidying up and bringing the last of the dishes inside. Dean holds a hand out to take them and Cas looks like he's going to protest, but the look on Dean's face must stop him because instead he just smiles and lets him take the dishes away. There's a dishwasher, but Dean needs a distraction so he fills the sink with hot, soapy water and starts in on his task.

Cas comes in to sit with him and he tries to keep up a conversation, but Dean is struggling with it and it doesn't take long before Cas realizes. He comes up behind him, slipping his hands down Dean's arms and pulling his hands out of the water. Dean's not entirely sure what's happening but Cas presses up close against him and turns him around only letting go of his arms when he, seemingly suddenly, realizes how close they are. He takes a step back.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing."

"Dean, you were okay until your phone rang."

"It was just Sam," Dean shrugs. "It's kinda weird being away from home."

"You're homesick," Cas realizes and Dean just sort of shrugs his agreement, not looking at him.

"Come on," Cas says softly, "come sit down, the dishes can wait until tomorrow."

Dean lets himself be led into the living room and Cas sits him down on the couch while he flips through the channels trying to find something for them to watch. Dean's torn because he appreciates what Cas is doing but he simultaneously wants to hide himself away in his room and curl up into Cas' side and fall asleep.

He ends up somewhere in the middle when Cas tugs him into his side. Dean doesn't even try to readjust himself, he just lies half on Cas and half on the couch and when Cas throws an arm around his shoulders, Dean just cuddles up closer. He doesn't think about it, he just lets himself be (cuddled and comforted. He barely even pays attention to what's on TV because Cas is warm and close and despite the fact that his heart feels like it's going to beat right out of his chest, he feels surprisingly good right now.

As his eyes get heavy, Dean just slips a little lower in his seat. He could shut his eyes, just for a second, what's the worst that could happen.

When he wakes up, it's to Cas looking down at him softly. Dean stretches his arms and pushes himself back up into a sitting position.

"What time is it?" he mumbles, rubbing his eye with one hand.

"Close to eleven. I didn't want you to sleep on the couch and wake up sore for work."

"Thanks," Dean smiles. He gets up and Cas follows after him, resting a hand on his shoulder and slipping his hand up to the side of Dean's neck. Dean's just (sleepy) enough that he leans into the touch and he's considering closing the short distance between them when Cas draws away.

"Goodnight," he breathes. "I might be out early in the morning, so don't worry if I'm not here when you wake up. I'll leave you a key."

"Thanks. Goodnight, Cas. Thanks for... tonight."
"Anything I can do to help. I know it's hard to be away from the people you love." He gives Dean a soft little half-smile before turning to grab the remote. Dean heads to bed while Cas is locking up and he drops face-first onto his bed; he's so exhausted he almost doesn't bother getting up to get changed, but eventually, he gets out of his pants and that's just going to have to be good enough.

Cas is gone when he gets up in the morning, but when Dean goes into the kitchen to make himself coffee, there's already some in the pot and the little red light on the machine tells him it's still hot. He smiles to himself because of course Cas would make coffee for him, as he goes to grab a mug, but a small slip of paper on the counter stops him. He picks it up and as he reads the neatly printed words, his smile widens.

Good morning, Dean
I made blueberry pancakes and there are still some in the over, though I don't know how warm they'll be. There's coffee in the machine - it should still be warm - and whipped cream and extra blueberries in the two green bowls in the fridge.
Have a good day, I'll see you when you get home.

It's signed with a capital C and something else that might have been a smiley face or something, but has been scratched out so hard the paper is torn. He wonders about it for a moment, but he's quickly distracted by the promise of pancakes and he folds the note and tucks it into his pocket without thinking.

He doesn't eat much because he has to get going and he doesn't want to leave dishes for Cas to come home to, but he borrows a travel mug and takes his coffee to go before grabbing the key off the counter and looping it onto his own keychain. It looks weird sitting next to the rest of the keys - newer and shinier than the others - and it feels important. Dean changes into his work clothes and grabs his bag - he's stopped showering in the mornings because he always comes home filthy so there's not really any point. He locks up the apartment and heads down to the parking lot feeling hopeful for the rest of his day.

Of course, when he arrives, Charlie confronts him with the invoice that's got his delivery dude's phone number at the top. Dean laughs and takes it from her, looking at it like it's the first time.
"I'd forgotten about that."

"Really?" she asks. "You - my closeted bisexual friend - forgot about being blatantly hit on by a guy who, even by my standards, is super hot? I don't buy it."

Dean huffs a laugh and hands the paper back to her. "I had an interesting night." He turns to head toward the barn and Charlie comes after him.

"What, you're just not gonna tell me?"

"Cas and I just had a good night, there's not much to tell."

"Uh huh," Charlie says, clearly disbelieving. "Good enough that you forgot about Jesse?"

"Yeah."

Dean goes to open the door of the Mustang he's been focusing on, but Charlie stops him, getting herself between him and the car and leaning back against the door.

"This is where you suddenly shut up about this guy? You've been talking about Cas since the second I met you and now that you had a good night - nothing?"
Dean rolls his eyes. "We talked about some stuff in the past and it was good."

"Okay fine, keep your secrets." Charlie moves to let him at the car, but Dean stops her.

"Actually, can I ask you something?"

"Go for it."

"I just... I've been thinking about things with Cas. I keep going back and forth because I didn't want to start something - or try to - when I'm just gonna go home at the end of this, but being with him it feels different, like- I don't know, almost like there's still something there."

"Okay," Charlie starts, "I'm gonna tell you something. I don't know if you're the kind of person who just believes anyone anything says to you, so I didn't want to mention it, but the way Cas treats you is not normal."

"What-"

"Just listen to me, Dean. You haven't seen him for ten years and the first thing he does is invite you back to his apartment? Let you sleep on his couch? There is some huge amount of trust there. I don't see someone for ten years, I don't know them, I don't know if I can trust them in my house, but Cas just welcomed you in like no time had passed. You're living with him now. Look, I'm not saying he's desperately in love with you or anything, and I don't know him personally, but judging from everything you've told me? Yeah, Dean, there's definitely something there."

He's dumbfounded. It sounds like Charlie's been holding onto this for a while, and he feels bad for constantly talking to her about Cas. Honestly, he doesn't even realize it sometimes. But to hear from someone else - someone who doesn't even know the details - that there's something worth hoping for, he can't quite work out how to feel other than slightly nauseous. Once the dust of this revelation settles, Dean realizes what Charlie said; she doesn't even know Cas, and he makes a mental note to amend that.

He realizes he's been silent for a long time when Charlie raises both eyebrows at him and he shrugs apologetically. "Didn't realize how much I talk about him," he mumbles.

"All the damn time."

"So. Did you think any more about what you're going to do?" Charlie's packing up her tools and putting them all in the box in the corner of the room. She pauses and turns to look at Dean for his response.

"I don't know. I think I'm gonna see how it goes, it's still early and I'll be here for a while. I don't want to force something only for it to crash and burn."

"Doubtful," she says, "but if you want a break from thinking about it, why don't you come out for dinner with Benny and I tonight? Get out of the house for a bit."

"Yeah, that'd be awesome. I could do to get out a little more," Charlie beams at him, and Dean knows that he's going to love this woman by the time they're done here - he already does a little.

They get dinner at a little sports bar that's only a ten minute walk from Benny's so they walk, despite the heat, and Dean's exhausted by the time they get there, cursing Benny and insisting that he's going to die of heat exhaustion before this project is done.
"It's gonna get worse than this before it gets any better, brother," Benny chuckles, pushing the door open so Charlie can walk through ahead of him. Charlie finds them a table up on the upper level and then goes down to the bar to get drinks, leaving Dean and Benny alone.

"I hope it's okay that I came tonight," Dean says, looking up to Benny.

"Course it is. Besides, Charlie said you might need a change of pace."

"It's only been two days," Dean chuckles. Benny just shrugs.

Charlie comes back with their drinks and starts in on a story about this convention she's going to at the end of the summer, and how Dean and Benny need to go with her. Dean's surprised that she's so welcoming to someone she barely knows - especially considering all Dean has done is bitch about Cas since they met.

The night goes on and the more they drink, the more Dean thinks that going with Charlie is a brilliant idea, and the more he's wondering how long he'll be in California for. They order chicken wings and mozzarella sticks and Dean's having a fucking fantastic time when his phone goes off. At first, he ignores it, but when it goes off again, he realizes it might be important and nearly knocks himself off his stool trying to get his phone out of his pocket. Charlie giggles at him and tries to lean over his shoulder to see what he's doing, but Dean pulls his phone away and raises an eyebrow at her.

There's are two texts from Cas when he opens his mailbox:

<< I'm making burgers for dinner.

<< And there's an Indiana Jones marathon on if you get home in the next 20 minutes.

<< 10 minutes.

The third comes through just as he opens his phone and Dean smiles down at the screen; Cas definitely knows what he likes, and he feels bad for having to turn him down because that sounds like pretty much the perfect night, but he doesn't want to run out on Benny and Charlie.

"That Cas?"

Dean's head snaps up and he turns to find Charlie staring at him. "Sorry," he mumbles, making an attempt to put his phone away.

"This your loverboy?" Benny asks, leaning heavily on the table and looking over at him. Dean's not entirely sure how Benny found out about the whole Cas thing, but chances are Dean was rambling one day when he showed up - it's happened a couple of times now. The fact that Benny doesn't seem to give a shit that Cas is a dude though, makes him feel significantly more comfortable with the whole thing.

"Yep," Charlie grins and Dean feels horribly outnumbered.

"What's he say?"

"Nothing." Dean makes a second attempt to put his phone away, but Charlie stops him.

"Not a chance Winchester, tell me." She's drunk and Dean knows it, but he's not exactly sober enough himself to defend himself properly right now, either.

"It's nothin'. He just wants me to go home and watch movies with him."
"So what are you still doin' here?" Benny drawls.

"I'm not just gonna leave because something else comes up, I like hanging out with you guys and."

"Aw, Dean, that's sweet," Charlie grins, "but the chances of you getting laid are so much higher if you ditch right now and go curl up on a couch with Cas."

"Charlie-" Dean tries to argue, but she cuts him off with a bitchface that could rival Sam's.

"You go have a good night," she insists, "and you can tell us all about it tomorrow morning."

Dean thanks them both for dinner, and leaves a couple of bills to cover his part of the drinks and food before heading out to call a cab. Going home drunk is probably not the best plan, but it's not like he's past the point of (self-control), he's just a little tipsy. He texts Cas while he waits to let him know he's on his way and he'll be about half an hour.

The cab shows up quickly and by the time Dean gets home, he's missed the first half of *Raiders* but he's seen it enough times that he's not really missing anything. Cas gives him a look when he stumbles over the coffee table but Dean mumbles and apology and Cas just smiles at him and moves over.

"I didn't mean to interrupt your night," he says, "you didn't have to come home right away."

"I'd rather be here." Dean shifts in his seat, leaning against Cas' shoulder, and by the time the first movie is over he's slouched halfway onto Cas' side.

Cas cleans up in between movies and offers to make Dean a burger, but he's not hungry anymore and he's feeling a little sleepy, so he declines politely. When Cas comes back, Dean's straightened himself up, but Cas plops down in the corner of the couch and slides an arm around Dean's shoulders, tugging him in closer. Dean goes easily; he's tired and still a little buzzed and nothing bad came of it yesterday, so why not? His eyelids are already heavy, and Cas is warm and comfortable, so he shuts his eyes, listening to the movie in the background.

He doesn't know how long it's been, but he wakes up in Cas' lap, with Cas' fingers dragging through his hair. He hums sleepily, settling into his lap and Cas chuckles softly at him.

"You should get to bed."

"Probably," Dean mutters, but he doesn't want to, "how long was I out?"

"An hour or so? I figured I should let you sleep."

"Thanks." He's still warm with sleep and comfortable, and he wants to badly to bring Cas to bed with him and just curl up with him, tangle their limbs together and share his warmth. He manages to put himself up and off the couch and Cas follows him to his room, standing in the doorway as Dean drops onto his bed with a yawn.

"Goodnight, Dean," he says softly, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. He catches the faintest glimpse of a smile as Cas turns and shuts the door behind him and for a second, he considers calling him back and hauling Cas into bed with him, but it's only the beer making him brave and he wouldn't know what to do with himself in the morning. Still, if this is gonna be how he falls asleep every night, he's not complaining.
"No way, Dean, tell me."

"Charlie, I told you it was nothing."

"Right," she says, putting her sledgehammer head down and leaning on the handle, "and that stupid grin you've had on your face all morning is just because you're so happy that you got to watch Indiana Jones last night, right?"

"I mean, it's Harrison Ford," Dean smirks. Every atom of his existence is buzzing with the memory of what he can really only describe as cuddling with Cas last night, and as much as he would love to drag this on all night to harass Charlie, he really wants to tell her about it, so he breaks early and explains the whole thing. Charlie just looks at him for a good twenty seconds.

"You sound like a twelve-year-old who's never kissed a boy."

"Shut up, I've totally kissed boys," he shifts awkwardly and Charlie gapes at him.

"Oh my god, you haven't, have you?"

"I've kissed Cas-"

"That doesn't count. I thought you were together when you were kids?"

"We were, but I was only ever with him. My dad was uh," he pauses, biting his lip, "he wasn't quite so accepting as some people. I've never even told my brother."

"You told me."

"You're gay, Charlie."

"Yeah, okay, I'll give you that one. So, you and Cas - you gonna go for it?"

"I don't know. This... whatever it is that we have right now is good, but I don't wanna mess it up."

"Uh huh, and that's why you're so excited about lying in his lap."

"Shut up."

"You're adorable," she grins, picking up her sledgehammer again, "you know that, right?"

"Whatever."

"Did you say anything to him?"

"No, I fell asleep."

"And he just... let you sleep on him?" She groans in mock frustration, "Dean, you need to talk to him."

"Maybe," is all Dean says, still grinning to himself as he ducks his head back under the hood of the Mustang.
Chapter 7

Things at work only seem to get better. More and more often, Benny joins them to work in the barn, tearing down the old, rotten fixtures and making repairs to the structurally important ones. Charlie makes sure to fill him in on all of Dean's drama with Cas and while he sits and rolls his eyes at them, he's glad to have people who want to listen and care enough to give him advice - even when he doesn't ask for it. Soon enough, both of them have joined Meg in asking him nearly every day when he's planning on doing something about the very blatant feelings he has for his new roommate. *You don't want to end up in this weird limbo period forever*, Charlie says and maybe she's right, but Dean's still wary of messing up whatever this weird limbo period is because right now it's good.

He talks to Sam most nights too, even if they just text back and forth throughout the day; he tells him about work and LA and the beach and everything he can think of that isn't Cas. Sam was there the last time he lost Cas and he can already hear the exasperated tone if Sam were to find out where he's staying. Other than that, things are going really well, but talking to Sam makes him miss him more and makes him miss home and his friends back there. Most nights when the homesickness is really bad, he'll go out and sit out on the balcony and watch the waves roll in or the people swimming and sometimes Cas will join him. He seems to have a sense for whenever Dean's feeling down and he's become really good at distracting him from whatever is bothering him if he can't help figure it out. For the first time since he first got to LA, over a month ago now, Dean actually feels like he's at home.

Then, right near the end of the month, he has a day that completely shatters his happy little image.

It's a Thursday when everything goes to shit. Charlie's been sick for the last week, struggling to fight off a cold, and today she's got a fever so she's not at work. For the first half of his day, Dean is alone fighting to get the engine out of an old Fairlane, but the whole damn car is rusty and he's half-tempted to tell Benny it's just a write-off.

The second half of his day, his throat starts to hurt and he's fairly certain he's picked up the same damn cold Charlie has. Benny was supposed to come and help him later in the day, but the construction crew arrives to discuss the new building for the cars and his afternoon is taken up with planning and directing and Dean is left alone. Again. Most days, he doesn't mind having to work alone - he can put on his music and it gives him time to think, but this morning Cas was evasive with him at best and now that he's on his own, Dean can't think about anything else.

It doesn't get better when he gets home either. Cas isn't anywhere to be seen, but when Dean goes to make himself something to eat, he hears banging upstairs and assumes that means Cas is working. He leaves him alone when he's painting, not because Cas prefers it, but because they're together all the time now and it's a chance Cas has to be by himself - Dean has his work, but for Cas work means even more people.

Dean sets himself up in his room with a book and a snack and hides himself away for the better part of an hour before he hears Cas comes downstairs. He tries to hold back because he really doesn't want to face a quiet and unwilling Cas, but it's better than the not knowing and being alone in his room.

He spends another fifteen minutes in his room before going into the kitchen to confront Cas. Cas is scrubbing the countertops despite the fact that they're clean from this morning, and Dean takes a seat at the island, looking over at him.

"Cas?" he asks, and Cas turns to look at him, the expression on his face somewhere between helpless
and guilty, "is everything okay?"

"Yeah, it's nothing."

"Uh yeah, in my experience obsessively cleaning doesn't mean nothing."

Cas sighs heavily and drops the cloth onto the counter. "One of my colleagues asked me out to dinner," he says, dropping his shoulders, and despite the way his stomach drops, Dean can't figure out why this is a bad thing.

"Oh," he says, trying to sound casual, "what did you say?"

"I haven't said anything yet. I lied and I told him I needed to make sure tonight wasn't the night I already had plans. We were supposed to go out for dinner."

"You should go," Dean says because he's a masochist and clearly never wants to be happy. Cas almost looks disappointed, but he pulls off his gloves and crosses to lean on the island.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, man, I'm sure. You deserve good things just as much as anyone, and you said yourself your dating history sucks, maybe this is your chance to change that."

Cas scoffs at him like he's being ridiculous, "what are you gonna do?"

"Dunno," Dean shrugs, "maybe I'll call Sam, maybe I'll sit and watch Netflix all night." Cas frowns at him, but Dean slips off his chair, and steps behind him, guiding him out of the kitchen. "Go call him, and get dressed. Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself for one night."

"Dean-

"You should go get changed. Rubber gloves give the wrong impression on a first date." He pulls up his most convincing smiles and Cas sighs at him before brushing past him, presumably to go and get changed.

Dean all but pushes him out the front door and then the second he's gone, he doesn't know what to do with himself. He could text any one of his friends and have them tell him he's a damn fool for letting - encouraging - Cas to go on this date, but he's already been telling himself the same thing for the last half hour, he doesn't need to hear it from anyone else.

He slumps onto the couch and turns on the TV, switching every twenty minutes when he gets bored with whatever garbage is on this time. He manages to catch the last half of a documentary about Atlantis that holds his attention for almost an hour, but then it's over and he's bored again. He thinks about reading or asking Benny to hang out or do anything but wallow like this, but he doesn't have the energy to get up, never mind go out and he's still slouched in his spot when Cas gets home a couple of hours later.

Dean hears the door open and pretends to be asleep because he can't deal with this right now. The only saving grace is that Cas seems to be alone. He peeks his head around the corner and turns off the TV before pulling a blanket over Dean and heading into the dining room to pull the curtains closed.

Dean waits until he hears Cas heading upstairs and when his bedroom door shuts, he gets up and goes to his own room. He knows Cas has no qualms about waking him up to get him to bed, so why not tonight? The answer seems simple, but Dean doesn't want to think about it; what they've been
doing is too close to intimate and Cas doesn't want that now because maybe he's found something better. The verdict is in: Dean's a fucking idiot.

In the morning, Dean doesn't feel any better about himself and he also feels guilty for thinking badly about Cas' date; more than anyone, Cas deserves to be happy. He decides to be a good friend and ask about it, but it's harder than he expects it to be. Cas is sitting at the island, not eating the toast he just made and Dean's trying to make himself look busy while he considers what to say.

"How was last night?" he asks abruptly, forcing himself to stop playing out the whole conversation in his head.

"It was good," Cas says simply and Dean's heart sinks. "Not great, but good."

"Not great?" Dean asks and Cas just shrugs. "How come?"

"I don't know, do you ever- ever just wish you were with someone else?" Dean snorts without meaning to because yeah, he knows. That pretty much sums up every date he's been on in the last ten years. "It just made me realize there are still some things I need to sort out if I'm going to be dating anyone."

Dean doesn't like the sound of any of that, but he doesn't have time to ask because if he doesn't leave soon he's going to be late. He tells Cas that it'll probably be better next time and heads off to work, feeling like garbage.

Charlie calls him on it immediately, probably because he's working on his third coffee of the morning and still stifling a yawn as he strolls into the barn.

"You look like shit," she smiles.

"Good morning to you too."

"How much sleep did you get last night?"

"Couple hours? I don't know."

"Please tell me Cas is the reason you didn't sleep."

Dean groans. "Yeah, but not in the way you're hoping for. He had a date last night."

"Ouch."

"Yeah, tell me about it. I practically forced him to go."

"Uh, why?"

"Because I hate being happy?"

"You know what could solve this problem? If you ask him out."

"Yeah, that's not gonna happen."

"Because?"

"Because if something was going to happen, it would have by now."

"What are you waiting for, Dean? Because this guy is letting you live in his house, he makes you
breakfast almost every day, you sit around and cuddle and watch movies at least once a week. He almost kissed you for God's sake, Dean. Look, I know I said before that it makes sense not to tell him how you feel if you're afraid to, but at this point, I think you should ask him out."

"I've thought about it, but-" he shrugs, "something always seems to come up. This morning he said something about having to work through some stuff before dating, I don't know."

"Well if he's not up for a date, maybe something more casual? There's a little place down by the beach, they have an open mic night on the first Saturday of every month. Benny and I are going tomorrow, you should come with us. Bring Cas."

"Maybe. You guys wouldn't mind the company?"

"Not if it's gonna help your chances with Cas," she winks, "come on, give me a hand with cleaning up the back here so we can get the cars moved tomorrow? Benny wants to get the outside done ASAP so he can give you proper lighting to work."

Dean shoots a look at the mobile work lights he's been working with, "yeah, alright." He sighs and picks up a rake, following after Charlie.

As soon as he leaves Benny's he starts trying to figure out what he's going to say to Cas. He doesn't want to make it seem like a date because really, it's not; it's just a group of friends going out to listen to music but no matter how he turns it around in his head, it still feels like he's asking Cas out. He takes the long way home to give himself more time to think, and by the time he gets there, it's already almost six.

Cas is sitting in the living room when Dean strolls in, curled up in the corner with a book in his hands, but he glances up with a smile as Dean approaches.

"You're late."

"I was talking to Charlie about some stuff," Dean shrugs, "didn't realize what time it was. How was your day?"

Cas shrugs, setting his book down on the seat next to him, "nothing special. You?"

"Yeah, pretty much the same," he says automatically, then pauses, "actually uh, Charlie and Benny are going out tomorrow night- there's bar down by the beach and they're doing an open mic night. She asked me to come with them, and I thought you might like to come too."

Dean already feels like his heart is in his throat, and then when Cas reaches forward and slides a hand over his knee, it's like he can't breathe.

"I would love to go with you."

Dean offers to make dinner that night, and Cas is delighted, although it's mostly an excuse to not talk to him for a while so that he can't get his heart rate back to normal and remember how to breathe again. They eat out on the deck again, because it's nice out, and it's only getting warmer and then Dean goes to bed early because he's on edge and he needs some time alone to calm down if he's ever going to fall asleep.

He's getting an extra pair of clothes ready for tomorrow when there's a knock on the door, and Cas peeks his head into the room.

"I'm just heading to bed, but I have a couple things to do tomorrow, so I'll probably just meet you
guys out there if that's alright?"

"Yeah," Dean nods, "sounds good. Night Cas."

"Goodnight, Dean."

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The next morning and the following day pass to quickly for Dean's liking, and then it's five o'clock and he's following Charlie's truck into town, wondering what in the hell made him think this was a good idea. Somewhere along the way, time stops being real and all of a sudden he's sitting at a table with Benny and Charlie, shifting anxiously because Cas is stuck in traffic and Dean's so nervous he can barely think. It's certainly not the first time he's asked someone out, and really as far as this being a date, it's the most casual thing he could have come up with, but it's definitely the most nerve-wracking. Cas has been the only person he's felt anything for the last ten years and he's terrified of fucking things up and losing that.

He taps his fingers on the table until Charlie covers his hand with her own, "hey," she whispers, "you'll be okay, I promise. Right, Benny?"

"Hey, don't bring me into this," he grins at Dean, "though your boy'd have to be an idiot to say no, 'specially after all this," he gestures to the stage and Dean manages another calming breath before he sighs.

"He, uh, he doesn't know anything about that."

"Even if he doesn't," Charlie starts, "he still coming, there's still everything else."

Dean just groans loudly and drops his head onto his arms.

"All you have to do is ask, even if he doesn't get here on time. It's not like he doesn't want to, Dean, he's stuck in traffic. It's a Saturday night, so it's bound to be busy out there - just don't work yourself up about it."

Dean turns his chair again so that his knees are under the table and he swallows the rest of his drink in one gulp, "you're right, I just have to relax. I can do that."

He starts tapping his fingers on the table again, shaking his leg so much that Charlie has to physically put her hand on his knee to stop him. In far too little time, Dean's being called up to the stage, and Cas still isn't there. He turns to Charlie and she gives him an encouraging smile, but his stomach is in knots, not helped by the fact that he hasn't eaten anything since breakfast.

"You'll do great," Benny assures him, and Charlie nods her approval. Dean breathes slowly and nods. He picks up the guitar case from next to him and Charlie flashes him a thumbs up as he climbs the few stairs up to the stage.

He's not used to performing in front of more than one person, if anyone at all, and the microphone in the middle of the stage makes his stomach flip nervously. Crouching down, he unclasps the case and pulls the guitar out, quickly checking the tuning before slipping the strap over his head and crossing to the stool.

"Hi, uh-hi," Dean rests his foot on the rung of the stool and leans on the guitar, "the uh, the first song I wanna play is for a friend. He's, um, he's not actually here right now but..." he trails off, turning his attention to the guitar and glances up briefly to search out their table in the crowd. Finding it, and seeing Charlie and Benny smiling up at him makes the first few chords of the song a thousand times
I can feel her heartbeat from a thousand miles
And the heavens open every time she smiles
I'm running to her, that's where I belong
I'm running to her, like a river song
She gives me love, love, love love
Crazy love
She gives me love, love, love, love
Crazy love

He keeps his eyes on Charlie, and anyone paying attention would think he's singing to her, but any
time there's the briefest movement at the back of the club, his eyes dart up toward the door. Cas
doesn't show up throughout the entirety of the first song, and Dean's worked himself up so much that
he can't bring himself to introduce the second.

When he starts this time, he has to force his voice to stay calm, despite the encouraging looks from
Benny and Charlie. It's a song he knows Cas will recognize, and when he starts into the second
verse, he's cursing the traffic for delaying him, but he keeps going.

The door swings open just as he finishes the verse and Dean tips his head up just in time to see Cas
walk into the club. He's wearing grey shorts and a t-shirt, and Dean has to look away to keep his
concentration, but he catches Charlie out of the corner of his eye, tugging Cas toward their table.
When he looks back, Cas is leaning on the table staring up at him and it's a miracle that Dean makes
it through the final verse.

I could make you satisfied in everything you do
All your secret wishes could right now be coming true
Spend forever with my poison arms around you
No one's gonna fool around with us
No one's gonna fool around with us
So glad to meet you
Angeles

Dean keeps his head down as he finishes the last few notes of the song so he doesn't have to face
Cas immediately. This was the easy part, he reminds himself - if he's going to follow through with
his plan, the worst is yet to come. He thanks the audience and crouches down next to the guitar case,
barely aware of the applause over the rushing of blood in his ears.

When he sits back down, all three of them are talking to him at once, but he can't focus on what
anyone is saying and he just shifts his chair a little closer to Cas and orders another drink as soon as
he gets the chance.

They sit and watch the rest of the acts, and Benny heads out just after seven. When Cas goes up to
order another round of drinks, Charlie slips into his seat.

"I'm leaving," she says abruptly, and the calm that Dean's been feeling is suddenly gone. "You'll be
fine," she assures him. "Just relax, and have fun. I'll see you on Monday."

"Seeya," Dean mumbles, picking up his empty glass and swirling the ice around in the bottom. Not
two minutes after Charlie disappears out the door, his phone vibrates on the table, and her name pops
up on the screen. When he opens it, there's a single message:
Do you see the way he looks at you? Do something about that.

Dean huffs a laugh, locking his phone and shaking his head softly as he tucks his phone away again. When Cas sits back next to him, he slides a hand over Dean's knee, pushing his drink over to him.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing," Dean lies, grinning back at him, "just Charlie."

"Did she go?"

"Yeah, she had some other plans or something."

"We should go then," Cas says simply, and Dean's heart races because this isn't how this was supposed to go, but then Cas continues with, "you can't sit still, and it's a beautiful night," and Dean relaxes.

"Yeah," Dean agrees, breathing slowly, "where do you want to go?"

"Finish your drink and I'll take you down to the beach."

The beach is surprisingly quiet, and Cas takes him down to the far end where there's even fewer people. Dean sits at the top of the beach, watching as Cas wanders through the shallow water; it's early evening and the sun is just going down, turning the sky a pinky-orange colour against the blue of the ocean. He smiles to himself and Cas turns to face him, gesturing for him to come down, but Dean just shakes his head. He was supposed to have done something by now, but Cas seems to have taken control of their evening, and for the time being Dean's okay with that; he'll have other chances to ask Cas out - or they can just keep doing this.

He gets about five more minutes to himself before Cas walks up the beach, "take off your boots."

"What?"

"Come walk with me," Cas smiles, and Dean realizes he's never going to win this battle. He pulls his boots off and rolls his jeans up as far as they'll go before letting Cas pull him to his feet.

They walk along the edge of the water and Cas talks about when he first came to LA and how he loved the beach and would spend any time he could get down here. He'd bring his homework down, and Gabe would tease him about it, but then any time Cas would ask, Gabe would go with him and they'd sit in the sand until it got too cold and too dark and they'd head home. Dean listens, regret twisting in his stomach. He missed so much with Cas, and there's no way to make up that missed time, even if he's here now. He doesn't realize he's actually speaking out loud until Cas pauses, slipping his fingers between Dean's and coming around to face him.

"It wasn't a good time, Dean. You didn't miss much."

"I missed everything-"

Cas shakes his head and he's smiling warmly. "Dean, these last few weeks have been better than the majority of my time here. Until you showed up in my lecture that day, I-" he falters like he doesn't know what to say and Dean gets that feeling. He rubs his thumb over Cas' hand soothingly, though he's not sure which one of them he's trying to calm down. Cas pulls back a bit and though Dean's busy watching the sand at their feet, he can feel Cas' eyes on him.
"Dean?" he asks, "this was supposed to be something more, wasn't it?"

Dean pushes the sand with his toes, running his free hand through his hair with a deep, slow breath. "It should have been."

"It still could be," Cas hums but Dean just shakes his head.

"I fucked it up. I didn't know- after what you said yesterday-"

Cas steps forward, cutting him off and slipping his fingers through Dean's belt loops to pull him close. "You didn't fuck up anything, and yesterday-" he pushes further, forcing Dean to look up at him. "When I said I wanted to be with someone else, I meant you." Cas' nose bumps against Dean's cheek and then his lips are on his and Dean sinks into him, running his hands up Cas' arms.

It's everything he's wanted for so long, but it's brief and then Cas is pulling away again. Dean's heart is still racing and he hopes Cas doesn't notice because it's a little embarrassing how breathless he is after just one little kiss; if Cas notices, he doesn't say anything. He just tugs on Dean's belt loops again.

"We should go swimming."

Dean's stuck about three points back, still trying to steady himself, but Cas tugs him along, and he goes with him. He finds a rock to sit on, still attempting to catch up with current events, but then Cas is pulling his shirt off, and Dean's brain refocuses incredibly quickly. Cas stops halfway through undoing his shorts to look up at Dean, and Dean fumbles to pretend he wasn't just staring.

"You can't swim in your jeans, Dean."

"Yeah, I know."

Cas pauses in undressing himself and crosses over to stand in front of Dean, "arms up." Before Dean even has a chance to process the command, Cas is tugging his shirt up over his head and tossing it to one side, careless of the sand.

"Stand up." This time, Dean is quick to comply, rising to his feet, and as Cas' hands find the button on his jeans, his breath catches in his chest. Time stands still; he watches Cas' hands work to open the button on his jeans, and he tries to focus on anything else to keep his dick in check, but when he looks up, Cas is watching him, and it's too fucking much.

Cas closes the gap before he even has a chance, kissing him swiftly as he pushes Dean's pants down his thighs. Dean steps out of his pants, kicking them into the sand with his shirt, but he doesn't pull away until Cas breaks the kiss a few seconds later. Cas is much quicker ridding himself of his shorts, and he kicks them away, lacing his fingers with Dean's and walking him back wordlessly toward the water. It's probably a good thing he's not saying anything because if Dean was expected to respond, he'd make an idiot of himself for sure.

Cas' version of swimming ends up being standing around in the water and occasionally swimming around for a few minutes, or pushing Dean into the water and then shouting when he gets pulled down too. Dean tries his best to keep his hands off of him because he knows he has no control when it comes to Cas and he doesn't know where Cas is drawing the line, but Cas seems to have other plans, and if that's what he wants, who is Dean to deny him that. They stay in the water until after it's dark and everyone else nearby has left the beach, and then Cas kisses him again.

Dean is only just recovering - having misjudged Cas' strength and ended up being the one underwater after he tackled him - from having salt water up his nose and down his throat when Cas
slips up to him. At first, he's expecting an apology or something, but then Cas' fingers slide up his stomach when Dean meets his gaze, he's just watching him.

It's slower this time, like he's been thinking about it beforehand, instead of just going with it in the moment, and Dean slips his arms around Cas' waist, pulling him close until they're pressed against each other. Cas' lips are cold, but that's par for the course right now, and Dean does his best to warm them up, kissing back hard and nipping at his bottom lip. Cas surges forward, his fingers digging into Dean's hips as he opens to him, sliding his tongue along Dean's lip.

Dean moans softly, pressing his chest against Cas, and maybe it's a good thing he's freezing, because the way Cas is moving against him, he's lucky he's not hard already. He pushes forward and Cas lifts him off his feet, chuckling softly at the strangled noise Dean makes. He curls his legs around the back of Cas' knees, wrapping his arms around his neck and running his fingers through his hair. WhenCas' hips press forward, Dean can feel the thick line of his cock and he groans into Cas' mouth, rocking forward to meet him.

It seems to shock Cas back to reality, and he draws back suddenly, panting and grinning sheepishly. There's a faint flush in his cheeks, and in the pale moonlight, he's so fucking beautiful it hurts. Dean unwraps himself so he's standing on his own again, running his fingers just above the waistband of Cas' underwear.

"Maybe we should get going," Cas says, and Dean nods his agreement.

"Yeah, it's fuckin' freezing."

Cas laughs and takes his hand as they trudge up toward the beach. The air is even colder than the water, and his semi-erection flags quickly. They dress as quickly as they can, but wet jeans aren't exactly comfortable, and he's eager to get home only both of their vehicles are back at the bar.

"Do you have a towel or something, I don't want to get my seats wet."

Cas just stops and looks at him, "you're not driving home."

"Why not?"

"Dean," Cas laughs, "you downed like three drinks in ten minutes, and you were drinking before I got there - Charlie gave you away. I'm not letting you drive home. We can come back tomorrow and get the cars."

Dean wants to argue but Cas is right; he's had more than a few drinks, and he's not gonna risk his baby driving home tonight.

"Yeah, okay," he groans, "you wanna call us a cab?"

"Already done," Cas grins, holding out his hand, "come on, let's get going, it shouldn't be long."

They only have a couple of minutes to wait before the cab shows up, and from there it's a half-hour drive back home, but Dean's glad to be out of the cold regardless, and when they get back to Cas' he hurries inside while Cas pays for the cab.

As soon as they get home, they heard for their separate bedrooms to get changed, but Cas pauses briefly, brushing his fingers against Dean's before heading upstairs. When he's alone, he grins to himself as he digs out his pyjama pants; he gets dressed quickly and drops down onto the bed to text Meg. Apparently, she's beaten him to it.
How'd your open mic thing go?

Really well, we just got in

His phone beeps at him, and he didn't think Meg would be around, but he smiles at the message.

It's like... midnight, what were you doing?

Cas and I went down to the beach after

And?

There's a knock at the door, and Dean shoves his phone under his pillow, "what's up?"

Cas pushes the door open and pokes his head inside, grinning. He crosses over to the bed and plops himself down, "I had a really good night tonight."

"Me too."

"You want to watch a movie or something?"

"I'm kinda tired honestly," he says, and Cas' smile fades just a little. Dean pauses, trying to figure out how to backpedal, "you could stay?" he suggests, and Cas looks up at him questioningly. "C'mere."

Cas stands up and pushes the door shut, flicking the light off as he kneels on the bed and shuffles up to lie next to Dean, "we should do this again - maybe just you and me next time?"

"Yeah, we could do that." Dean's vaguely aware of his phone vibrating under his pillow but he ignores it, pulling it out and setting it on his side table. He lies down and shuffles around until he's comfortable, with his nose just a few inches from Cas'.

They lie awake and talk for a long time, and Dean's never felt so comfortable with anyone else in his life other than maybe Sam. He doesn't mention it when Cas slips under the covers and their knees bump together, but he tugs on his t-shirt until Cas takes it off, chucking it behind him with a smile.
Chapter 8

It's almost three before Dean even thinks about going to sleep, and it's just barely eight when Cas wakes him up again in the morning.

Dean's lying on his side, facing out into the room, and he's barely awake; just enough to know that Cas is still in his bed before his fingers brush down the length of his arm.

"Cas," he mumbles, rolling back into the touch. He cracks one eye open and Cas is leaning over him, and he smiles beautifully at him.

"Good morning."

"It's so early," Dean grumbles, pulling the blankets over his shoulder and rolling back over. Cas chuckles at him, rolling over with him and lying on top of him. It's hard to be annoyed, but Dean makes a half-hearted grunt and wiggles his arm, "what are you even doing up so early? We just fell asleep."

"I want to show you something."

"I'm so tired."

"You can go back to sleep after. This is important, there's something I need you to know." He says it casually, but the words go straight through Dean and he opens both eyes, rolling onto his back and looking up at Cas.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Cas assures him, but he's too squirmy for that to be entirely true. Dean pushes himself up, resting his elbows on his knees.

"Okay," he whispers, "show me."

Cas slips off the bed and Dean pushes the blankets off himself, and swings his legs off the side of the bed, scowling at the bulge in the front of his pants. Oh well, he thinks, if Cas wants him out of bed immediately, he can have him - morning wood and all. Cas comes over, fitting himself between Dean's knees, and he bends to kiss the top of his head before offering his hands and helping him to his feet.

"Come with me," he hums, and Dean follows obediently. Cas leads him upstairs, down the hall and it feels like the first day all over again, when he knew nothing of this new Cas, and he smiles to himself.

In the studio, there's golden light streaming in through the cracks in the blinds, and Cas pulls them open, letting in the light and the warmth of the early morning sun. Dean watches as he moves around the room easily, despite the disorderly state of it, and then Cas crouches in front of a shelf that Dean doesn't remember seeing the first time.

When he rises up, he's got an armful of what looks like graphic novels and he sits down on the cot, motioning for Dean to join him. "I need you to look at these," he says, though he doesn't meet Dean's eyes, and his voice wavers a little as he hands the stack over.

"You woke me up to read comics?"
"Dean, sit down. They're graphic novels."

"Alright," Dean shrugs, taking a seat next to Cas and shifting backward to lean against the wall. Cas shuffles back to sit with him, and peers over at him as if he's anxious for him to start reading. Dean opens the first volume and the first thing he notices is a dedication: for my real life Dean Smith, to whom I owe so much. There's so much going on in his head he doesn't know where to start.

"Cas?" he asks, tilting the book toward him, "you wanna explain?"

"I wrote it," Cas says calmly, "and drew it. And painted it. And I want you to read it before you ask me anything."

"Cas, I've seen these books- they're hugely popular-"

"Dean you've seen my apartment, you have to know my money doesn't come just from teaching." The thought that Cas has some other income has totally crossed his mind before, but this- these are books you see in every bookstore and Cas is responsible for that, and he can't seem to wrap his mind around it.

"Just read, Dean. Please."

He sounds so earnest that Dean can't help but nod and agree. Each volume is thick, and he knows he's not going to get through even one of them before he needs to eat something, but he starts in on volume one. The first panel is two men standing together, a sleek black car in the background with its lights shining into the darkness. Dean's eyes go immediately to the car, and he knows at once that the men on the cover are him and Sam.

He flips the book open and reads through the first chapter; a house fire, Mary's death - Cas' whispered apology when he gets to those pages -John's determination to find the thing that killed her, and ultimately, the boys - having separated and started leading different lives - joining up to search for their absent father. It's enthralling, and Dean finds he can't put it down. Between the storyline and Cas' gorgeous art, Dean's pulled in, completely forgetting that this person he's looking at is him.

By the time he finishes the first book, Cas is asleep, and Dean's pulled him down into his lap, carding a hand through his hair as he snores softly. All of his attention is focused on the pictures and words in front of him, that he doesn't realize how late it's getting until his stomach grumbles and he looks up at the clock to find it's almost ten and he's been reading for hours.

He understands now, why Cas was so insistent upon him reading them this morning; it must have been on his mind the whole time, and considering how soundly he's sleeping now, Dean has to wonder if he slept at all last night.

"Cas?" he whispers, leaning down over him, "Cas, wake up." He brushes the hair out of his eyes, and Cas shifts onto his back with a grunt, blinking up at him.

"What do you think?" he mumbles blearily, cracking one eye up at Dean. Dean pauses, setting the stack of books to the side before dipping down and kissing him soundly.

"I don't know what to say," he breathes, pulling away just enough so their noses still touch.

"That's a good start," Cas grins back at him. He reaches up, cupping Dean's cheek and pulls him back into a soft, unhurried kiss, only breaking apart when he needs to breathe. "Spoiler alert," he whispers, "Dean goes to hell to save Sam and gets pulled out by an angel named Castiel."

"You wrote yourself in?" Dean huffs.
"I wanted a chance to save you, after everything you did for me."

Dean sits at the island and reads volume two as Cas starts breakfast for them. He's still struggling to comprehend) that Cas wrote this and decided to make Dean his hero. It's overwhelming, and he's having trouble focusing on the actual work.

"When did you start?"

"What, writing?" Cas asks, pausing to look at him.

"Yeah."

"They were in my head since highschool, but my therapist suggested drawing out my nightmares when I moved out here and Gabriel suggested I make it into a story, so I started drawing panels and eventually it all came together like this."

"The angels are your brothers," Dean says simply, realization sinking in.

Cas gives him a look, "how much did you read while I was sleeping?"

"Only the first one," Dean grins, "I just skimmed through the rest. There were a couple familiar names."

"Yeah," Cas nods, "most of my nightmares centered around the two of them, and back in Kansas I was terrified that they would somehow get to you and take away the one good thing I had left."

"That's where the whole apocalypse thing came from?"

"Yeah."

"How many are there?"

"Volumes? Nine. The tenth starts printing in October."

"That's fucking amazing, Cas."

"Thank you," Cas smiles coming over to lean on the counter, "I literally couldn't have done any of it without you, though."

He tries to argue, but Cas pins him with the most honest look of confusion that Dean's ever seen, and he stops before he starts, pulling Cas' hand onto his knee and slipping their fingers together. "You're happy right?" he asks, and Cas' momentary smile fades into confusion again.

"I'm happier than I have been in years. I'm glad I found you again."

"This is what Balthazar was talking about, isn't it?"

Cas shuts his eyes and sighs. "Yes, Balth has been dying for the chance to meet you since he found out Dean wasn't just someone I made up in my head."

"How many people know?"

"A dozen, maybe? Everyone knows about Dean - about you - but the rest of it I kept pretty quiet. I don't even write under my real name."
"I noticed that."

Cas smiles at him. "I wanted you to know about them before everyone else."

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After breakfast, the two of them catch a cab to pick up their cars from the bar, and even after Cas has left, Dean sits in his seat with his hands around the wheel, trying to make sense of the whirlwind that has been his last twenty-four hours. Cas is fucking famous or, at least, his works are - using a pseudonym may give him personal privacy, but Dean has seen these books everywhere, and he vaguely remembers rumours of a TV show a couple of years back. It pretty much answers all his questions though.

Then there's Cas himself; Dean's losing track of how many times he's kissed him, but there's still so much tension between them that it's starting to make him insane. Given the chance, he would gladly push Cas down against any surface and fuck him senseless, but there never seems to be a moment for that and then last night, when they got close, Cas shut it down right away.

Dean doesn't know what to do about it so he bangs his head on the steering wheel and sits in the parking lot for fifteen minutes before pulling out of the parking lot. He takes the longer route to give him more time to think, but more thinking does nothing but frustrate him even more. He makes himself hard thinking about last night at the beach and he palms at the bulge in his jeans and wonders if it's worth attempting to jerk off in the shower. The thought of Cas walking in on that proves to be too much and Dean's familiar enough with this area that he finds back road in no time and pulls off to the side of onto the side of the road where it's mostly sheltered by a row of trees.

He starts out slow, just pushing his pants down enough to free his cock and give himself enough space, barely brushing his fingers over the heated flesh. He's surprised how quickly he gets hard; just the thought of Cas is enough to have him fully hard with only a few strokes. He pull up on his cock, twisting his wrist at the head and thinks about the way Cas pressed up against him last night, the way his cock felt against him, and he groans, arching off the seat and fucking into his hand.

He's really getting into it, moaning softly to himself when the phone rings, and he wants to ignore it, but he forgot to tell Cas he wasn't going to be home right away, so he switches hands and holds his phone up to his ear.

"Hey, Cas."

"He- are you okay?"

Dean inhales slowly, trying to steady his breathing, but the sound of Cas' voice just gets him even more riled up. "yeah, I'm good. What's up?"

"You sound out of breath."

"Mnhm," Dean mutters, holding back a moan as his thumb rubs over the head of his cock. His breath hitches and Cas makes an odd sound at the other end of the line.

"Dean are you-" he doesn't finish, but Dean knows exactly what he's going to say, and he can't answer because he's either going to admit to answering the phone with his dick in his hand, or he's going to lie to Cas, and both of those are terrible options.

"Fuck," Cas mutters, and there's a long pause that follows, and Dean wants to stop but he can hear Cas' breath and he sounds like he's struggling to keep his composure which is actually all kinds of hot. He shifts his hips, pressing up into his hand and when he can't hold back a groan, he can hear
Cas' arousal over the phone.

"Talk to me," he breathes, and that alone is enough to drive him up the wall. "Where are you?"

"Side of the road," Dean grunts, "near Benny's." His voice is unsteady and he puts Cas on speakerphone, setting his phone on the seat next to him, "you still hear me?"

"Yeah," Cas mumbles, "you sound so sexy."

Dean slides down in his seat, slipping his fingers up to the head of his cock. Pre-come slides down his length, easing his way, and he drops his head back against the seat with a moan, "tell me." he huffs, "tell me what you'd do with me if I was there."

"Everything," Cas replies, without skipping a beat, "everything I've been trying not to think about for the past four weeks." he keeps going, but Dean tunes out because fuck Cas has wanted this the whole time and they've both been fucking idiots.

"I want you," he groans without thinking about it, "want you to split me open and fill me up- ah!" he snaps his hips forward and he can vaguely hear Cas groan in the background, but blood is rushing in his head and he's so close, so close-

"Fuck, Cas- I'm gonna come-" Dean bites his lip, leaning back against the seat and pushing off of it. His cock is slick with pre-come and when he arches up it slips through his fingers easily. He angles his body, jerking himself faster and faster to the ragged sounds of Cas' breath. He comes hard, falling back against the seat as his legs shake beneath him, and over the phone he can hear Cas coming and his spent dick twitches against his stomach.

He leans back into the seat, breathing slowly with his eyes shut. Neither of them says anything, but Dean can't bring himself to end the call either, and then after what feels like an eternity, Cas' voice comes over the phone again.

"Come home, Dean."

- - - - -

Nothing is said about the phone sex when Dean gets home or, in fact, for the rest of the night. Dean's anxious about it because if Cas is mentioning it, maybe he regrets it - he has been avoiding getting too close otherwise. Over dinner, Cas asks about last night and they talk about maybe getting together with Gabriel soon, but no mention of this morning. By the time they go to bed, Dean's half-expecting Cas to flat out tell him it was a mistake and it can't happen again.

Dean lies awake going over the events of the past couple of days; there's definitely some interest there, but he keeps pushing away when it gets close to anything physical. Which is weird, considering he's totally okay with the intimacy stuff, which is usually what sends people in the opposite direction. And then there are the comics, which just add a whole other level of confusion to things. Thinking back, Dean's a little overwhelmed by it all; Cas kissed him - three times now- he's got a whole fucking series of graphic novels with Dean at the center of them, and now the phone sex - that Cas refuses to acknowledge- but still. It's a hell of a lot more than he was expecting.

He smiles to himself; maybe it doesn't matter that Cas doesn't want to bring up the phone sex thing, maybe it shouldn't have happened - it wouldn't have if Dean had just let Cas know he was going to be late getting home. If that's the case, he went along with it even though he's not ready for that, and that's as good a sign as Dean can hope for. It also means there's no way he's sleeping tonight.

After lying awake for another thirty minutes he feels like he wants to throw himself into the ocean
because he's just so overwhelmed by all of it, when he realizes, he can throw himself in the ocean. He throws the blankets off himself and changes out of his pyjamas and into a pair of shorts before heading out of the apartment. He has to sneak out because he doesn't want to wake up Cas, and it would be a hell of a lot easier if he had a private staircase down.

Thankfully, the condo is pretty soundproof so once he gets out into the hall he's not worried about being heard anymore. It's still warm outside and he kicks off his shoes in the sand and plops himself down, sitting and watching the waves roll in; it's calming and it helps him to think a little more clearly.

He can wait, he decides, if that's what Cas wants - even if he doesn't ever want to have sex, Dean can accept that. He loves Cas. He has for ten years being away from him, and he'd do anything for the chance to be with him again- properly this time - even if it means giving up the physical part of their relationship.

Dean gets up and wanders down to the shoreline, walking into the ocean up to his ankles and letting the waves crash against him. He likes it out here in the quiet of the night and he's not sure why Cas doesn't spend more time at the beach at night. He's considering going back up to the house, but he's not going to sleep anyway, so he takes a few steps back up the beach and checks to see if anyone is around before stripping completely naked and running into the water.

He's completely alone on the beach and it's late enough that even the houses lining the road have all their lights out, but he keeps thinking he hears something up on the shore. Unsurprisingly, when he looks up, no one is there, but it's hard not to turn at every sound when he's completely naked and his shorts are still on the shore. Turning his back, Dean pushes off the ground and swims out further, turning to float on his back. This time, he knows he isn't imagining it when he hears the distinct sound of someone clearing their throat.

When he looks up, Cas is standing ankle-deep in the water, looking out at him. Dean swims close enough that when he stands up, the water is still high enough that he's not exposing himself.

"What are you doing out here?" he asks and Dean shrugs, rubbing the back of his neck. This isn't the ideal time for Cas to find him, but he can explain himself, at least.

"I couldn't sleep. Thought a swim might help."

"And you just... forgot that you have a bathing suit?"

Dean can feel the heat rise in his cheeks. "The uh, the swim was an afterthought."

"Would you be opposed to some company?"

"No, do you-" Dean doesn't even get a chance to finish his sentence before Cas is pushing his pants down and tossing them to the side. He does his best not to look but Cas is stunning and it's hard to keep his eyes off of him.

Cas walks out to meet him, smiling as he reaches him and he takes Dean's hands and comes in a little closer. "Why couldn't you sleep?"

That's a question he's not quite prepared to answer. "It's nothing."

"Dean, you can talk to me about anything. You know that, right?" Clearly, there are very few boundaries considering Cas' dick is like an inch away from his leg, but this is something he doesn't know if he should bring up.
"It's kinda awkward."

"Is it about me?" he asks and Dean hates him a little bit for understanding him so well.

"Yeah," he admits and then it all comes tumbling out. "I'm just a little... I don't know, it's been a lot lately. I like being with you and last night was amazing."

"What's wrong?"

"I'm just afraid, I guess, that maybe I'm more invested in this than you are."

"I doubt that very much," Cas smiles and it definitely helps to ease Dean's nerves, but there's still the matter of the physical side of things - or lack thereof - that's bothering him. Logically, he knows Cas has a reason for it, but like everything, he feels like it comes down to something wrong with him. Cas takes a step forward, running a hand down Dean's arm. "It's more than just that, isn't it?"

"Uh, yeah."

"You can tell me. I'm not going to be offended if that's what you're worried about."
He could lie - it would be easier, but Cas is looking at him with such sincerity and his fingers slip
down to press between his and Dean sighs. "Is there something- did I-" He exhales slowly, pulling
his hand away and running it through his hair. "If just seems like any time we get close to anything,
y'know, physical, you pull away. I mean, I'm cool if that's what you want but-" he's rambling now
and he knows he sounds like an idiot, but he now that it's out there, he kind of regrets it. Cas stops
him with a brief kiss and he doesn't pull away when he speaks.

"Dean," he breathes, "I would have fucked you that first night you showed up if I didn't think it
would mess things up for us. I don't want what we used to have, if we're going to do this, I want to
do it properly."

"Oh." Yeah, that makes sense. "It just feels like. I don't know like you don't want me like that."

Cas chuckles softly and tugs Dean closer so they're pressed against each other. "I can promise you,
that's not the case." He slips his arms around Dean's back, sliding up over his shoulders. He's warm
against the cool water and Dean presses into him as Cas kisses him. It's soft and languid, and when
Cas shifts forward, Dean can feel the press of his cock against his thigh. He shifts a little and Cas
draws back, smiling at him.

He means to pull away, to give Cas some space and maybe swim a little further out, but he ends up
back in his arms again kissing him soundly. This time Cas makes no attempt to pull away, even
when Dean's hips roll automatically, pressing his cock into Cas' hip. He doesn't mean to, but the ache
is too much and Cas doesn't seem to care too much if the muted groan is anything to go by.

They move together slowly and Dean moans softly as Cas' fingers wind into his hair. He's so turned
on he can barely stand it, and Cas is hard against him, making it increasingly difficult for Dean not to
touch him. He keeps his arms around Cas' neck to resist temptation, but Cas is significantly less
restrained; his hands are everywhere, running up his chest and down his back, then slipping down
further to squeeze his ass. When Dean groans, it only seems to drive him on and Cas pulls him close,
forcing the roll of his hips so Dean can feel the full length of his erection slide against his own.

"Do you believe me?" Cas pants, "Do you see what you do to me?"

"Yeah," Dean huffs. "God, baby, you're so fucking hot."

Cas huffs a laugh and lifts Dean off his feet, sliding one hand back into his hair as Dean's legs wind
around him. Dean's breath falters as Cas rocks against him and it's a good thing they're in the water
or Dean would push him down into the sand and kiss him all over. As it is, Cas seems determined to
make him lose his damn mind; for someone who has so far averted every physical situation, he's
doing his damndest to make Dean come with only his cock and the roll of his hips.

"Fuck," Dean moans, "Cas baby, what are you doing?"

"I want to make you come," he breathes and Dean just shuts his eyes, dropping his forehead against
Cas'. "Tell me. Tell me what you want."

"I wanna come," he huffs, pressing his nose into Cas' hair. Cas' hand slips from his hair, sliding
down to curl around the base of Dean's cock. He pulls up slowly, tipping his head to meet Dean's
eyes. Cas strokes him quick and fast and Dean's so fucking into it he barely realizes when Cas puts
him down on his feet, but then Cas' cock is pressed firmly against his own held against him with
thick fingers and when Dean tips forwards, Cas catches his mouth in a sloppy kiss.

Cas grinds hard against him and Dean can barely keep up. He's already dangerously close to the
edge and all it takes is for Cas' fingers to press over his nipple and when he sucks at the underside of
his jaw, Dean comes hard, jerking against Cas' cock. He keeps his hips moving, riding the high with his face pressed into Cas' neck, sucking at the soft skin over his throat. If anything, it just seems to rev Cas up and he snaps his hips forward, grinding hard against Dean and moaning into his ear. Cas comes with a grunt and a moan, and it's nearly enough to get Dean hard again as Cas collapses onto his shoulder.

Once he's caught his breath again, Cas pulls him close, sliding his hands up Dean's back and kissing him slowly. "I think maybe it's time we go to bed, hm?"

"Think we're a little late for that," Dean huffs. Cas smiles at him and Dean presses close and twines their fingers together. Cas pulls him back toward the shore and as much as Dean is loth to let the night end, he's planning on not letting Cas sleep in his own room tonight, not after that.

The sky is starting to lighten and they scramble to get their clothes back on and get up to the condo before the sun starts to rise. The clothes are discarded again as soon as they get inside and Cas kisses him again, smiling against his mouth as he pushes Dean back toward his bedroom. They tumble onto the bed, still damp, and Cas pulls a blanket up over him as Dean curls into his side. Dean's only getting about three hours sleep maximum, but after everything tonight, it's totally worth it.

"Dean, your alarm went off five minutes ago, you have to get up."

At first the voice is confusing to him, but then the events of last night slowly come back to him and he smiles to himself as he presses back up against Cas. "Just a little longer." Cas huffs at him and presses a soft kiss to his temple.

"Dean, your second alarm went off five minutes ago." Dean groans and pulls his pillow over his face, but Cas just chuckles lightly and pulls it back. Dean flops onto his back to look up at Cas.

"Why don't we ever just get to enjoy the morning?"

"Because we have to work."

"I miss not working."

"No you don't, get up." Cas pushes him away and Dean reluctantly sits up, rubbing his hands over his face. "Do you want coffee?"

"If I want to make it to work I'll need it."

"Get dressed, I'll go put the coffee on." Cas disappears through the door and Dean grins to himself as he climbs out of bed. He's going to have a lot of explaining to do when he gets to work because he's dead tired and he's probably going to be all over the place today, but Charlie, at least, will be happy to hear his explanation.

Cas makes coffee and bagels and Dean takes both to go; he doesn't want to leave when Cas is still half-naked in the kitchen and he can think of so many better things to do than to go to work, but Cas pushes him out the door with a kiss and Dean's still smiling when he pulls onto Benny's road.

Charlie corners him before he even gets to the barn, which isn't difficult considering Dean feels a little like the walking dead. She's waiting for him at the end of the driveway, leaning on the roof of her car and when he pulls up she grins at him.

"Good morning," she chirps, "how was your weekend? When I left you on Saturday you looked like
you were about to spontaneously combust and now you're strolling in here like you haven't slept in a week."

"I feel like it," Dean groans, but he's smiling and he's about to tell her about Saturday night when Benny shows up. Benny is just as supportive as Charlie, but he cares a whole lot less for the details, so for now, Dean just gives her a wide smile and they head after Benny toward the barn.

Benny pulls her aside to talk about the new building and Dean gets to work while he waits for them. Work on the Mustang is being delayed because he's struggling to find parts for it, so today he's working on the Fairlane again, and it's when he's under the hood minding his own business, that Charlie finds him again, smacking him on the ass with a piece of wood.

"Nice," he mumbles, his voice echoing against the metal.

"You look thoroughly exhausted. How much sleep did you get last night?"

"Three hours? I wasn't exactly counting."

"Cas have another date?"

"Something like that," he smirks and Charlie raises both eyebrows at him. She just looks at him until Dean sighs. "You were right."

"And?"

"I don't even know where to start. I found out he writes these graphic novels..."

"Not exactly what I was looking for, but go on."

"Charlie, they're amazing. He writes them and illustrates them and I just- It blew me away, I never had any idea he did that kind of stuff. He drew a lot when we were kids, but that's about it."

"Yeah? You'll have to show me sometime."

"Ahh," Dean falters, shutting the hood of the mustang and turning to face her, "I don't think that's a great idea."

"Why, are they dirty?" she smirks.

"If I say yes, will you stop pestering me?"

"Definitely not."

"They're not dirty - at least not that I know of - but they're personal. He doesn't even publish them under his real name."

"So he's published, then."

"Yeah."

"And you're not gonna give the name away, are you?"

"Not a chance. Not until I finish reading 'em anyway," he winks. Charlie huffs at him, but she gets back to work and leaves Dean to his car. While it's quiet, he thinks about Cas. It's a dangerous thing to do under the circumstances, but it pulls distracts him while he's doing the mindless stuff and by the end of the day, he's eager to get home and see him.
Chapter 9

When he walks through the door, his back is aching from being bent at such an odd angle all day, and he groans as he tosses his bag into his room. Cas is cooking which isn't unusual, but when he walks into the living room the usually neglected dining room table is dressed up with placemats and those weird plates that go under other plates. Dean has never understood the purpose of them. In the center of the table, there's an unlit candle, and he wrinkles his nose as he makes his way into the kitchen.

Cas is standing in front of the stove with a dish towel over one shoulder, and it takes everything in Dean's power not to just go over and pull him away from what he's doing. Instead, he slips up behind him, resting his chin on Cas' shoulder being careful not to touch him because he's still dirty from work.

"What's all this?" he asks, and Cas just turns and gives him that look that means he's going to have to wait and find out. "What?" he asks again, and Cas huffs a soft laugh.

"You stink like grease. Go have a shower and dinner will be done by the time you get back."

Dean scowls at him, but Cas just turns and kisses his jaw before turning his attention back to whatever he's making. Dean follows his instructions, stripping out of his clothes outside the bathroom and chucking them into the laundry hamper. Cas is right, he stinks like grease and he needs to do laundry soon before he runs out of clean clothes to wear. He strolls into the bathroom and turns the tap on in the shower. As long as he lives, he will never forget this damn shower; there's enough room for a fucking orgy and the water pressure is to die for. He doesn't care how much it costs, the next place he lives needs to have a shower like this one.

When he's clean and dressed again, he meets Cas back in the living room. The candle is lit now, and there are salad and bread on the table, and Dean knows something's up. He takes a seat when Cas gestures to the table and he joins him a minute later, sliding a bowl of pasta into the middle of the table.

"Thanks," Dean grins, and Cas just smiles back at him. "What?"

"I have something of a favour to ask."

"Shoot."

"I guess it's less of a favour and more a request. I have a release party on Friday for my new book. It's kind of a big thing and I don't really like doing them, but I'm expected to make an appearance." He sighs like he's still not sure about the whole thing and Dean waits for him to continue. "I would really appreciate it if you'd come with me."

"Yeah. Cas, of course I will."

"So you'll be my date?" He asks slowly, the shy smile spreading further across his face. Dean's stomach flips, and he has to look away to keep from letting Cas see the look on his face. Sure, they basically had sex on the beach last night, but something about going as Cas' date to an event that's so important to him seems like a huge step.

"Definitely," he says and he doesn't realize how breathless he sounds until it comes out. Cas just smiles widely and leans over the corner of the table to kiss him.
"I promise I'll take you on a proper first date after, just you and me."

"You don't have to do that."

"Dean, I want to."

There's something unsaid in the way Cas looks at him, but for once Dean isn't worried about what it is. They eat dinner quietly and Dean does his best to stay calm despite the rush of emotions. The last date he had was with a guy he met online and he had to drive almost an hour out of state so no one would know he was having dinner with a dude. It had pretty much been a bust when the guy had called him Eric no less than three times and despite feeling shitty about himself, Dean had slept with him anyway, only to discover that he wasn't missing much - and neither was Eric.

That was almost six months ago now and even after the last few weeks, it seems unreal to think he has a date on Friday - four days from now - with Cas.

When they finish eating, he helps Cas clear the table and Cas loads the dishwasher, sending Dean off to find something to watch. He has papers to grade, and Dean knows it, but he figures they can wait an hour or so. He sprawls out along the couch, tucking a cushion under his head as he flips through the channels. As usual, nothing much is on, but he finds a home renovating show and sticks with that because it's better than the news or *Survivor*.

Cas joins him a few minutes later, slipping in next to him and pulling Dean's head into his lap. The TV plays in the background, but as Cas' fingers push through his hair, Dean shuts his eyes, more concerned with the warm press against his head than the show.

When Cas pulls his hand away, Dean looks up at him and he faintly catches a glimpse of something on his neck before Cas shifts and his hoodie blocks the view.

"What was that?" Dean asks, smiling smugly up at him.

"What was- oh, Right. Thank you for this," he says sarcastically, pulling his collar down to reveal a dark splotch on his neck. "I thoroughly enjoyed teaching a bunch of twenty-somethings who cared more about who gave me a hickey than anything I was trying to teach them."

Dean just grins up at him, running his fingers over the spot. "I bet they did."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Cas, do you not realize how fucking hot you are? Those kids are probably dying inside knowing you're getting laid."

"Don't be ridiculous," Cas mumbles, but Dean doesn't miss the flush that crosses his cheeks.

"Oh yeah, what about April?"

"April-?" Cas frowns in confusion and Dean lifts an eyebrow at him.

"The one who asked you out? When I first got here? How do you not remember this?"

"Are you talking about when you first came down here? Dean that happened once, ever. I can't believe you're still thinking about that." Dean opens his mouth to speak, but thinks better of it and frowns. Cas grins down at him. "Are you jealous?"

"No."
"You are. Why?" Dean just grumbles at him and huffs a quiet laugh. "Baby, there is no one I want more than you." Cas leans down over him, kissing him softly. "Why do you think I want you with me at this party? Stop worrying so much."

Dean grins and curls his hand around the back of Cas' neck, pulling him back into another quick kiss. "Okay," he breathes.

"Speaking of which, we're going to need to find you something to wear. Unless you brought a suit with you?"

"No such luck. I'm working on cars, I wasn't expecting to have to dress up."

"I'll buy you a new suit," Cas says simply, "we can go after work tomorrow if you want."

"I can't let you do that."

"At least let me come with you?"

Dean huffs a laugh and smiles up at him. "I think I can probably manage that. Later."

"Later, definitely. Right now," Cas hums, pushing himself up and turns to lift Dean off the couch, "I want to go to bed. With you."

Dean circles his arms around Cas' neck, kissing him quickly as Cas switches off the TV and carries him out of the living room. He doesn't so much as pause outside Dean's room, turning instead toward the stairs.

"I thought we were going to bed?"

"We are," Cas hums, "my bed."

"Your-" Dean falters. For all the time he's been in LA, Cas' room is the one he's never been inside, not that he hasn't thought about it. Cas carries him up the stairs and bumps the door open with his foot, depositing Dean at the end of the bed and crawling up over him. He kisses him softly and straightens back up, stripping out of his clothes and folding them neatly on the chair in the corner. Dean follows suit, but his clothes end up on the floor before he tucks himself into bed.

There's a TV at the end of the bed, mounted above a small fireplace, and Cas flicks it on before slipping into bed next to him and leaning against the headboard. Dean curls up into his side, resting his head on Cas' shoulders and shutting his eyes. There's some nature doc on TV and Cas doesn't bother to change it; it's interesting anyway, something about polar bears.

"Did I mention Gabriel's going to be at the party?" Cas asks.

"Really?"

"He's excited to see you."

"You told him about me?"

"I did. I mean, I told him you were staying with me. I left out a fair bit of the other stuff." Cas gives him a smug smile and leans in, kissing the curve of his ear.

"Shut up," Dean mumbles, pressing his face into his neck. Cas huffs a soft laugh, sliding down further under the covers.
Dean manages to make it through the entire workday without saying anything to Charlie or Benny. He wants to wait until after Friday to tell them anything, but keeping his mouth shut is hard, especially when he's so excited about it. He checks his messages before leaving and there's one from Cas telling him he'll be a little bit delayed and for Dean to meet him at the university; Dean doesn't mind so much because he's nervous about getting all dressed up to begin with and he highly appreciates the chance to go home and shower before they go out.

It doesn't take him long to get everything done and he's back at the university within an hour. Cas is sitting out on the front steps, talking with someone Dean doesn't recognize and when he pulls up, they both look up at him. Cas looks significantly more pleased to see him that his companion does. When he comes and slides into the car next to Dean, Cas looks a little sheepish, but he's smiling.

"Who's your friend?" Dean asks and as they pull back out onto the road, Cas waves to him, "and why does he look so impressed to see me."

"That's Bartholomew. He's the one I had dinner with the other night."

"Oh."

"Which is also why he was so unimpressed to see you. When you get turned down, it's even worse to see the guy with someone else a week later."

"Yeah, I guess that must be pretty harsh. He doesn't know though, I-"

"He does. I made the mistake of mentioning the party to him and he asked if I was going with someone. I didn't think."

While he likes the idea that someone might be jealous because of his position in Cas' life, he still struggles a bit with knowing who Cas' date was the other night. Bartholomew is handsome and Dean can't help but compare himself and he falls short of the mark. It's quiet in the car with nothing to fill and silence and Dean doesn't know what to say to amend the situation.

"Can I ask you something?" he says finally, and Cas seems to realize it relates to Bart because he smiles softly when meets Dean's gaze.

"Whatever you want to know."

"Did you sleep with him?"

"No," he says firmly. "I actually-" he huffs a laugh, "I was kind of hoping you'd be awake when I got home. I was a little drunk and I'd been thinking about you all night and I was- I was ready to make some pretty stupid decisions."

"Meaning?" Dean asks, but he's fairly certain he knows the answer and Cas rolls his eyes at his smirk.

"I wanted to fuck you," he says bluntly, "and if you hadn't been asleep, I probably would have."

"Do me a favour?"

"Hm?"

"Next time wake me up."
Cas takes him to a damn tailor, and Dean's about to refuse when Cas turns to him and tells him in no uncertain terms, that Dean is doing him a favour and in return, he's going to do this for him. Dean doesn't really have a way to say no to that, so he lets Cas take him inside and play dress-up with him for the next forty-five minutes.

The hardest part, as it turns out, is not pulling Cas into the fitting room with him because he is entirely too kind about everything Dean tries on. Dean's never really been one for dressing up - he's much more comfortable in jeans and a t-shirt, but he likes this. The suits are more comfortable than he's expecting, and the only part he isn't entirely sure about is having the tailor pinning it around him. Cas assures him that it's fine and that he's done it a dozen times, but this is a first for Dean and everything about it makes him a little bit anxious.

Cas ends up buying him the suit and a couple of shirts and ties to go with it. Dean doesn't argue with him, but it's a close call. He'll have to stop by and pick up the suit on the way home on Friday, but it's just a brief stop and he's already planning on asking Benny if he can finish a little bit early that day. Shoes are easy and Dean's not overly worried about them because now that he's got everything else, it'll be easier to pick them out.

The drive home is even quieter than on the way there because now Dean has his clothes all picked out and it's starting to sink in that this isn't just some regular party. He knows it's important to Cas, but the clothes he's wearing are something he would have picked out for his own wedding, not just a party - and Cas mentioned wearing a tux. Maybe he's in over his head here, but every time he catches that soft little smile on Cas' face, it settles his nerves and he doesn't regret anything.

Friday is another matter.

At work, he's an absolute disaster. All he can think of is his routine when he finishes; pick up the suit, get home, shower, change, and then they have to leave. He won't have a lot of time unless Benny lets him off early, but he's feeling nauseous about the whole thing and he hasn't been able to mention it yet.

He's been looking forward to the party, but now that the day is here, he's anxious and wondering where exactly he fits in Cas' circle.

He talks to Benny just after lunch because Benny doesn't ask questions; he even offers to work overtime on Saturday, but Benny just shakes his head and gives him a knowing smile and tells him to have a good night.

As he gathers his tools together, Charlie keeps shooting him questioning looks from the other side of the barn, and he assumes as long as she's not coming over to talk to him it's a good thing. He walks past her as he leaves, leaning against the door frame of the barn.

"You've been quiet all day and now you're leaving early, is something up?" she asks.

Dean shakes his head. "I have a date."

She beams at him, but her smile falters when Dean just shrugs. "Is that not a good thing?"

"It's just... it's a pretty fancy thing we're going to and I'm not used to that kind of thing. I'm more used to this," he says, gesturing down at himself.

"You'll be fine," Charlie assures him, "Cas has good taste." Dean just groans and Charlie squeezes his shoulder. "You can always text me if you need an escape. If not, I'll see you on Monday."
"Thanks, Charlie," he smiles, "have a good weekend."

"You too."

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Dean gets home before Cas for once, and he pours himself a small glass of wine because he needs something to calm his nerves. When Cas does arrive, he's got a clothing bag draped over one arm and Dean's suddenly feeling a lot less confident in his clothing choices. He downs the rest of his drink quickly and strolls out into the other room to see Cas.

"Hey," he says and Cas looks confused.

"You're home early."

"Yeah, Charlie and I finished early today so I could get ready for this."

"Are you nervous?"

"A little," Dean huffs and Cas slips an arm around his waist, kissing him softly.

"Don't be. Do I get to see you in your suit?"

"Yeah," Dean grins, "just let me shower first." He considers asking Cas to join him, but having a wet and naked Cas pressed up against him is going to make it harder for him to get out and get ready to go, so he just slips away and goes to shower on his own.

When he gets out, he wraps his towel around his waist and stands in front of the mirror, staring at his hair in the foggy glass. He tries to do something with his hair, but it doesn't seem to want to cooperate with him, and everything has just been building and building until finally, he can't take it anymore. He throws his comb on the floor, and drops onto the edge of the bathtub, rubbing his face.

Just one night, he reminds himself. There's a quiet knock on the door, and he mumbles a stifled come in. Cas peeks into the bathroom, craning his neck around the door to see Dean, and when he does, he crosses over to him, crouching down next to him.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he grunts.

"Mmhmm," Cas says, "that's not true at all." Dean shrugs and lets his shoulders slump, pretending he doesn't notice when Cas' hand lands on his thigh. He squeezes gently, and Dean is acutely aware of the fact that only a thin towel separates them, and this is an added distraction that he just doesn't need right now.

"You can tell me," Cas says softly, "whatever it is, I can help."

Dean thinks, fidgeting with the edge of his towel and debating whether it'll make things better or worse if he does tell Cas the truth. When he looks down at him, though, Cas' expression is honest and open, and Dean just topples over, pressing his head against Cas' shoulder.

"None of this feels right," he mumbles, and he can feel Cas jolt back in surprise. "I'm not- I'm just a guy from Kansas, I don't do fancy book release parties or- fuck, I'm just not up for this. I can't do it." He winces even as he says it, but Cas is just so calm about the whole thing. He pulls back, bumping his forehead against Dean's.
"Dean, you could have told me that. How long have you been worrying about this?"

Dean swallows hard, shutting his eyes, but he doesn't say anything. He doesn't want Cas to think he's an idiot, or think he's afraid to talk about things. A lot of the time he is, but that's beside the point.

"You know you don't have to come with me, right? I have to make an appearance, but if you're uncomfortable, you don't have to come." His fingers brush against Dean's cheek, and he smiles, "I don't want to do anything that makes you so uncomfortable."

"It's not that," Dean sighs, "I want to go, I just- what if they don't like me?"

Cas chuckles softly, "Dean, the people who are going to be there - the ones who matter? They don't give a shit what you do, or how you dress. They're there to drink wine and champagne and have a good time; they're like me."

Dean snorts a laugh, "I could handle a room full of you."

"I bet you could," Cas smirks. He pushes himself back up and holds his hands out to Dean, tugging him to his feet. "I don't have to leave for an hour. Let me know what you want to do by then?"

An hour later finds Dean shifting anxiously at the front door, wiggling his arms and tugging at the ends of his sleeves. It's not right, it feels weird. Objectively he knows he looks damn good, but it's the thought of what the suit represents that he doesn't like; the pretending to be someone else, someone he isn't.

When Cas finds him, his face splits into a huge grin, and he moves into Dean's personal space, adjusting his bow tie before his eyes flick up to meet Dean's.

"I like this," he hums, "it suits you."

"Nah" Dean mutters, but Cas presses slips a hand under his jacket, pulling him forward until their noses bump together.

"You don't know what you do to me," Cas whispers, "the way it feels, seeing you like this... christ, Dean, we'll be lucky if we get through this night in one piece." A shudder runs through Dean's entire body, and he doesn't dare speak, because anything he could possibly think to say is going to end with them fucking right here, right now, and he knows this night is important.

They take Dean's car, because it's flashier, and because it gives Dean an excuse to distract himself for a while. It doesn't stop him from thinking about what Cas said the entire drive there, and he's still thinking about it when they arrive at the hotel.

Dean's on edge from the moment they walk through the door, any good feeling gone as soon as he sees how big the crowd inside is. He's never done anything like this before and he knows that everyone is here for Cas and at some point, Dean won't have him to lean on and he's not sure what he's going to do. Cas keeps nodding to everyone and Dean just shuffles along with him, pretending like he's okay with everything that's going on.

It's not until they're stopped by Inias, that Dean gets a little bit more comfortable. Cas has told him about Inias before; he's a friend from work - a history professor, or something - but Dean wasn't expecting him to be so handsome. Still, Cas is so much more focused on him, that it sends a little thrill through him and he barely notices how attractive Inias is. Cas smiles warmly, leaning in to hug
him, and Dean shifts from foot to foot, hoping he doesn't stick out too badly.

"Hello, Inias," Cas says, and Dean doesn't miss the familiarity in his voice, but that's where it ends. He glances at Dean with a sort of half-smile and proceeds to stumble over his words, "this is, uh, this is my-"

"I'm Dean," he smiles, stepping forward to shake Inias' hand.

"Dean," he says peculiarly, raising an eyebrow in Cas' direction. "It's good to meet you, I take it you're a friend of Cas?'"

"Yeah, we go way back."

They stay and chat for a few minutes, but then someone else comes along and diverts Inias' attention. As soon as they're out of earshot, Dean stops and pulls Cas around.

"What was that?" he asks, and Cas looks off to one side with a sigh like he's trying to avoid the question.

"I don't know how to introduce you," he mutters.

"No, not that- the other thing, the way Inias looked at me, the way everyone's looking at me."

"Dean, they've all read the books, they've seen the dedication. I've been doing this for nine years, and no one has ever so much as seen a picture of my real life Dean Smith. As soon as I say your name, they know that this was all for you- because of you," he corrects.

"So they're looking at me funny because-"

Cas slips his hand into Dean's, pressing up closer than strictly necessary, "because they know who you are, and they know that you're the one coming home with me tonight."

He's still confused, maybe more so now that before, "and how would they know that?"

"Because they've read further in the series than you have. Things get... complicated between Dean and Castiel in the later volumes."

"Meaning?"

"You'll just have to read them and find out," Cas smiles.

Dean doesn't know what to do with that information, so he tucks it away for the time being, and instead pulls Cas closer with the intention of proving his earlier point, but a voice rises up above the others, interrupting his plans.
Cas finds his words after that, introducing Dean equally as his friend and as his inspiration, but no one's buying it and it just makes Dean very curious as to what's in those later books. He meets so many new people that he can't keep them straight, but Cas assures him that he'll never see half of them again so he needn't worry about it. They've been there an hour already before they get a chance to sit down and even then, Cas is too antsy to sit for more than a couple minutes before he's up again and standing behind Dean's chair. He's got a drink in one hand, and the other is sitting comfortably on Dean's shoulder, his thumb stretching up to rub soft, soothing circles on Dean's neck. It's a mystery how Cas can make him feel like they're the only two in the room, but Dean holds onto it, shutting his eyes and slipping a little in his seat.

There's a commotion somewhere back toward the main doors, and Cas' thumb stills against his skin.
He just knows that whatever this is, it means they won't be alone for long, and his suspicions are confirmed when Cas sighs and mutters under his breath *Gabriel.*

Gabe comes up behind them and the only reason Dean knows it's him is because of the way he announces himself - no *hello,* no good to see you, just, "Cassie, I didn't know you were seeing anyone," as he slips into the seat next to Dean.

"I thought you gave up becau- Hey, Dean." He sounds equal parts confused and surprised and Dean can't do anything but grin at him and shrug.

"I uh-" he starts dumbly, and Gabriel waves him off, looking between him and Cas for an explanation.

"You know, I was just kidding, but it always has been hard to tell with you two." Dean is suddenly acutely aware of Cas' hand on the back of his neck and he can't imagine that looks particularly innocent to anyone else - and definitely not to Gabriel. "How've you been, Dean-o?"

He very nearly cringes at the nickname, reverting back to his fifteen-year-old self who would gladly punch Gabriel just for calling him that, but he's never been so glad to see him, and tonight he lets it pass.

"It's been good. Tonight is a bit insane but overall good. How about you? It's been a long time?"

"Oh you know," he shrugs, "this and that. It's been good. I didn't realize you were coming tonight."

Dean frowns and tips his head back to find Cas smiling sheepishly at him, "you told me he knew I was coming."

"Not exactly," Cas starts, rolling his eyes away from Dean, "I told you he was excited to see you. I didn't mention anything about tonight."

"It was implied, Dean says, turning in his seat so he can face Cas properly.

"Fine, I lied. I wanted it to be a surprise," Cas smiles at him, and when he looks over at Gabe he looks so pleased with himself, and Dean could kiss him right then and there.

"Which is all well and good," Gabe chimes in, "but I was informed that you were coming to LA to work. This," he says, gesturing to Dean and Cas, "is not what I was expecting."

"Cas took me in. I was a disaster when I got to LA and-"

"You weren't," Cas interrupts. He brushes his fingers through Dean's hair and it takes a great effort on Dean's part to keep his eyes open.

"So," Gabe starts, "how did this all come about? Cas is terrible at keeping me updated with his life." Dean doesn't even have to turn to picture the look on Cas' face and he just leans back against him, tipping his head back to look at him.

"I got a job restoring classic cars and I looked him up," he admits. "It's been a long time and I wanted to see how he was doing."

"I asked him to come with me tonight." Cas says and it sounds like there should be more to that sentence, but he doesn't elaborate. Cas' hand has found its way back down to Dean's neck, only this time, he's rubbing just behind his ear, his fingers moving in small circles like he's not even paying attention to what he's doing. Gabe just smiles knowingly.
"So you've read the novels?" he asks and Dean nods.

"The first one. I only got time to glance through the others. I only found out that they were Cas' what, a week ago?"

"Not even, it was Sunday remember? After the-" he pauses, raising his eyes to Gabriel before turning back to Dean.

"I take it you haven't seen the full canvasses he's done then if you've only read the first book." Dean looks up to Cas for confirmation, because he saw a lot of Cas' art when he first got there, but he doesn't remember if any of them were related. Cas shakes his head.

"He hasn't seen them," he says, then looks down at Dean, "I'll show you when we get home tonight."

"Okay," Gabe says, turning his whole body so that he's facing Cas and Dean, "I know it's been a couple weeks since I've seen you, but how much did I miss? and what is this?" he adds, gesturing at the two of them.

"We're... figuring things out," Cas admits, and Dean's heart flutters at the words, "Dean's been staying with me for the last few weeks while he's been working here."

"Some things never change," Gabriel grins, "hopefully it takes you idiots less than ten years this time. Does that mean you're still in Lawrence then?"

"Yeah, I'm living with Sam and a couple friends of ours." The more he talks about it, the more his life starts to feel like someone else's like; very far away, like a dream or someone else's life that he was briefly a part of. It's hard to think about back home because when he does, it's inevitably followed by the thought of leaving LA and that's not something he wants to think about. Ever, if he can manage it. He pushes the thoughts aside and focuses on the warmth of Cas' chest where he's leaning over him.

They talk for a while, and then Cas heads off to talk to the other guests, leaving Dean and Gabe alone for a little while to catch up. Gabe tells him everything about his bakery and his girlfriend and in turn, Dean fills him in on the current events back in Lawrence and answers all of Gabe's questions about his old friends - the ones who stuck around, anyway.

When Cas comes back he's got two glasses of wine and he hands one to Dean just as someone comes up behind him, diverting his attention. Dean turns around to see who it is and a familiar face catches his eye. He stands up, excusing himself from his conversation with Gabe, and heads into the crowd until he finds her, sitting alone off to one side of the bar.

"Never thought I'd run into you here," he says and Charlie turns to him with a look of utter confusion on her face.

"Hey, Dean, I- wow, you clean up nicely."

"Thanks, you too. What are you doing here?"

"Really?" she asks, "you think I'd miss this? The Supernatural books are my all-time faves. Right next to Harry Potter. And Lord of the Rings. Anyways, I think the more important question is what are you doing here? Tickets sold out months ago, and aren't you supposed to be on a date?"

"Uh," Dean rubs the back of his neck. He doesn't know where to start. "I am. Cas is talking to a friend."
"Okay, but Cas doesn't strike me as a Supernatural fan and you-" she stops suddenly, narrowing her eyes at something over Dean's shoulder and he turns to see Balthazar has joined Cas and Gabriel and Cas is currently using his back to write on. It takes him a second, but he realizes Cas is signing a copy of one of the books and Dean turns back to Charlie with a (resigned) sigh.

"Maybe I should let Cas explain this one to you."

"Well, somebody better. Jesus, Dean you never told me your boyfriend was famous."

"He's not, not really. I mean, he uses a fake name so no one really knows it's him."

"Until now."

"Yeah."

"Because-?"

"Honestly? I don't know. He didn't want it to be a big thing."

Charlie nods along like she understands, but then all of a sudden she blurts, "so you're Dean, Dean," and looks up at him like she's realizing for the first time that Dean is something more than he is.

"I think so."

"Oh man- if I had known that, I would have told you to go for it right away." Dean just looks at her like she's spouting nonsense, and as far as he's concerned, she might as well be. "Dude, the dedication- the human!Cas story arc-"

"What?" Dean interrupts.

"Wait, you have read the books, right?"

"I read the first one and I skimmed a bit."

Charlie beams at him. "Promise me you'll read the rest. Dean, I don't know what you did, but you left one hell of an impression on Cas and he never forgot about it."

Dean's head is spinning. He was shocked and honoured and confused when Cas showed him the novels, but to hear it from someone else, it reads like a love story and that's not at all what he was expecting. "I don't understand," he stammers, but Charlie just grins at him.

"Read the books," she says and then something behind him catches her eye and she shuts up again.

"Hello Charlie," Cas says and Dean turns just in time for Cas' arm to wind around his waist.

"Hey," she grins. "I didn't realize you were, well, you. I am a huge fan of your books."

"Thank you, that means a lot."

"Hey," comes another voice from behind and before Dean knows it, he's got Gabriel on his other side, leaning on his shoulder. "Who's this?"

"Gabe, this is Charlie," Dean says, "she a friend of mine, we work together. This idiot is Cas' brother."

"Idiot," Gabe scoffs. "Nice to meet you, Charlie, try not to let these two cause too much trouble,
"I was just about to suggest she comes over for dinner," Cas levels Gabriel with a look before turning back to Charlie. "I could show you my studio, I'd actually like to get an opinion on some of my canvasses."

Charlie looks like she's about to pass out and Dean elbows Cas playfully. "I could give you opinions."

Cas kisses his temple. "You have a lot more reading to do before you're allowed to see these." Dean groans dramatically, but Charlie is quick to accept the offer.

"I'd love to."

"I'll draw up a waiver," Gabe mumbles and Dean just snorts.

"It's not that bad," he offers.

"I'll tidy up a little first," Cas promises.

"Cas, the last time I was in your studio, I almost lost you in there. Anyway," Gabe says, "as lovely as this is, I'm gonna wander. How long are you in the city, Deano?"

"Until the job is done. Another month or so, I think."

"We'll have to get together before you leave," he says and Dean agrees thoroughly. "Catch you later, kiddos."

"Actually, I should get going too, I'm supposed to be meeting a friend here like," Charlie checks her phone, "half an hour ago. Thanks again, Cas, I'll let you know about that dinner. See you Monday, Dean." Charlie heads off in the opposite direction and Cas takes the opportunity to take Dean's hand before anyone else comes up to talk to them.

"Come with me for a minute?" Cas leads him out into a quiet hallway; there's an echo of another party down near the end, but for the most part, they're alone.

"Are you having a good time?" Cas asks, brushing his thumb over Dean's knuckles.

"Yeah, it's not as fancy as I was expecting it to be."

"I'm glad," Cas hums. He presses forward and Dean's shoulders bump against the wall as Cas kisses him. It's slow and gentle, but Cas' hands are firm on his hips and there's a definite fire behind the kiss, leaving him eager for more when Cas finally pulls back.

"Thank you for coming tonight," he breathes, his forehead still pressed against Dean's, "I know it doesn't seem like much, but it's really important to me, and I appreciate you being here."

"Cas, you know all you have to do is ask and I'd do anything for you."

"I'm so lucky to have you."

Dean wants to tell him that he's wrong; that he's the lucky one, but then Cas' lips press against his own again and the words die on his tongue. A little more of that fire bleeds through, and when someone comes down the hall and they have to pull apart and Dean's breathing heavier than he would like to admit to.
"Maybe we should go," Cas suggests, and Dean gives him a questioning look.

"I thought you were having a good time?"

"I am," he assures him, "but I've seen Gabriel and Balthazar and I've done the rounds. It's getting late, most people won't stay much longer anyway, and I think I'd rather be at home."

"What's at home that you can't have here?"

Cas grins slyly at him. "You," he purrs, breathing against Dean's ear, "naked in my bed."

Heat surges through Dean's body, and he slips his fingers up into Cas' hair, "I think we could manage that." He slips his fingers around Cas' tie, jerking him forward, and the stuttered groan he gets in return goes straight through him. Well, that's something. He holds Cas close, doing his best not to crumple the tie in his hand, and lets go only when Cas draws back.

"Let me just say a couple of goodbyes and we'll get out of here."
Chapter 10

They barely make it down to the parking lot. Dean tugs Cas close by his tie and Cas' fingers curl around the folds of Dean's jacket. Dean kisses him urgently and he stumbles as Cas presses on, held up only by Cas' momentum and his arms around his hips. Dean digs in his pocket for the keys, his free hand still cupping Cas' cheek as they move. A breath later and he's pressed up against something hard and cold and he can only hope it's his own car, because when Cas' hips press forward and his dick presses against Dean's, he's not sure they're going to make it much further than this.

He gives up all pretense of finding his keys, raising his other hand to the back of Cas' neck and rolling his hips slowly in response. Cas melts into him with a muffled moan, slipping his arms over Dean's shoulders and leaning in to kiss his neck. Dean tips his head back, shutting his eyes and focusing on the wet heat of Cas' mouth on his neck, and the way his hips jump forward with every little sound that Dean can't hold back. As soon as he realizes this, he makes a point of exaggerating every breath and when Cas figures out his ploy, he nips at the underside of Dean's jaw, drawing a stuttered laugh.

Cas moves down, kissing as far down his neck as he can reach, and his fingers slip from Dean's hair, sliding down his sides and along the backs of his thighs. He lifts Dean off his feet, their noses bumping together as he makes the few steps back behind the car and sits Dean down on the trunk. At first, he's a little disappointed, because he can't feel Cas against him anymore, but then he's being tugged forward and Cas is between his legs, one hand sliding up his thigh toward his aching cock, and he just shifts forward a little to hurry the process along.

It's moot, as it turns out because seconds later the distinct clicking of high heels echoes throughout the parking lot makes Cas draw back, holding out a hand to pull Dean off the car.

"Another time," he whispers, crowding Dean back against the driver's side door, and Dean's heart races with the idea that Cas might have actually fucked him right here on the back of his car. He groans audibly and Cas huffs a laugh, pressing a finger to his lips, "shh."

Dean shoves his hand in his pocket to retrieve the keys, but Cas crouches down in front of him and his breath catches in his chest. Cas presses his nose against the stark jut of Dean's erection, slipping down to mouth at the head and Dean's eyes drop shut with a shuddering moan.

"You know," he huffs, "you want me to- ah- you want me to be quiet, but you're not exactly helping."

Cas just hums against him, looking up at him with dark eyes, and Dean gives up the search again, curling his fingers into Cas' hair until he hears the familiar jingle of his keys. He lowers one hand and Cas presses them into his palm. The click-clack of their unwelcome visitor is getting closer and Cas rises to his feet again, standing to one side as Dean unlocks the door.

The timing is perfect because as soon as the door swings open, a tall blonde woman turns the corner. She spots them immediately and waves, flashing a wide grin at Cas as she passes. Cas returns the gesture and ducks into the car from this side, sliding over the leather bench to his own seat. Dean frowns questioningly, but Cas just raises his eyebrows and gestures down at his crotch.

"That's Hester. She's my publisher," he says quietly, and Dean nearly bursts out laughing. He slips into the seat next to Cas, and leans over him.

"You don't want her to see you like this?" he hums, running his palm up Cas' covered erection. Cas
melts under his touch, shaking his head slowly.

"It's not high on my list," he breathes.

Dean chuckles and drops back into his seat, adjusting himself to try and find a comfortable way to sit, but it's hopeless. He tries to get the car started because the sooner he gets out of here, the sooner he can have Cas all to himself - no interruptions - but Cas' fingers drag along the inside of his thigh and he misses the key slot three times. He doesn't look at him, because he knows if he does, he'll lose all concentration, and he would like to get them home in one piece tonight. Cas presses up against his side, muttering against his ear and nipping at his earlobe, and it takes all of Dean's strength not to pull the car over and climb into his lap, but he manages not to, somehow.

"You're so beautiful," he breathes, pressing his nose against Dean's neck, "God, I want you." Dean measures his breathing as he turns out of the parking lot onto the street, but Cas just doesn't let up, "I've wanted this since you first walked into that lecture hall," he groans, and Dean realizes he's rubbing his palm over his own erection.

"That's fucking excellent, Cas. I am so glad to hear that, but you're making it kind of hard to focus, and if you don't stop, there's a distinct possibility that we're both going to die before you get the chance to fuck me."

He's pretty sure Cas scowls at him, but he's focused too hard on the road to tell, though he does give Dean's cock a squeeze before sliding back into his own seat. The rest of the drive home takes far too long, and by the time they get into the elevator, Dean's practically vibrating with the need to touch Cas again.

He restrains himself because it's a glass fucking elevator. Dean hasn't met any of Cas' neighbours, but he doesn't think this is the kind of place where people take kindly to elevator sex. Cas is standing in the opposite corner looking at him, but then Cas smiles and all bets are off. They meet in the middle, and Cas pushes him back against the wall, lifting him so Dean's legs wrap around his hips. Cas braces his arms on the wall pressing his chest against Dean's and he bites his lip with a moan before their lips are crashing together again all fire and urgency.

When it hits their floor, they tumble out of the elevator, stopping every ten seconds to push each other up against whatever surface is available. It's a goddamn miracle that Cas gets the door unlocked before Dean is pushing it shut and tugging Cas back against him. He shrugs out of his jacket as Cas kisses his neck, then pushes Cas' to the floor with it, totally unconcerned about it as Cas' fingers slip under the waistband of his pants.

He pushes his hips forward, giving Cas space to tug his shirt out of his pants, and he's none too delicate about getting it undone before it joins their jackets on the floor. Cas runs his hands mindlessly over Dean's chest as he kisses him, just feeling him, and when he brushes over his nipples, Dean groans and Cas huffs a soft laugh against his lips.

As much as he would love to just let Cas touch him all night, Dean has better plans, and they involve Cas being a lot more naked than he is now. He pushes him forward, tugging at his shirt, and Cas catches on quickly, loosening his tie and pulling it over his head as Dean gets his shirt untucked. Cas tries to unbutton it, but Dean's too impatient, tugging it over his head as soon as the top few buttons are undone. He moves to undo the tie, still miraculously intact around his throat, but Cas' fingers curl around his hand.

"Maybe not just yet," he huffs, and Dean is in no place to deny Cas something he wants.

"Okay," Dean pants, curling his fingers around the tie and tugging Cas' head down to his. "It can
”He kisses him slowly, pulling at Cas' lower lip with his teeth. He's so turned on his can feel the pre-come beading at the head of his cock and he's desperate to get Cas naked, to see Cas naked, but apparently Cas has different plans.

He rests his hands on Dean's hips, turning him none too gently and pressing his chest flush against the wall. All the breath pulls from Dean’s lungs and when Cas gets his pants undone and his hands slip in, curling around his cock, Dean forgets how to breathe altogether. Cas jerks him a couple of times, but he moves on quickly, tugging his pants down and dragging his fingers over Dean's hole. Dean groans and pushes his hips back and in a second, Cas has his cock out, slipping it between Dean's cheeks and pressing close against him. He reaches around, rubbing Dea's cock as he rocks his hips, grinding against his ass, and when he leans over, his breath is hot and damp against Dean's ear and it's all he can do to keep himself upright.

With some difficulty, he kicks his shoes off and without missing a beat, Cas pushes his pants the rest of the way down, running his fingers back up Dean's thighs as he straightens up again. He kisses and nips at the back of his neck, still rutting against his ass, and Dean can barely move. He's got one of Cas' arms around his chest, holding him against him, and the other is holding his hips back.

Dean turns his head, leaning back and Cas catches his lips in a sloppy, heated kiss. This has been a long time coming and now that they're here, Dean wants to keep him close forever; even when Cas draws back, Dean wants to press back against him, but then Cas lifts him off his feet, sliding his arms under Dean's knees and he carries him over to the couch. Cas puts him down on his knees and Dean sits back, turning to kiss him before Cas pushes him forward against the back of the couch. He's breathing heavily as he leans over Dean, kissing the back of his neck again, and Dean loses himself, in the huff of breath in his ear.

Cas draws back, kissing a line down Dean's spine and when he gets down to his ass, he doesn't stop. Dean whimpers as the first press of Cas' tongue against his hole and Cas smooths a hand up his side to calm him as he drops down to his knees. It's been a while since Dean's had anything up his ass, but the sounds that spill from his lips don't even sound like him and he wishes he didn't sound so damn needy, but Cas is thriving on it, and after a few minutes, Dean gives up any pretense, dropping his forehead against the couch. He gasps and shudders as Cas points his tongue, pushing through the ring of muscle.

"Oh. Shit."

Cas hums against him and that sends a whole other wave of sensation through him and Dean's legs ache from the restraint it takes not to push himself back on Cas' tongue.

"You like that?" Cas breathes and Dean can only hum in response, nodding his head against the couch. "Good, baby. You have such a nice ass." Cas presses back in again and Dean arches his back, encouraging the probing thrust of Cas' tongue. It doesn't take long before he's panting again, thrusting his hips forward desperately, seeking any sort of relief for his cock.

Cas tugs his hips back roughly and Dean gasps at the suddenness of it but then Cas' fingers are slipping between his cheeks, pressing against his hole and rubbing against him and he moans with each touch. Cas pushes firmly, stretching his hole without pushing into him and Dean rolls his hips; he wants Cas inside him and the teasing is killing him. Cas is gentle, but determined, alternating with his fingers and his tongue and Dean can barely keep his eyes open, breathing heavily and moaning with every little movement and then, suddenly, Cas pulls away.

Dean turns to look over his shoulder and when Cas doesn't stop him, he pushes himself up off the couch, rising to his feet, and he presses up against Cas' chest. There's no hesitation before Cas kisses him deeply, cupping Dean's face in his hands, and Dean fumbles with Cas' pants, pushing them
down over his hips.

"Come upstairs," Cas breathes. His eyes are still shut, but when Dean nods lightly, Cas smiles, running his hands down to squeeze his ass and pull him against him. Cas rolls his hips once and pulls away, taking Dean's hand and tugging him after him.

Dean follows him up the stairs and when Cas stops and turns to him at the top, Dean pushes him back against the wall, leaning against the wall over Cas' shoulders and kissing him hard. Cas smiles against his mouth, running his hands up Dean's back and back down again to pull his hips close. He's rock hard and the slide of his cock against Dean's is overwhelming; Cas is thick and hard and Dean can't help but watch the way he slides against him - all he wants is to do is get his mouth on him, to lick his cock from root to tip and suck the whole thing into his mouth. His own cock gives a little twitch at the thought of it, and Cas tips his chin up, watching him.

He keeps his eyes locked on Deans and reaches back behind him, pressing his fingers back between his cheeks and Dean's eyes flutter shut with the first touch.

"Keep your eyes on me," he whispers and Dean nods. Cas pushes a little deeper and Dean's nostrils flare, but he keeps his eyes open, pushing back just lightly. Cas stops him again, pulling out and rubbing over his hole but Dean wants more; he wants to feel the stretch, he wants Cas' fingers inside him, flexing and rubbing and he wants it so badly he can't help himself. He reaches back behind him, pressing a finger into his hole and it's a little dry, but he pushes as deep as he can without hurting himself, letting out a shuddering breath.

"Okay," Cas huffs, and in a second Dean's arm is being pulled away and he's being lifted off his feet again. Instinctively, he wraps his legs around Cas' waist and buries his face in Cas' neck, kissing the soft skin under his jaw. He's laid down on the mattress a moment later and Cas climbs over him, rocking his hips down against him before rolling over to one side and reaching for something in the headboard.

Dean takes the opportunity to move with him, pushing Cas onto his back and licking up the length of his cock. He doesn't waste any time wrapping his lips around the head of his cock and sliding his mouth over him. Cas groans and his hips jerk forward, pressing into the back of Dean's throat as he rises up on his knees. He moans as he leans over Dean, rubbing down his spine and rolling his hips slowly, pushing his cock between Dean's lips. He's breathing heavily and Dean is enthralled, delighted with the fact that Cas is making these sounds, moaning and gasping with his cock in Dean's mouth.

As Dean pushes further, taking him deeper, Cas bends over, pulling his hands away and when he pushes back between his cheeks again, his fingers are slick. This time, when he pushes inside him, he doesn't hesitate. Dean's eyes roll back as Cas pushes two fingers inside him and he rocks back onto him, moaning around Cas' cock.

Cas pulls away, pressing his cock between Dean's lips again before drawing back completely and sitting back on his heels. Dean slips his hands around the backs of his thighs, tugging him until Cas relents with a soft laugh, and he kisses Dean as he stretches his legs out on either side of him. Dean presses him back against the bed and the way Cas' eyes rake over him sends shivers down his spine; Dean kisses him soundly, moaning as Cas' hands run up the insides of his thighs.

Dean hums against his skin, kissing Cas' mouth and his chin, down the column of his neck and over his collar bone. He nips at his skin and runs his tongue over the faint red marks that he leaves, before moving lower. He makes his way slowly down Cas' stomach, pressing back into each of Cas' touches as he kisses a line straight down to his cock. Cas may have other things on his mind, but he's got a beautiful cock and Dean's been patient for long enough.
He sucks him back into his mouth and Cas lets out a startled groan, slipping his hands into Dean's hair as he curls in on himself. He's panting already and when he looks down at Dean, he's so sexy with his dark, hooded eyes and ruffled hair and Dean wants everything he has to offer, he wants to do everything he can to make Cas feel good.

He loves the feel of Cas' cock on his tongue, the blunt nudge of it against the back of his throat, and Cas gets really into it when Dean takes him deep, curling his fingers in Dean's hair and rolling his hips in time with Dean's motions. Dean sinks down on him, holding still and Cas moans above him, pushing his cock into Dean's throat and when Dean swallows around him, Cas tugs hard on his hair and whether intentional or not, it sends a shock through Dean and goosebumps break out all over his skin.

He looks up to Cas and his expression mirror's Dean's feelings. Dean keeps his eyes on him and Cas gives another sharp tug, biting his lip when Dean moans around him again.

"You like that?" he asks and Dean nods slowly, curling his tongue around the head of Cas' cock. Cas has been rough with him before, but back then Dean just assumed it was because of everything going on with him; Cas needed an outlet and Dean didn't question it. He certainly didn't think that it might be something he's really into, but he's starting to now.

Dean rolls his hips against the bed, sliding his cock against the sheets because it feels so damn good and just the thought of Cas dominating him is making him crazy. He slides up to the head of Cas' cock, sucking hard and winding his tongue around him and Cas tugs him up and off of him, pulling him up so Dean's lying on his chest. He runs his hands down Dean's back, squeezing his ass and Dean adjusts so he's straddling him, grinding against Cas' cock and pressing his face into his neck.

"Ngh, baby you feel so damn good," he bites Cas' neck and sucks lightly at his skin. Cas shifts and rolls his whole body against him and Dean just sucks harder. He likes the idea of marking Cas up, of leaving a sign that this stunning, beautiful man is coming home to him every night - and despite his protests, Cas doesn't really seem to mind all that much.

Dean leaves a line of blotchy marks along his collarbone, running his tongue over the ridge as Cas' hands slip back down to his ass. Cas shifts down the bed, pressing his fingers between Dean's cheeks and adjusting himself so his cock slips easily between them.

"Oh," Dean groans. He pushes his cock into the soft part of Cas' stomach, slipping through collected pre-come. He's so turned on he can barely think and he just wants more. He snaps his hips hard, rutting against Cas and pushing back against his cock. He pushes back hard when Cas' cock catches on his rim and he just wants to push back until Cas is inside him, but he stops short when he meets Cas' gaze.

"Come here," Cas breathes and Dean pushes himself up so he's straddling Cas' hips. Cas' fingers curl around his cock and he jerks forward reflexively, seeking the warmth and firmness of Cas' palm. "I want to be inside you," Cas mumbles, and as Dean rocks back against his cock, he digs his fingers into Dean's thighs.

"Yeah, baby," Dean huffs. "I want you." He leans back and Cas' hands smooth up over his stomach as he strokes Cas' cock, holding it in place as he presses down on him. There's a big, pink dildo hidden under the mattress in Dean's room back at home, and it's the only thing he's had inside him in the past six months. Cas is significantly bigger and the press of his knees on either side of him is calming and so much fucking better than jerking off at home, alone.

Cas steadies him, and as much as Dean wants to drop down onto him and fuck him senseless, he lets Cas slow him down and he savours the initial push, groaning as Cas presses deeper, stretches him
open. He rolls his hips before Cas can slide in fully and the shaky oh fuck he gets in response is enough for him to keep going. Dean settles himself, switching positions so he can move more easily, and he pushes off of Cas' chest, holding him down against the bed as he sinks down on him and rocks his hips hard.

The feeling of being full is overwhelming and Dean groans as he bounces on Cas' cock, slipping one hand over his own erection as he fucks him. Cas is loud when he moans and Dean fucking loves it. Cas holds his hips, pushing him back and forth and holding Dean down so he can fuck up into him and Dean goes wild for it; he can't seem to keep up a steady rhythm for more than a few minutes because it's so fucking good and he just wants more.

When he loses control, Cas takes over, curling a hand around the back of Dean's neck and pulling him down to kiss him as he slows the roll of his hips, pushing deep enough that Dean whimpers with the feeling of it.

"Oh-!" he gasps, panting against Cas' cheek. "Oh fuck, baby, you're so good- so good."

"Yeah," Cas hums in agreement. He nips at Dean's earlobe breathing hot against his face. "Oh, Dean-" Cas pushes him back up and Dean leans back on his heels, squeezing around Cas' cock and rolling his hips slowly as Cas' hands slide up his sides Dean shuts his eyes and bites his lip, moaning as Cas' hips roll up again.

When Cas twines their fingers together, Dean squeezes tightly; it makes his position a little awkward but he refuses to let go, keeping his free hand planted firmly on Cas' chest. It's wholly different than before because as often as they had sex when they were young, it was never this emotional; Dean never felt so loved and (cared for) as he does now, even as Cas fucks him hard, ramming against his prostate.

"Dean," he breathes, "get up baby."

Dean's eyes flick up to meet him and Cas presses him up. Dean goes with the motion, sliding off of his cock and Cas pushes his hips, helping him turn around before pressing his cock up into him again. He pushes his hands up Dean's back as he waits for him to settle, and as he drags his nails back down, Dean groans, arching his back and clenching around him.

"Shit," Cas gasps. "Mmm, that's good baby. Keep going."

Dean leans back, planting his hands on Cas' hips again and he pushes himself up on his cock, thrusting his hips just enough that he takes the head of Cas' cock in before pulling up again. Cas groans and Dean can feel his frustration in the press of his fingers, but he doesn't push any further.

When Dean does sink back on him, Cas' whole body shudders under him and he curls his arms around Dean's waist, leaning up to kiss his spine. It's such a simple gesture but it emphasizes everything Dean's already feeling and he's never felt so in love with Cas as he does right now.

It's been so long since Dean's had decent sex that he forgot how good it could be, but Cas is quick to remind him, snapping his hips hard and Dean is exhausted, overwhelmed by the rush of sensations. He lies back against Cas' stomach, pressing his mouth against Cas' jaw and kissing him lazily. Every thrust seems to be directly aimed to rub against his prostate and Dean's whole body tingles with the pleasure of it. His cock slaps against his stomach as he moves with Cas' thrusts and Cas there's a patch of pre-come smeared over his lower stomach that slips his fingers through, using it to slick the way as his fingers wrap around the head of Dean's cock.

"Oh baby- Cas, you're gonna make me come."
"God, I hope so, I'm so fucking close." Dean huffs a laugh and arches off of him, humming in his ear. He pushes his hips up and Cas chases him, snapping his hips up hard and fast. Dean shifts his hips, planting his feet on the mattress and when Cas fucks into him again, he slams right against his prostate and Dean sees stars. He moans soundlessly, seeking out Cas' hands and twining their fingers together. He squeezes hard, holding himself still as Cas hots that same, sweet spot over and over again and Dean can feel his orgasm approaching, building and building until he feels like he's going to explode.

His hips jerk up as he comes and he clasps Cas' hands tightly, rolling his hips against the nothingness. He writhes against him, moaning and whimpering and Cas whispers in his ear, huffing softly and telling him how good he is, telling him how beautiful he looks like this and he groans deeply as he comes, pushing himself deep inside him. Dean pushes himself up, riding Cas through the rush of his orgasm, and when it's over, when Cas' fingers loosen against his own and his breathing evens out, Dean flops back against his chest, pressing his nose into Cas' cheek.

"I've never come like that before," he mumbles, swallowing hard.

"Maybe I'm just really good," Cas teases breathlessly, turning to smile at him. Dean kisses him, smiling against his mouth; he knows Cas is kidding, but he's right.

"Yeah, baby, you are."

Cas kisses him then and just when Dean thinks he's about to pull away, he slides a hand up to cup Dean's cheek, brushing his fingers against his skin as he kisses him. It's soft and sweet and Dean has to swallow back a premature confession, burying his face in Cas' neck when they finally break apart.

"You're amazing," Cas hums and Dean just shakes his head. "Come on, we should get cleaned up. I'll run a bath." Dean wants to protest because his limbs are heavy and he's exhausted and he knows there will be other times when he can take a bath with Cas, but he nods and agrees because he likes the idea of curling up in a bath with Cas.

By the time he drags himself into the bathroom, the tub is already full and Cas is waiting for him, so he steps in, settling himself between Cas' thighs and he leans back against him. It's warm and Cas winds his arms around him, humming into his hair and Dean shuts his eyes. He hums softly as Cas washes his stomach and he tips his head up to kiss Cas' chin, but he doesn't move until the water starts to get cold. He finishes cleaning the come off of himself and climbs out of the bath and heads for bed.

Cas comes after him a minute later and curls up around him, kicking the blankets to the end of the bed because it's too hot for them tonight.

"Did you have a good night?" Cas asks.

"Yeah," Dean hums, "really good. I can't believe how many people read your books."

"I know," Cas agrees, "it's even hard for me to believe sometimes."

"I don't want what we had before either," he breathes, "I never did. I want to know where I stand with you and I want you to be able to introduce me as your boyfriend."

"Do you want to be my boyfriend?"

"Yeah."
Cas smiles at him and presses a soft kiss to his forehead, "okay."
Chapter 11

Dean wakes up with his head on Cas’ chest and for a moment he forgets that this is real and that Cas is really here with him. Even when they were together before, they weren't really together and Dean never got to press up close and bury his nose in Cas' hair in the mornings. Today, he can do whatever he wants because neither of them is working and Cas doesn't have to be up until eleven. They stay in bed until ten-thirty.

After a thoroughly exhausting round two, the last thing Dean feels like doing is making breakfast but Cas assures him he promised to. Dean has a vague recollection of telling Cas he'd do anything for him if he just fucked him already, so he relents. Normally, he'd go all out, especially after the night they had but he's exhausted again and Cas has half an hour until he's supposed to be meeting Gabriel. This morning Dean opts for bacon and pancake mix from a box.

They eat together in the kitchen and Cas kisses him on his way out, after which Dean promptly texts Charlie to set up a dinner date.

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Charlie comes for dinner on Wednesday and it's everything Dean could hope for. Charlie and Cas get along great and Dean couldn't be happier. Cas even shows her some of the original art for his newest book - stuff Dean hasn't even seen yet. Dean is a little jealous, but mostly he's just glad they get along so well - it's his own fault that he hasn't read enough anyway.

Charlie stays most of the night and by the time she finally goes home, Dean is exhausted. He and Cas drop into bed without even bothering to clean anything up. Lying in bed, Dean doesn't ever remember being as happy is now. He has a good job, good friends, and most importantly, he has Cas - for real this time.

The good feeling lasts for a week.

Dean's sitting on the couch, Skyping with Sam when the other shoe drops. It feels like forever since he's talked to Sam, and Sam fills him in on everything that's been going on back home. It just makes Dean feel homesick in a way he hasn't for a long time now. He tells Sam a little bit about LA, but it's hard when he's trying to keep the majority of it a secret and has to rely on strictly work stuff if he doesn't want to lie to Sam. He hates it, but for the moment, it's better than the alternative. He's made up his mind; when he goes home, he's going to sit Sam down and talk about him - about everything. It will be easier then because he won't be with Cas anymore and as much as that sucks it means he won't have the added pressure when he tries to talk to Sam.

"So how much longer do you figure?"

"A month - give or take. Depends how long it takes to get the parts I'm waiting for." Outwardly, he sounds happy about it, but the thought of finishing this job comes with so many unanswered questions he doesn’t want to think about. Especially what the end of it means for him and Cas.

"It'll be good to have you back."

"Yeah."

Their conversation drifts, or rather Dean steers it toward Jess. Dean knows she is one of the few things he can get Sam to talk about for hours on end without question, and right now he doesn't want to think about his own life. He likes to hear about her, about how happy she makes Sam. He’s never
said it out loud, but Dean suspects she's the one for him. He's so caught up in listening to Sam he doesn't realize when the front door opens.

Cas comes up behind him, brushing his fingers up Dean's neck and kissing the top of his head. For a brief second, Dean doesn't think and he smiles up at him before Sam's voice breaks through the calm and he remembers Sam can see everything.

"Sorry," Cas hums, "I didn't realize you were talking to someone." He moves to back away, but there's a moments' hesitation and Dean knows he's fucked because Sam looks confused and if that's how Cas is seeing him right now, Dean's going to have a lot of explaining to do. When Cas walks away, Dean shuts his eyes and swallows hard.

"Uh, Dean?"

"Yeah, Sammy?"

"That was Cas, wasn't it?"

"Yeah," he sighs defeatedly. "Look, Sam, I gotta go. I'll talk to you soon." He signs off before Sam can argue because he knows this is bad and he has no one to blame but himself. He doesn't want to deal with this right now. He had a plan.

Setting his laptop aside, Dean pushes himself up off the couch and tries to calm himself down a little as he makes his way into the kitchen. Cas is leaning over the sink when he finds him and Dean doesn't know what to say so he asks if he needs help with dinner. Cas doesn't respond, and it's obvious that he's upset. Dean can hardly blame him; he's been lying to both of them since this started and that looks really bad from the outside. It doesn't feel great from where he's standing, either.

"Cas-"

"He doesn't know you're here, does he?"

*Be honest. "No."*

"Why?" How the *fuck* is he supposed to answer that without sounding like a coward and an asshole? "Are you ashamed of me? Are you afraid to tell Sam that you came back to me?"

"No," he says instantly. "No." Cas doesn't seem to buy it and Dean sighs. "You know what I'm ashamed of? My goddamn self. Cas I loved you- I love you and I'm still fucking terrified to do anything about it. And back then, I-" he stops, inhaling slowly, "I'm just too fucking scared to be what you want."

He stops because he didn't mean to say any of that, but now it's out there and if he stays right now, Cas is going to start asking questions Dean isn't ready to answer, so he just turns away.

"I should go." Again, Cas doesn't say anything so Dean leaves, slipping on his boots and taking the stairs. If he tries to take the elevator he's likely to have a panic attack and he doesn't need anything else right now.

*Fuck, he's such a damn coward. If he was just a little bit braver, he could tell Sam he's bi and that he's living with Cas but he can't because what will Sam say? And when it comes down to it, if he loses Sam, who does he have left?*

Instinctively, he makes for the parking garage but when he reaches for his keys he realizes they're on the coffee table upstairs and it's just one more thing gone wrong. He drapes himself over the hood of
the Impala and tries his best not to bang his head against it. He can feel his phone going off in his back pocket so at least he didn't forget that. He can't go back for his keys though because he can't face Cas right now. He just ran away from their conversation like an idiot and now he's totally lost.

Dean pulls his phone out, ignoring the messages from Sam and Cas and searching for Charlie's number. He calls her quickly, leaning back against the car.

"Dean?" she asks as she picks up and Dean lets out a shaky breath he didn't realize he'd been holding.

"Hey, are you in the city?"

"No, I'm at home, what's up?"

"I uh-" he can't say it, "do you think you could come get me?"

"Yeah, is something wrong? Where are you?"

"I'm just outside Cas' place, right on the beach." He can already hear his voice wavering and he doesn't trust himself to say anything more. He gives Charlie the address and goes to sit somewhere out of the way. If Cas comes looking for him, Dean doesn't want him to be able to find him. It's childish, but Dean can't even think about being around him right now. On top of Cas finding out he's lying to him - and to Sam - Dean just basically told him he's in love with him, which is super great.

Charlie doesn't take long to get there, or maybe it just seems like it because Dean's so lost in thought. She picks him up and other than a quick reassurance that Dean is okay, neither of them says anything on the drive back to her place. Dean leans against the window, staring out blankly and wondering how the fuck he managed to screw this up so badly. It shouldn't have been a big thing but then he had to go and panic and blow up about it. Now he's leaving the house because he's a coward and he can't face Cas, which will probably just make things worse in the long run.

When they get to Charlie's, she sits him on the couch with a blanket and leaves him for a minute. When she comes back, she's got a couple of pillows and some extra blankets for him. It's already late, so she doesn't ask what's wrong and Dean appreciates it. She leaves him to go to bed, telling him to help himself to anything he needs and she'll see him in the morning.

Dean doesn't sleep. He texts Cas to tell him where he is; he might have been the one to fuck this up, but his mom taught him better than to take off without telling anyone where he's going. He's not expecting a response, but of course, Cas texts him anyway.

<< You're not coming home?

<< You don't just get to fucking leave after a confession like that.

He doesn't know how to respond to that, because he didn't mean to say it in the first place. Instead of responding, Dean puts his phone on the floor and lies awake looking at the ceiling all night.

In the morning he gets up and doesn't bother showering because he's going just going straight to work anyway. Charlie makes him eat toast before they head out, but he only ends up taking a few bites before he feels nauseous again.

Work goes just about as well as the morning and by the end of the day, Dean's so tired and overwhelmed that he just wants to curl up in his own bed and sleep for a month. Instead, he gets Charlie to drive him back to Cas' condo, because he only has one pair of clothes and he can't run away forever.
Cas is in the kitchen when he gets home and Dean tiptoes around, trying not to make too much sound. He changes into a pair of comfortable pants and a tank top before slinking into the kitchen. Cas is making tea and he looks up when Dean walks in but he doesn't say anything. He does turn around to pull another mug from the cupboard and Dean pulls out a stool and sits himself at the bar.

It's quiet while Cas finishes their tea and when he does he slides Dean's mug across the island to him, leaning over it to look at him.

"I'm sorry," Dean mumbles, looking down into his tea. "Um. I- Can we sit in the living room." Cas nods and Dean follows him into the living room, curling up in the corner of the cough with his mug in his hands.

"Okay," he tries again. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you that Sam doesn't know about... any of this. I, um... the thing is, Sam doesn't know I'm bi."

"What?"

"I never told him."

Cas looks like he wants to speak, but he stops himself and sets his tea down on the table before sliding over to Dean and taking his mug from him too. "I didn't know. I'm sorry I made such a big deal about it."

"No," Dean shakes his head, "I should have told him. I should have at least told you that he didn't know."

"Is there anything else I should know?"

"No. Um, no one else knows either. About me or about this. Except Meg. Meg knows... pretty much everything." Cas chuckles softly and presses his hand to Dean's knee.

"Thank you for telling me. Can we agree to be honest with each other from now on?"

"Yeah," Dean nods.

"So when you said you loved me," Cas starts and Dean feels like he's been tricked. He knows Cas wouldn't bring it up at a time like this just to shut him down again, but he feels sick to his stomach just thinking about it.

"I..." he sighs as he thinks about it and he looks up at Cas. "I love you," he says softly, "I loved you ten years ago and I love you now and I will love you ten years from now."

Cas presses in, tugging Dean's legs together and climbing into his lap. "I always loved you," he breathes, cupping Dean's face in his hands. He tips his head down, kissing him softly. "What do you say we order in and spend the night in bed?"

"Okay," Dean hums and Cas kisses him again before he has a chance to say anything else.

Cas sends Dean to have a shower and by the time he gets out, dinner is ordered and Cas is already in bed - his bed - with a movie paused at the title screen. Dean huffs a little sigh as he stands in the doorway. He doesn't know how he ended up getting this lucky, but he's going to do his best not to fuck it up again. They've barely finished eating when Dean falls asleep leaning on Cas' shoulder.

The next afternoon, Cas is out shopping and Dean takes the opportunity to call Sam because they haven't talked since the incident and Dean has been avoiding all of his texts. He pulls out his laptop
and settles himself in the corner of the couch measuring his breaths because he doesn't want to do this or rather, he does - he's just terrified. Sam connects and Dean's heart leaps into his throat.

"Hey," he says.

"Hey."

"Okay, so I don't really know how to start this, but I owe you an explanation."

"You don't owe me anything," Sam assures him.

"Yeah, I kinda do." He pauses, taking a deep breath. "Sam I'm bi. And I'm living with Cas."

"I know," Sam says quietly and there's a soft smile that creeps across his face. "When we were kids I walked in on you and Cas one night. I don't think you even realized I was there because you were so wrapped up in each other."

Dean's speechless for the first time in his entire relationship with Sam. "You what?"

"I mean, even if I hadn't seen you that night, Dean- you were so heartbroken when he left I didn't even know what to do."

Dean is stunned but Sam just keeps talking. "Actually, while we're making decade-old confessions... when Cas left, he told me he loved you and I was... I don't know, afraid to tell you. You obviously weren't open about it back then and I guess I thought you'd freak out or something if you thought I knew."

Dean shakes his head. "We were kids. It doesn't matter anymore. Cas and I, we-" he smiles despite himself, "we finally figured it out, Sam."

"You want to tell me about it?"

Dean laughs and nods. "Yeah."

He starts at the beginning, how he'd barely landed in LA before he started looking for Cas, and Sam isn't the slightest bit surprised. He goes through the whole story and when he's filling Sam in on the novels and the party Cas walks through the front door with a bouquet of flowers and an armful of grocery bags.

"Hey, Sam, I- I gotta go, but I was thinking- I know you're worried about things going badly like they did before. Would it make you feel better to talk to Cas, maybe tomorrow?"

"Dean, I trust you to know what's best for you. You're not eighteen anymore, but yeah, if you guys are up for it, I'd love to see Cas again."

"Okay, I'll text you tonight, figure out a time. Thanks, Sam, for... y'know."

"Yeah, any time. Talk to you later."

Dean shuts his laptop without even closing the program and he looks up at Cas. He tries not to smile but fails miserably as Cas comes over to him.

"I know you're not really a flowers person," he says, "but I wanted to do something."

"No Cas, they're great. What's all this though?"
"Thought I'd make dinner tonight. Something nice."

"Let me help?"

"If you like," Cas smiles. He leans in to kiss Dean's cheek before heading into the kitchen. Dean follows after him, leaning on the island as Cas lays out the groceries on the counter.

"I talked to Sam today."

"And?"

"I told him. About me. About us. He was pretty cool about it. He's worried about me, I think, but that's nothing new."

"I'm glad you talked about it. Why is he worried?"

Dean hesitates because as much as he's told Cas about everything else, he's barely touched on how he was when Cas left. "Look, Cas, I don't know-" Cas stops what he's doing and turns. Dean gives him a hopeful smile, but Cas isn't buying it.

"What's wrong?"

"When you left it was pretty rough. I mean, I never got to say goodbye, not properly and I was... Honestly, Cas I was a fucking mess. I was eighteen and in love with you and suddenly you were gone and no one knew who I was, not really, and I'd also lost my best friend. It took me a long time to even care about anything. I guess Sam's worried about it being the same this time."

Cas has been looking at him with sympathy, but he frowns as Dean finishes speaking. "What do you mean, this time?"

"I have to go home sometime, Cas. I can't afford to live in California when I'm not working." Cas just nods.

"We'll talk about that later. Right now you're here and I'm sorry we never got to say goodbye. I promise I won't leave you again." Cas smiles warmly and leans across the counter to rub his thumb over Dean's hand. "Come help me cut these vegetables?"

---

When he and Cas finally get to sit down to talk to Sam, Dean's practically shaking. He knows now that Sam has seen them together before, and Dean told him about everything he didn't already know, but he's still anxious. Cas rubs his back soothingly, but Dean's worked himself into a panic that not even Cas can ease. When the familiar ringing sound announces Sam's impending arrival, Dean freezes up and Cas has to answer the call.

"Hello, Sam," he says and Dean just stares ahead at the screen. Jess is with Sam and Dean assumes that it's for moral support.

"Hey, Cas."

Dean's given a few minutes of reprieve as Sam and Cas catch up and Sam introduces him to Jess. He gets a chance to just sit back and watch and seeing Sam and Cas chatting amicably makes it a lot easier for him to remember how to breathe.

"So," Sam asks, "how did all of this come about?"
"Okay, can I just-" Dean starts with a sigh. "Everyone here knows what's going on. Cas and I are," he glances over at Cas for support and Cas smiles back at him. "Cas and I are together. I don't know what's going to happen when this job is done and I'm sorry I didn't say anything earlier, but I don't really want to talk about this. I want to be honest and I want us all to be on the same page, but I just-"

"It's okay," Sam interrupts. "I get it. It's cool."

"Why don't both of you come here next weekend?" Cas offers. "I think it might be easier for everyone if we can all get together in person. You can stay in Dean's room."

"Are you sure?" Jess asks and Dean is ready to ask the same thing, but Cas nods and assures them both that it will be a great time.

After the call, Dean wants to make up an excuse to cancel or at the very least he wants to ask Cas to change his mind. The idea of seeing Sam and Jess is great, but he's not sure he's ready to be with them and Cas in the same place - not just yet. Cas, on the other hand, is in a very good mood after the conversation with Sam and he makes it known to Dean. He manages to assure him that everything will be fine and Dean agrees to give it a shot because he does really miss Sam.

Dean talks to Charlie about it and while she's surprised it took him so long to talk to Sam about things, she's excited that she might get to meet him.

"Uh, yeah, probably."

"You don't sound overly excited," she comments.

"It's just the whole Sam thing, I'm not so sure about it- about him meeting Cas so soon."

"Wait, hold up-" Charlie puts down her tools and sits up straight. "You're not telling me you're doubting this thing with Cas now, are you? Because you've been pining over this dude since you got here."

"It's not that it's just- I don't really feel like I fit in with Cas' friends now. I guess I just don't want Sam to come here and see that after the way we used to be."

"Dean," she says softly. "Whether or not that's true, you can't just not let Sam ever be around you two."

"Yeah, I guess."

"Would it make you feel better if I'm there? I could bring Dorothy."

"Dorothy?" Dean asks and Charlie just grins and shakes her head.

"My wife." Dean's expression must portray his shock and confusion as vividly as he feels it because Charlie laughs out loud at him. "Surprise! I'm married. I don't wear my ring to work, but we've been together for a few years."

"Jeez. You think you know a person."

Charlie chuckles and returns to what she was doing. "So is that a yes?"

"Yeah, I would really appreciate that."
"Let me know."

"I will. We're picking them up after work tonight, but we might get dinner or something on Sunday."

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When he gets home Cas isn't there and Dean's worried that he's running late; it's Cas' last day of work and there has to be a lot of work to be done. He's not normally worried about Cas being late, but he doesn't want to face Sam and Jess on his own. There's no good reason for it because he's comfortable with them, but he can't stop thinking about everything that's changed recently.

He gets a text from Cas a few minutes before he's ready to leave confirming that Cas is running late and saying that he'll meet them back at the apartment with dinner. He's not thrilled because he'd rather have Cas with him for the initial meeting, but this is Sam and Jess and he assures himself on the walk down to the parking lot that it will be fine. Sam knew all alone, after all, and just because Dean didn't know that he did doesn't mean anything is going to change now.

The drive to the airport seems to take seconds despite Dean having to use the GPS on his phone to figure out where the hell he's going. Cas texts on the way to let him know he'll be home shortly and to see if they need anything for tonight. Dean tells him no, but he puts Cas on speakerphone anyway, just to hear his voice.

When he gets to the arrivals gate though and he sees Sam, all of the anxiety melts away. It feels like a hundred years since they've seen each other and suddenly nothing can ruin this reunion for him. Dean starts toward them, but Sam and Jess meet him halfway and Sam pulls him into a tight hug, clapping him on the back.

"It's good to see you. 'S weird without you at home."

"Tell me about it. Hey Jess."

"Hey, Dean."

Dean hugs her in turn and offers to take her bag for her as they head back out to the car. Sam relays messages from Jo and Aaron and Dean tells them all about LA and where he wants to take them while they're visiting. When he gets into it, there's a lot he wants to do with Sam while he's there and they only have a few days so he tries to narrow down his list as they make their way up to the apartment.

Dean's cleaned up his room for Sam and Jess to use for the weekend, and he's sleeping upstairs with Cas which is something he's looking forward to more than he will admit to. They get in the front door and Dean shows them to his room so they can drop all their things off and leaves them to go and see what Cas is up to in the kitchen. Cas looks up from cooking when he sees him and he smiles, gesturing for Dean to come over to him.

"Balthazar invited us to a party on the sixth if you'd like to go?"

"Yeah," Dean says, "sure. How was your last day?"

"Hectic," Cas chuckles. "I'd forgotten how much there is to do and I still have to go back for a few things, but today was my last full day. Did you pick up Sam and Jess?"

"They're just getting settled," Dean says, but as if on cue, the pair of them turn the corner into the kitchen just as he says it.
"Smells amazing in here," Jess smiles.

"Thank you," Cas smiles. He quickly turns to the sink to wash his hands, drying them off on a towel as he crosses toward Sam and Jess. "Hi Sam."

There's a moments' hesitation in which Dean's anxiety flares, but then Sam's face softens and he says a quiet hey, Cas before pulling him into a hug. Dean nearly collapses with relief. He doesn't know exactly what he was expecting, but this is the best possible outcome. He tunes out, turning to check on the food as Sam introduces Jess.

"Babe?" Cas asks and Dean can't help the stupid grin on his face as he turns to look at him. "Do you want to give them a tour?"

"No, you go for it. I'll keep an eye on the food." He'd love to show Sam around, but this is Cas' house and it gives them a good chance to catch up without Dean being around to force conversation one way or another. Dean suspects that even now Sam still holds some bitterness toward Cas for the way he left, and Dean can't blame him, what with the way Dean reacted to the whole thing back then. There was a lot Sam didn't know back then.

Hopefully this trip will give them a chance to clear the air, and to show Sam that they've figured out their shit now and everything is good. Dean needs Sam and Cas to get along if this relationship is going to go, well, anywhere. He doesn't like to think about the future because it's so uncertain for them what with Dean's lack of steady income and the fact that he lives three states away - he's doing his best to just enjoy the moment with Cas and not worry too much about anything else.

Cas takes much longer to show them around than Dean is expecting, though it's likely something to do with the comics and by the time they return to the kitchen, Dean already has dinner served. He's set up outside so they can eat on the balcony. It's a warm night and there are people down at the beach, screeching as they run into the ocean and laughing again on their way out. Dean likes to sit and watch sometimes and wonder what it's like for people to just live here all the time, where swimming into the early evening is just as normal as it is for him to sit on the couch and watch TV. He would like to talk to Cas about it, but his early years in LA aren't something Cas talks about often and Dean suspects it's something of a sore spot for him, so he doesn't try to bring it up.

After dinner, Sam and Jess go to bed early and Dean can hardly blame them, but he'd like to have more time to spend together. Sam promises to wake up early and they can go out for breakfast or something to make up for it. They say their goodnights and Dean piles everything into the dishwasher while Cas tidies up outside. For the first time maybe ever, Dean feels like an adult with his own life and he likes it.

Cas comes in with the last stack of dishes and kisses the back of his neck. "I'm gonna head up to bed, don't take too much longer."

"I won't. Do you want me to lock up?"

"No, I'll do it. Just finish this and come up to bed, okay?"

"Okay."

Dean finishes up quickly and he leaves the dishwasher off for the night before heading up to Cas' room. Cas isn't there when he gets up, so Dean strips out of his clothes and climbs into bed, kicking off his underwear and pushing them out from under the blankets. He grins up at Cas when he appears out of the bathroom in a pair of sleep pants and nothing else.
Cas just raises an eyebrow at him and flicks off the ceiling light before climbing into bed next to him. "I think that went pretty well," he says and Dean smiles.

"Yeah, me too. It feels good knowing that Sam knows and that he's cool with it."

"His girlfriend is thrilled."

"Why?" Dean laughs.

"She wants you to be happy, especially since she and Sam have been spending so much time together lately."

"Yeah," Dean nods, "the last few months Jess has been around more often. Don't get me wrong, I like her and she's great for Sam, but she's right and it's kind of lonely."

"Well, then it's a good thing you have me now, isn't it?" Cas doesn't wait for an explanation before pressing up against him and Dean rolls onto his side, fitting himself against Cas' stomach. A warm hand slides down his side, but Cas' pauses momentarily as he smoothes over his hip, considering before slipping forward and running his fingers up the length of Dean's bare cock. "You're naked," he says and Dean hums as he presses into the touch. "Your brother and Jess are right downstairs," Cas chides.

"Guess you'll have to be quiet."
It's Saturday so when Dean wakes up in the morning aching slightly and still a little sticky, the first thing he considers is dragging Cas into a long shower. He intends to keep him there as long as the hot water holds up, but Cas quietly reminds him that they have plans this morning. It doesn't stop him from going down on him until Dean feels like he's about to explode and then fucking him to completion. The shower that follows is significantly shorter than Dean had hoped for, but considering his legs aren't totally up to holding him up yet, it's probably for the best.

They head downstairs to make coffee and Dean nearly falls asleep on the island while Cas is getting everything ready. Sex with Cas is phenomenal, but it's been forever since Dean's gotten laid more than once in a day and his body is exhausted. The fact that they barely got five hours' sleep last night isn't doing much to help either, but it's a small price to pay. Jess comes out and plops herself next to him, rubbing a sympathetic hand down his back.

"They've got you working too hard," she says and Cas snorts and shakes his head as he places a mug down in front of her.

"Try not to feel too sorry for him," he smiles, "it's his own fault."

"Is not," Dean grumbles but no one is buying it.

Sam emerges half an hour later while Cas and Jess are discussing their plans for the day and Dean is struggling to keep his eyes open - despite being on his second cup of coffee. Normally, Sam would make fun of him for being so tired, but this morning he slouches next to Dean and they leave Jess and Cas to their planning.

With their coffee finished and their plans still partially undecided, the four of them pair off to get ready for the day. Cas tells Sam to pack a bag for the beach because it's a beautiful day and, more than likely, they'll end up there at some point. He and Dean do the same and they pack everything into the trunk of the Impala before heading out to Cas' diner of choice for breakfast.

The diner is in the middle of the city and Dean would never have found it were he not being given instructions at every turn. It's set into the bottom of a huge glass building and the only distinguishing feature is a little yellow sun sign with the name of the place out front. Dean drops his three passengers off and spends another fifteen minutes looking for parking before walking back to join them. Somehow, despite the place being absolutely crammed they've been seated already, tucked away in a back corner of the adjoining room. Dean slips into the empty seat next to Cas.

Coffee and juice are pushed in front of him and he smiles over at Cas where he's looking through the menu. Even after all the weeks they've spent together, Dean's still having trouble believing this is all real and they can have this.

They take longer eating breakfast than planned but when they're done, Dean drives them down to the beach. Trying to find a place to set up is next to impossible, but Cas finds them a spot a little ways down the beach where it's less crowded. He leaves the three of them to set up, promising to be back in just a minute and Dean watches after him as he disappears into the crowd. Sam comes up behind him, nudging him and drawing his attention back.

"Hm?" Dean asks. When he turns to face Sam, he's met with a huge soft smile. "What?"

"Nothing," he shrugs, "I just haven't seen you this happy - not for a long time."
"Yeah, well," Dean shrugs but he can feel the heat rise in his cheeks and Sam chuckles softly.

"Look, I have to admit when I found out you were staying with Cas I was pissed. You don't owe me an explanation of what you do every minute of every day, but I saw what you were like when he left and I didn't want that to happen again. This is... not at all what I was expecting."

"You know Cas never left because he wanted to, right?" Dean says. Sam lifts an eyebrow at him and Dean nods. "It's not my story to tell. Remind me to show you the comics later."

"I saw. He’s pretty dedicated."

"Yeah," Dean breathes softly, "he is."

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Dean's day goes from good to great and by his third drink, he and Sam have moved from sunbathing to debating kayak rentals. Jess insists that it's a terrible idea considering how many margaritas they've had, but Dean's still into it.

"Maybe tomorrow," Cas says, shifting to sit behind Dean and pulling him into his lap. "I don't want you to drown."

"Exactly my point," Jess agrees and Dean and Sam share an unimpressed look before laughing out loud.

"Man, I missed you," Dean mumbles. "We should do this more often."

"Thought you weren't gonna be here much longer?"

Dean shrugs and leans back against Cas' chest. "Yeah, probably not." Cas wraps his arms around his shoulders and kisses the top of his head, mumbling something inaudible that is probably supposed to be comforting.

They spend another couple of hours at the beach and when they get home, it's already getting dark. They go to bed late, and by the time they do, Dean's exhausted.

He lies in bed for a little while, staring up at the ceiling as he waits for Cas to join him because he can't turn off his brain. Tomorrow Sam's meeting Charlie for the first time and they're all meeting Charlie's wife - something that still seems weird to him after having known her for a couple of months.

When Cas does slide in next to him, he promises that everything will be fine and Dean lets himself believe it, curling up against Cas' side as he shuts his eyes.

Nothing goes wrong the next morning - waking up late, aside - but it's hectic. They have a reservation for lunch at 12:30 and so far Dean hasn't heard from Charlie at all. He's worried that she might have forgotten, but Sam assures him that if they all woke up late, Charlie may have too. It helps him calm down a little, but he's still not really relaxed until he's sitting behind the wheel of the Impala, driving them out to the pier.

Charlie is there waiting, just like everyone said she would be and Dean gives her a small wave as they pull up beside her truck.

"You brought the whole gang," she smiles and Dean nods, turning back to look at them.
Charlie, this is Sam and his girlfriend Jessica." He steps out of the way so Sam and Jess can step forward. "Charlie and I have been working together on this project."

"It's good to finally meet you. Dean talks about you a lot and now I finally have faces to put to the names." Charlie introduces Dorothy to the group, but the sun is hot and they don't waste any more time before heading into the restaurant.

Dean's thoroughly relieved to find that everyone gets along really well. He likes Dorothy and he can't figure out why Charlie never mentioned her before because she's hilarious. Lunch runs late, this time because they're too busy talking that they forget to eat.

Dorothy has to step out for an appointment while the rest of them head back to the beach. In the rest of his 28 years combined, Dean's never spent so much time at the ocean as he has in the last two months - not that he's complaining. Dorothy rejoins them an hour later, bringing snacks and drinks and Dean sits back and watches Sam and Jess try to discreetly mix drinks under the edge of their umbrella. Not for the first time, he misses them both desperately.

These are the people who are the most important to him. Out of everyone he knows, he can narrow it down to this small group and the thought of being away from any of them hurts. But he's going to have to choose. In the little time he has left in California, Dean needs to choose between here and Kansas and which people he wants to be closest to. His heart sinks as he considers it because realistically he doesn't have much of a choice. Living here is fine now when he's staying with Cas and has a steady income, but what about after the job? Where is he going to live? How is going to pay rent? At least in Lawrence, he has a guaranteed place to live.

When he looks at Charlie and Dorothy - struggling to hold towels around an overflowing can of pop - and Cas with his toes in the sand, his chest hurts. He doesn't let anyone else see it, but having them together, even just this once, is bittersweet. His time with Cas is coming to a close and that's hard enough without factoring in the other people he cares about.

Cas seems to notice but when he looks over Dean pulls up a smile. If there's one thing he's good at, it's pretending like everything is fine when it's not. Cas seems to understand his reluctance to talk about it and he doesn't push. It'll come up later, maybe when they're in bed or tomorrow after Sam and Jess leave, but it'll be easier to deal with then.

A long day turns into another long night for all of them and it's dark by the time they make their way home. Cas doesn't ask about the moment at the beach and Dean doesn't bring it up. He's still half-drunk as he strips out of his clothes and flops into bed and he presses up against Cas back.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Cas asks.

"About what?"

"Whatever was bothering you at the beach."

"No," Dean says instinctively, then, "I just don't wanna have to choose y'know? Between here and there. But I can't afford to live here or to come back and forth with any kind of regularity. I can't. I try not to think about it because it just fucking sucks, but having everyone together today, I just-" he cuts himself off and rolls onto his back.

Cas seems to understand that that's as much as he's going to get for now, but he turns with Dean, wrapping an arm around him.

"I know," he says softly. "We'll figure something out, okay? I promise. We've spent enough time
being miserable, I want something good for us, so we'll figure it out.”

---

In the morning, Dean gets ready for work while Sam and Jess get the last of their things together. Cas is driving them to the airport today and Dean has to say his goodbyes before he leaves. He's sad to see them go, but reminding himself that he'll see them soon doesn't make him any happier.

Work goes by slowly and Dean puts it down to the constant reminder of how little time he has left here. Most of the structural work is finished other than the replacement of small bits and pieces, but everything big is done. Benny's getting a detailer to come in after and do all the paint so what's left won't actually take Dean that long.

Charlie does her best to keep his spirits up and Benny assures him that there's a lot more work he needs done if Dean's up to it. Dean understands that they're trying to help and he appreciates it, but neither of them really gets it. A week ago, the prospect of more work here would have significantly cheered him up, but it doesn't help much now. All it really does now is cement California in his mind as a genuine option instead of a wish, leaving him the responsibility of choosing. It's more difficult now, knowing he has a choice than it was when he felt like Lawrence was his only option.

On his way out, Benny stops to invite him to a Fourth of July party he's having and while Dean's glad to be included and definitely looking forward to it, it makes him miss the parties he and Sam used to hold. All in all, his day is a bust and other than telling Cas about the barbecue, he's not expecting the night to go much better.

When he gets through the door, all the lights are out in the living room which strikes him as odd, but he's too tired to worry about it right now. All of his things are still up in Cas' room, so he drags himself up the stairs with the full intention of flopping on the bed and staying there until Cas makes him get up. When he opens the door, there's a note on the be so Dean drops his bag on the floor and crosses to the end of the bed. Lifting the folded paper off what seems to be a small wrapped package; he opens the note and reads silently in his head.

If you're not feeling sexy, leave the package until tomorrow. Put on something comfortable and come back downstairs.

Dean is definitely not feeling sexy tonight, but he's eager to know what this mysterious package is nonetheless. Obeying the note he leaves it alone, moving it to the dresser so it won't be forgotten about tomorrow and seeking out something more comfortable to wear.

When he gets downstairs Cas has candles lit in the fireplace and some on the table, surrounding a very full tray of nachos. Dean can't help but smile. Cas tugs him down onto the couch, pulling him close and Dean is too overwhelmed and too tired to stop him. He curls up against Cas' side, shutting his eyes and inhaling the scent of him. As much as the thought of having to choose terrifies him, being with Cas is still the most comforting thing.

"Thanks," he whispers. "You didn't have to do all of this."

"Of course I did. I don't want you to suffer alone. If I can help at all, I want to."

"I don't deserve you," Dean mumbles, pulling back to kiss him softly.

"You do," Cas assures him and when Dean goes to argue, Cas kisses him silent and that's the end of that.

Dean finds a James Bond marathon and they start watching halfway through Diamonds Are Forever
and spend the next four hours watching until, full of nachos and beer, Dean slumps over and passes out on Cas' lap. He doesn't wake up until Cas slides out from under him and even then, he's only awake for a couple of minutes before his eyes drop shut again.

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When Thursday comes, Dean's excited but he's also a little anxious. Benny's a great guy and Dean's sure his friends are also going to be great, but it's another party where he has to meet another whole group of people and feeling the way he is lately, he's not sure he's up to it. He spent the day yesterday talking it through with Charlie and he knows she'll be there with Dorothy, but it's still so much for him right now - he doesn't know how he's going to make it through Balthazar's party next week.

Dean takes advantage of the time off to sleep in until almost ten o'clock. When he gets up, Cas joins him in the shower and they make a quick breakfast together before driving out to Benny's.

There are already dozens of people there and Dean suspects that Benny just sent out a blanket invite to the whole neighbourhood because some of the people arriving are bringing food with them - one person is dragging a whole cooler behind her. Everyone seems to be introducing themselves to each other and Dean's anxiety about the whole thing calms down when he gets the chance to introduce Cas to Benny.

The party helps to pull Dean out of his head and Cas even comments on his mood, glad that he's enjoying himself again. They end up being some of the last to leave - along with Charlie and Dorothy - and Dean's glad he decided to come despite his hesitance. Cas is right, he should enjoy the time he has left here and when it comes to leaving, well, they'll cross that bridge then.

Balthazar's party proves to be much more difficult.

It's just a small get together with some friends and coworkers - and end of the semester kind of thing, but Dean's looking forward to it after what a good time they had at Benny's. They arrive at Balth's just after six and Cas is immediately pulled into a group discussion about something Dean can't keep up with. Biblical studies, he thinks. He sits off to the side, nodding along like he has a fucking clue what they're talking about, and when the conversation lulls, Cas introduces him to everyone. Balthazar and Inias he already knows, the rest of them are new.

Hannah is a Spanish professor if he can remember correctly. Joseph teaches some sort of math. The rest of them just kind of jumble together and Dean does his best to remember their names because he figures that's more important than what they do. It's not, apparently, because he ends up getting lost in every conversation. The few other plus-ones look as bored as Dean feels through the discussion, but they all seem familiar which each other - Dean sits at Cas' side quietly, feeling more like a trophy boyfriend than an actual partner.

He loses faith in all of it sometime around ten. Everyone else is drinking and although Balth keeps offering, Dean doesn't want anything. He claims not to be feeling well, and Cas is so wrapped up in his conversation with Hester that he doesn't even recognize it as a lie. Dean just feels worse.

He was wrong to think he and Cas would work; Cas is a different person now and he's built a life around himself that has no room for Dean in it. None of these people - Cas' friends - have anything in common with him and as much as he tries, Dean can't work his way into a conversation. After another half an hour of feeling miserable, he sends Cas a subtle text, telling him he feels sick and making sure he has a way to get home before heading out. He thanks Balthazar as he leaves, apologizing for leaving early and then he drives around Los Angeles for the next two hours, trying to think of a [way] this doesn't end badly, but he can't.
By the time he gets home, he knows he has to end things with Cas; maybe they work together when they're alone, but there's more to a relationship than just that. At least it'll make his decision easier in the long run.

He goes to his own room when he gets in, something he hasn't done for ages and he sits at the end of the bed with his head in his hands, trying to figure out what he's supposed to say. He loves Cas more than he's ever loved someone but sometimes it takes more than that and this is one of those times.

Cas gets home shortly after and he finds Dean immediately, pushing the door open without knocking. Dean doesn't have the energy for this right now and he's already on edge when Cas shows up.

"What's wrong?" Cas asks and he sounds concerned but there's an edge to his voice and Dean snaps back.

"Nothing." The look he gets in response is incredulous at best and Cas leans back against the wall with a sigh.

"Why did you leave?"

"Because I didn't fucking belong there. I don't know if you noticed, but I don't have a single thing in common with any of your friends."

"Dean," Cas sighs. "I thought we'd been over this." He sounds annoyed and Dean puts it down to the alcohol because usually, Cas is far too patient with him.

"Fuck," Dean mumbles and he doesn't even get a chance to reply before Cas is shaking his head. He opens his mouth to speak, but Dean interrupts with a huffed, "just don't." "Look, I can't do this. It's not working. Maybe you'd have been better off with Bart, with someone you can actually talk to."

"Dean, I can talk to you perfectly fine. This isn't going to work if you keep comparing yourself to everyone I know. I love you, I don't care about them."

"You're right," Dean grunts, pushing himself up off the bed. "This is never gonna work. Maybe we could have done it back then, maybe we did, but we're different people now. You don't need me anymore - you've got your job and your books and all your friends and your students who love you... it took me a while to get used to living here because I feel like I'm trespassing. People like me don't belong in houses like this. I just don't fit, Cas." He's running solely on adrenaline right now, but if he doesn't get this out now, he's not going to. Cas doesn't speak, so he continues.

"You deserve someone who's your equal. You deserve to be with someone who isn't afraid to be with you." The second he says it, his stomach clenches but he knows he's right. Cas deserves all the best in life, and he's earned a lot of it on his own - it only makes sense that he should have someone beautiful and charming to spend the rest of his life with and Dean is not that. Cas is still silent and Dean can't bring himself to look at him because he knows his resolve will fail. He sighs and drops his arms to his sides.

"I guess this is it. I'm gonna stay with Charlie until I'm done. I'll come get the rest of my things tomorrow." He doesn't have anything prepared; he wasn't planning on walking out tonight, but he doesn't bother getting anything together before slipping past Cas and out into the hall.

He feels like he's in a trance as he walks through the front door and down to the parking lot. He drives - blindly, with no particular destination in mind, but he still ends up out near Charlie's. It's a bad idea; it's late and he should stay at a hotel tonight instead, but the more he thinks about it, the
more the gravity of it sinks in. Before he can get himself together, tears are streaming down his cheeks and he has to pull off to the side of the road because he can't see properly.

This is stupid; he doesn't cry. He hasn't cried in forever - not even when his Mom died because he had to be strong for Sam. There's no one here to perform for this time and when everything bubbles to the surface, he lets go. He was stupid to think he and Cas could make things work - or maybe just blinded by love; they're just too different now. Once upon a time, they were two broken kids who found something good in each other, but now Cas is happy and successful and comfortable in his own skin. Dean's out of a job in a few weeks and the only thing he's good at is fixing cars. It's not even something he's particularly interested in. Fixing cars doesn't get you anywhere in life, other than a dead-end, coming home every night stinking and covered in grease. Cas deserves someone he can be proud of and Dean's not even proud of himself.

He doesn't know how long he's been sitting there, dwelling on his lack of employment, but his head aches where the steering wheel presses into his forehead, so he must have been sitting here for a while. There's a tap on the window and he looks out to find Charlie looking down at him sadly with two mugs in her hand. He doesn't want to dump all his shit on her, but he can't exactly sleep out in his car, either, so Dean opens the door and swings his legs out, looking up at her. Charlie hands him a mug and he takes it with a whispered thanks.

"Cas texted me, said you might be headed out my way. Do you want to talk?" Dean shakes his head and takes a sip of his tea. "You want to at least tell me what happened?" He sighs and shrugs and Charlie rubs his shoulder. "Come on, let's go inside."

Dean lets himself be led inside and Charlie sits him down on the couch and plops down on the chair across from him. He knows this is the part where he's supposed to tell her what happened, but he doesn't know where to start.

"I told him it's over."

"I assumed that much. Any particular reason why? I thought Cas was everything you ever wanted?"

Dean huffs a bemused laugh. "Yeah. I can't be what he needs. He deserves better." Charlie opens her mouth but shuts it again quickly.

"I don't believe that, but maybe we should talk more in the morning. You look exhausted." It's probably the first good idea anyone has had tonight and Dean nods his agreement.

Charlie sets him up in the spare room and after a brief goodnight, leaves him alone to sleep. Surprisingly, he falls asleep fairly quickly, but he's emotionally exhausted, so maybe that makes sense.

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Dean wakes to sun shining in on his face. He's in an unfamiliar bed and it takes a second for everything to sink in. Charlie doesn't come up to get him, so he doesn't bother getting up; he's an idiot and he knows it, but in the long run, this is what's best for both him and Cas. He curls in on himself, pulling a pillow over his face so he doesn't have to face the world.

Eventually, Charlie does come for him. She makes him breakfast and the two of them drive over to Benny's because the last thing Dean wants to do this morning is talk about what happened, so she takes him to work to keep his mind off of it - and it works.

It turns out to be a ruse though, because just after noon, Cas shows up. This morning has been a
struggle and though he's getting through and right now the last damn thing he needs is to see Cas. He
tries to sneak out, but Charlie stops him, telling him that everything will be easier if he just talks to
Cas.

"Charlie I tried-"

"No, you didn't. You talked and Cas listened. You didn't have a conversation." Dean scowls and
tries to ask how the fuck Charlie knows this, but she cuts him off. "He called me last night. After he
texted to tell me you'd probably be showing up, he told me what happened and we talked about it.
Now it's your turn to talk."

"Charlie-"

"Dean, I'm not going to be a go-between here. Go talk to him, let him say it for himself." Dean huffs
but he walks away, making for the road because, presumably, Cas is still in his car.

At first, when he approaches Dean can't even look at him, but Cas climbs out of his car, curling
around to sit on the hood and Dean glances up, just briefly. He hates this because he just wanted it to
be over, seeing Cas again and knowing they can't be together is too much.

"You're an idiot," Cas says and yeah, Dean deserves that but he wasn't expecting Cas to sound so
awful. When he looks up at him again, he realizes Cas looks nearly as bad as he sounds; he's on par
with Dean, and at this point, Dean's been under the hood of an old Chevy for the last two hours.

"Thanks," he snaps back.

"Did you really think walking away was going to solve this?" It's a genuine question; Cas wants an
answer.

"What would you do, then?"

"Make an effort?" Cas huffs. "Fucking talk to me. I know you're an emotional disaster, but I thought
maybe this was worth more to you than just 'it's over'."

"First of all," Dean starts, but as soon as the words are out, the force behind them is gone. He is an
emotional disaster, as much as it hurts to hear it from Cas. He only told Cas how he felt accidentally
and if he hadn't they probably never would have ended up here.

"Dean, this isn't just about Bart or the people you met at the party." Dean tries to argue, but Cas
doesn't give him the chance. "If it was, we could sit down and work through that - you might even
try listening to me for once. Last night you were upset and you just up and left. I thought you were
coming back and then you just... didn't." His tone softens and Dean realizes the implications here;
Cas didn't sleep last night because he was waiting for Dean to come home.

Dean chest swells with an unbearable guilt and he shuts his eyes, moving to lean against the Impala
where it's parked in front of Cas' car.

"I can't do anything about this if I don't know what's wrong, Dean. This is supposed to be a
relationship, not just you making rash decisions because you're upset. Talk to me. Tell me what's
wrong because I know all of this isn't about my friends."

"Fucking..." Dean mumbles, "just fucking look at you. You're rich Cas, you've got a great apartment
right on the damn beach, you're so fucking smart I can't keep up with you half the time and I just- I
don't fit with that. Look at me," he says, spreading his arms and moving into Cas' line of sight, "I'm a
fucking mess. I have dirt in my hair. You, you're hungover and you're still wearing a damn tie."
"I didn't get changed," Cas mumbles, but Dean's not listening. He steps forward and Dean looks up at him for a second.

"Cas, take a good look at us. We've been trying but it just doesn't work - anyone can see that you and I just don't fit, not anymore."

Cas closes the distance between them and Dean can feel his willpower draining out. Cas lifts a hand, wiping a smudge off of Dean's cheek with his thumb.

"You've been covered in shit since I met you," Cas breathes and Dean huffs a laugh despite himself. "Why is this any different?"

"I don't have anything to give you anymore," Dean mutters and the last of his resolve crumbles as Cas' arms wind around his waist.

"I don't want anything from you," he breathes. "Dean, I just want you. Please come home with me. We can talk about all of this later, but please just give us a chance. Haven't we been through enough?" Dean's eyes prickle with unshed tears and he lets Cas press up against him, bundling him into his arms.

"I'm sorry," Dean mumbles, pressing his fingers into Cas' shoulder blades.

"Let's go home."

Dean nods, but he can't bring himself to let Cas go quite yet. He's just a huge fucking mess and everything he tries to do seems to turn out worse for him. He doesn't know what it is that Cas wants to hold onto so badly, but maybe this once Dean doesn't know what's best for him; maybe Cas has gone and flipped things and Dean needs to learn to trust him to know what's best.

For now, at least, he can do that.

When Cas finally pulls away, he waits by the cars while Dean goes and talks to Charlie. He barely gets a chance to explain before she tells him to go home and she'll see him on Tuesday. Dean's relieved because he's has just about enough talking about things for one day; he's emotionally exhausted, his head aches and all he wants to do is go home and curl up in bed. Maybe if he's not an idiot on the way home, Cas will even join him.

They leave the Impala and Cas drives home because Dean's still feeling overwhelmed by everything and he doesn't trust himself to drive right now. When they get back to the apartment, Dean changes into clean clothes and curls up in the corner of the couch because he doesn't want to feel exposed right now.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Cas asks and he shakes his head. "What you do doesn't dictate the kind of person you are."

"It was just a stupid fight," Dean mumbles, "doesn't mean anything."

"Obviously, it did."

"I just don't feel like I deserve you."

Cas frowns sadly. "How can you even think that? After everything you've done for me? I don't think you realize how close I came to giving up, dean. The only reason I'm still here, the only reason I have all of this is because you and Gabriel never gave up on me. I'm going to make some tea, do you want some?" Dean nods and Cas kisses his forehead as he gets up from the couch. From his spot,
Dean can hear Cas talking and it only takes a second to realize he's on the phone - with Gabriel, by the sounds of it.

He feels immediately guilty because it Cas was upset enough last night to talk to Charlie about it, he probably called Gabe as well to talk to him. Dean feels like the world's biggest idiot. He doesn't want to listen in, but he can't help but overhear what Cas is saying - nothing that seems overly important, but he catches *yeah, he's home and we're okay* and it doesn't seem like either of them is too upset with him.
Chapter 13

Dean wakes up to Cas grumbling beside him and it takes him a minute to realize Cas isn't awake yet. He feels immediately guilty because having talked about it, even just a little bit, he realizes Cas is right. Cas is always right. In an attempt to make up for being an idiot, Dean sneaks out of bed and heads downstairs to make breakfast. He's getting everything together when Cas finds him and slips up behind him, curling around his back.

"You should be in bed," he breathes. Dean shrugs.

"I'm not sick, I'm just stupid."

"You're not stupid either." Cas presses his nose into the back of Dean's ear, kissing him softly. "I know it might not be easy, but I want to do this, I want to be with you - whatever it takes."

Dean nods. He turns in Cas' arms, sliding his hands up over his shoulders and Cas kisses him, walking him back until he bumps against the counter.

"Sorry," Cas smiles and Dean can't help but grin back at him.

"Don't be sorry. Go sit down." Cas just presses in further, tipping Dean's head back as he kisses his neck.

"I don't want to."

Dean chuckles softly as he pushes Cas off of him. "Let me finish breakfast and then I'm yours for the rest of the day."

"I have a meeting at ten," Cas argues.

"I'm yours until ten, then."

Dean does end up getting breakfast finished, but only because someone calls Cas just as Dean's pushing him into the living room, and apparently it's about his meeting this morning, so he has to take the call. Dean's glad for it because it means he can do something for Cas for once. He knows Cas said he didn't want anything from him - doesn't want anything from him - but he'd still like to, given the chance. Maybe he can't take care of Cas anymore, but he can make him breakfast on occasion.

He plates everything up nicely and heads into the living room where Cas is waiting none-too-patiently on the couch. Dean hands him his plate and sets the second one down on the table for himself, but Cas has other plans.

"Come here," he says, sliding his plate onto the table next to Dean's. He pulls Dean into his lap the first chance he gets and Dean shuts his eyes. He doesn't deserve this, not after what he did. "Hey," Cas breathes, "look at me." Dean opens his eyes hesitantly and Cas is smiling up at him. "I love you."

"Cas," Dean starts, but he can't help the rush of emotion and he smiles down at him despite himself, shaking his head softly. "I love you so damn much." Cas' arms wind around his waist and Dean lets himself be pulled forward; he doesn't hesitate when Cas kisses him and he tries to convince himself that he deserves this - that Cas wants this just as much as he does.
"Don't think so much," Cas breathes, slipping his hands down over the curve of Dean's ass. He shifts him forward, moving one hand up under his shirt and Dean presses into the touch. "I want this. We're gonna make it work, okay? I promise."

"I don't deserve you."

"You do," Cas nods, smiling. He presses closer, kissing him softly.

It's sweet and slow but as Dean kisses him back, Cas' grip tightens on him, pulling him closer. Cas breaks the kiss, tilting down to kiss his shoulder and up his neck. When he moves up, he gives Dean no choice but to tilt his head back and as Dean's eyes flutter shut, he struggles not to get hard.

After everything, he doesn't want to jump right back into things. He wants Cas to know that he meant the things he said, but he also wants to work on it. When he's with Cas, he's happier than he can ever remember and he does want to make it work, even if it means giving up certain things for a little while.

Cas presses forward, bringing his hands up so he and Dean are flush against each other and Dean can feel that he's hard too. So maybe it's okay if he gives in, just this once.

"Thought we talked about you thinking so much," Cas teases, drawing away to look at him.

"Sorry, just- I don't want you to think I'm just rushing back into things," Dean says, but even as he does, he's moving with the rhythm of Cas' hips, rocking against him slowly.

"Does it matter to you how long this takes?" Cas asks.

"No. I just want to be with you."

"Then I don't care if we wait five minutes or five months." He smiles and Dean huffs a relieved laugh cupping Cas' face in his hands and kissing him hard. Cas rocks up, sliding one hand up into Dean's hair and humming against him.

In a matter of minutes, Cas has them both out of their shirts and Dean's fumbling with Cas' belt, desperate to get him out of his pants without having to pull away. Cas pushes him up and Dean stumbles to his feet as Cas rises with him. He leans in close, breath hot against Dean's ear.

"Be right back." Cas drops his pants to the floor as he walks away and Dean's quick to strip down, sitting back on the couch to wait for him and Cas doesn't keep him waiting long.

He returns only a couple of minutes later, bending down to kiss Dean and haul him up into his arms before turning around and plopping down with Dean in his lap. Dean curls a hand around both of them, stroking them slowly and Cas pushing up against him, kissing Dean as he slips a hand back between Dean's cheeks. He lubes his fingers up quickly and pushes past the ring of muscle, working in slowly as Dean groans against his lips.

Cas is impatient; Dean can feel it in the way he flexes his fingers and the way his hips jump with every little movement, but Dean's right there with him and not about to deter him. He rolls his hips with Cas' motions, waiting as long as he can before pulling his hand away, and he rises up to his knees, shifting Cas' cock and kissing him hard as he presses down onto him.

Fingers dig into his thighs as he seats himself on Cas' cock and once he's fully seated, Dean leans back, propping himself up on Cas' knees. He rolls his hips and bounces in Cas' lap, groaning as Cas tips forward, wrapping his lips around Dean's nipple and kissing his way up Dean's chest.
It's fast and hard and it's exactly what both of them need right now, a reminder that this is good, that they do work well together and that they feel good together. Cas lifts him up just as he's getting close and sits Dean on the back of the couch. Dean comes upside down with his legs wrapped tightly around Cas' waist and a second later Cas follows, pulling out and coming on Dean's stomach.

Cas leans over him and for a few minutes, he just rests with his head on Dean's hip, breathing softly against him. He laughs suddenly and Dean struggles to look up at him.

"I'm gonna be late for my meeting."

"Just say you were busy," Dean hums. "Or don't go. We could stay here."

"I wish it was that simple. Why don't you have a shower and go back to bed? I won't be more than a couple of hours."

"I might," Dean says, but he has no intentions of going back to bed at this point.

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They talk about things. They spend more time talking for the rest of the week than anything else, and by the time Thursday rolls around, Dean is done with talking, at least for now. He constantly tries to remind himself that this is good for him, that he deserves something good, and when he can't do it for himself, Cas is more than willing to lend a hand.

They're basically done with work, so he and Charlie take the afternoon on Thursday off and sit out on Benny's property talking through things. A lot of things, Dean knows will come with time, but there are other than he's going to have to put a whole lot of effort into if he wants to make this work. One of those things is feeling comfortable around Cas' friends. Charlie suggests he invite them over for dinner, even just one person at a time, so Dean can get to know them on his own schedule, in his own home - not an unfamiliar place where there are twenty brand new faces to adjust to.

He likes that idea, and he's looking forward to talking to Cas about it, but when he gets home, Cas is nowhere to be found. There's a moment of panic before he stops and reminds himself that after everything, Cas isn't going to up and leave him; Cas wants this, too. Trying to be patient, Dean changes into clean clothes and gets himself a drink before wandering upstairs to see if Cas is in his room, because there's nothing to say he'd be anywhere but in the condo.

Cas isn't in his room, but Dean notices that his studio door is open and he tiptoes down the hall, peering into the room quietly so as not to disturb him. Cas is sitting in the middle on the floor with a four-foot canvas in front of him and there is paint everywhere. It looks like Cas just sat down and surrounded himself with anything he was going to need because there's an uneven circle of supplies all the way around him.

Dean smiles softly as he pushes the door open and Cas looks back over his shoulder, returning Dean's grin and beckoning for him to come closer. Dean does, coming to crouch behind him with his hands on Cas' shoulders.

"What are you working on?" he asks, kissing the back of Cas' neck and passing his glass of water to him.

"It's you. Well, it's my Dean, but close enough."

"No," Dean hums, "it's way too good to be me." Cas ignores the comment and he pushes everything from his right side out of the way, winding his fingers between Dean's and tugging him forward.
"Help me, then."

Dean sits with him, letting Cas curl around his back, but he refuses to put anything on the canvas because he doesn't want to ruin it. Cas puts the brush in his hand anyway, curling his own hand around Dean's and guiding him. He's no artist, but he thinks with Cas' help, they might be able to create something beautiful.

Cas gets up after a few minutes and leans the canvas up against the outside wall before pulling a blank one from the stack and leaning it up against the stand. He fits himself back behind Dean and picks up a second paintbrush.

"What?" Dean asks, turning to look at him.

"Paint me something?"

Dean frowns at him. "Like what?"

Cas just shrugs. "I don't know. Anything." He gets his arms around Dean and paints a flower in all pink. It takes him all of two seconds and he looks at Dean expectantly.

"It's not gonna be that good," Dean mumbles. Cas presses his nose into Dean's hair, assuring him that anything he does will be amazing.

They sit and paint for an hour, and Dean gets paint on him no less than six times. It's not even like he's it on his hands, which he does, but he also manages to get it on his knees and his face and up his arms - Cas thoughtfully takes his shirt off for him after the second close call, just to make sure it stays clean. Dean grumps about it, but he doesn't really mind all that much; he likes being like this with Cas, though he's definitely going to need a shower tonight.

"Look at me for a second," Cas hums and when Dean turns to him he smiles for a brief second before running his finger down the length of Dean's nose. In an instant, he knows he's covered in paint, but when he tries to fight back, Cas just laughs and pushes him down to the floor.

"You're a dork," Dean hums, curling his arms around Cas' neck. He tugs Cas down to him, kissing his nose and smearing a smudge of paint across his cheek. Cas shuffles awkwardly and then he's pressing a cold, wet hand to Dean's shoulder and Dean frowns at him.

"What are you doing?" he asks and Cas just smiles and kisses him again. Dean shuffles under him, lifting his arm to see the perfect red handprint on his skin. It prickles as it dries and he raises an eyebrow at Cas.

"Like the books," Cas explains, but Dean doesn't need the explanation.

"I know," he grins, tugging Cas back down to him. He kisses him soundly, pulling away just long enough to breathe, "fuckin' dork."

Cas pushes him back against the ground with a smile, running his fingers through Dean's hair - he's definitely going to have to have a shower tonight - and watching him softly. Dean's trying, but moments like this still set his heart beating a million times a minute and he has to distract himself to keep him from thinking about why Cas is looking at him like this. He knows Cas loves him, he knows Cas wants him, but it doesn't stop the feelings from creeping up anyway. Cas notices the change and he stops, pulling back to look down at him.

"What's wrong?" he asks.
"It's nothing," he mumbles, cupping Cas' face in his hands. It's true, mostly. This isn't something worth worrying Cas over - after the last time, Dean's learned his lesson - but he knows he has to be honest if they're going to work things out. "Just uh, remind me that this is what you want."

"Okay," Cas says, leaning down until he's resting on his elbows. When he gets down to Dean's level, he presses against him, pushing his arms up so he can thread his fingers through Dean's hair. He doesn't say anything, but he kisses Dean's jaw and makes his way downward, kissing every inch of skin in between. He nips at the skin when Dean squirms under him; it's supposed to be a warning, Dean thinks, but it just makes him want it more, and by the time Cas gets down to his stomach, Dean's skin is covered in goosebumps.

It just makes him squirm more and Cas huffs against his skin, pressing slow, open-mouthed kisses just above his hip. Dean doesn't tell him to stop and Cas looks up, staring at him through dark lashes and Dean nearly falls apart. He's incredibly turned on and only vaguely aware of what Cas is doing because he's focusing so intently on not getting hard. He knows Cas wouldn't mind; back when they were kids Dean was always popping boners at the most inappropriate times - and really, who could blame him when he was *always* with Cas? At least now his body had calmed down enough that he doesn't get hard without a good reason, and having Cas on top of him is a very good reason.

Dean's so caught up in not feeling that he doesn't realize Cas is undressing him until his pants are being tugged down over his ass.

"Hey," he huffs and Cas spares him the briefest glance before returning to his work. He gets Dean's jeans right off of him, shoving them away to a less painty corner of the room and he turns back to Dean. Cas runs his hands up Dean's legs, stopping just short of the hem of his boxer-briefs and when Dean looks down, there's no mistaking how hard he is now. His cock juts up, thick and proud, tenting his underwear, and he shifts awkwardly, but Cas doesn't seem concerned.

He moves slowly over Dean, dipping his head just enough that his tongue traces a warm, wet line down his stomach. He looks up right at the last second, meeting Dean's eyes for a split second before he dips his head, mouthing at the base of Dean's cock through his underwear.

Dean groans instantly, dropping his head back with a thud and pressing up against Cas' lips. He slides a hand down his chest, fitting his fingers around the jut of his cock but Cas pushes him away, taking both of his hands and pinning them up above his head. He twines their fingers together before slipping away again and dragging his fingers down Dean's sides. Just as he makes it down to his hips, Cas' eyes flick back up to Dean's hands, checking to see that he hasn't moved and when he's satisfied, he curls his own fingers around Dean's waistband, tugging his underwear down and tossing them away with his pants.

Cas touches him softly, brushing his fingers up Dean's thighs and over his stomach. Dean arches up to follow the motion, biting his lip to stifle a soft groan; he might be easily worked up, he doesn't need to sound like it, too. It feels like an hour that Dean just lies there and lets Cas touch him; he runs his hands all over him, avoiding his cock, but paying close attention to every other inch of skin that he can reach. When Cas draws away, Dean's already breathless and Cas is just smiling down at him.

He ducks down again, this time pressing his mouth to the side of Dean's neck and sucking juts under the curve of his jaw. There will be a mark there tomorrow, and if it lasts for long enough, it will still be there when he goes back to Lawrence. There's a large part of him that likes that thought, a much larger part than he would have expected. He breathes through his nose, still biting down on his bottom lip as Cas makes his way down the column of his neck and over his collar bone. Dean tries to keep still but the sharp tug of his skin sends shivers through him and Dean's hips jump up without permission, seeking contact.
When Cas draws away Dean looks up, and his eyes flutter open just in time to see Cas tugging his shirt over his head, stomach muscles pulled taut as he lifts his arms above his head. It's far from the first time Dean's seen him shirtless, but he has a hard time looking away. Tentatively, he reaches out, pressing his fingertips up Cas' chest and the smile he gets in response is soft and sweet. His hands slip up over his shoulders as Cas bends over him again, kissing a line straight down into the vee of his hip. Dean pushes into it, but Cas is precise in his movements; Dean isn't getting anything more until Cas gives it to him.

Dean relaxes, realizing that he's not in control right now and that maybe that's okay. He pushes his hands over Cas' shoulders, rubbing circles into his skin even as Cas travels lower, pushing his legs apart and kissing down the crease of his leg. When he moves inward, Dean shudders, pressing his fingers into Cas' skin; his thighs are incredibly sensitive and the second Cas figures that out, all bets are off. Yeah, he was sensitive as a teenager, but recently he's discovered the sensation has only increased with age and when Cas' mouth presses against the sensitive skin, he lets out a stuttered laugh and squeezes Cas' shoulder.

The response he gets is amused and determined and Dean curls in on himself, trying to mentally separate the ticklishness from the arousal. He lets Cas move down each leg, making his way back up with soft, wet kisses that have Den moaning and squirming under his hands. If it were anyone but Cas, he would be embarrassed to be so needy and desperate but this is Cas and he trusts Cas implicitly and he wouldn't trade this for anything. He's moaning softly, squirming with every touch, when suddenly Cas stops.

The hard he is now, and that combined with the mess Dean made of his hair, he's so damn sexy. Dean reaches up instinctively, pulling Cas down on top of him and Cas Shifts so he's lying next to him instead. He runs a hand up from Dean's knee, pausing to cup his cock in the process and Dean, rolls his head back, arching off the floor as Cas' fingers drag up his length, devastatingly slowly. When he pulls up to the head, Cas doesn't continue, instead, he pushes back down, pressing back behind his balls and he rubs lightly against his hole.

"Oh," Dean huffs, grasping for anything to hold on to. He settles for wrapping an arm around Cas' back and holding him as tight as he can. It's a little dry, but Cas is gentle and it feels good enough that Dean doesn't even care if it goes further because he's already so turned on he probably wouldn't make it past Cas pushing in. He changes his mind the moment Cas presses against him. Dean lets out a low groan, pushing his hips down, but Cas pulls away, pressing his lips against Dean's ear.

"Wait here." Cas rises to his feet and Dean tracks the motion carefully as his fingers move to his waistband, pushing the button open on his jeans and pushing them and his underwear down to the floor. Dean gets caught up looking at Cas' cock, watching the way it bobs when it's freed from clothing, but then Cas turns to head out of the room.

By the time Cas returns to him, he's stroking steadily and Cas kneels down next to him, batting his hand away. Cas moves, putting one knee between Dean's and pushing his arms back up above his head. Dean grins up at him and Cas rolls off to the side, slicking up his fingers and pressing back down between Dean's cheeks with no hesitation.

Dean gasps, but when Cas pushes in deeper this time, his surprise turns to pleasure and he moans low, pushing his hips up. He presses in and draws back, going deeper with every thrust and Dean rolls his head back, breathing heavily as Cas fingers him. Cas keeps it up, pushing his free hand.
through Dean's hair and the faint tug only adds to his arousal. When Cas presses a second finger into him, Dean moans out loud; he tries to keep himself relaxed, but it burns a little as careful as Cas is, and he turns his head into him, pressing against Cas' forehead.

Cas' nose bumps against his own and Dean shuts his eyes, focusing on the brush of his lips and the press of his tongue, but ultimately, the stretch of his finger is overwhelming and Dean drops back onto his back, groaning into the air.

"Are you okay?" Cas asks. He moves to withdraw, but Dean runs a hand down his arm, shaking his head.

"I'm good. Don't stop."

Cas pushes in, seeking out his prostate and rubbing against it. Dean whimpers, squeezing his eyes shut; he's so ready to come, he's already leaking pre-come all over his stomach and he's so close already with Cas barely touching him. He whimpers as Cas pushes in deep, and Cas just keeps going. He rubs into him, stretching him as he pulls back and bumping against his prostate. He doesn't stop until Dean's legs are shaking and he's whimpering desperately, jerking his hips with every thrust. His cockhead bumps against his stomach, smearing pre-come with every movement and Dean's head spins with the pleasure of it.

"Almost there, baby. Just like that, Dean, come on." Cas switches tactics, increasing his speed and fucking into him hard anad Dean's whole body feels like it could just burst apart at any second. He comes hard, hips bucking desperately as he comes all over his stomach and Cas pulls out, rubbing over his hole and kissing him through it. He keeps coming for what feels like forever and when he's finally finished and he settles back against the floor, Dean's amazed to find he's still in one piece. Cas draws away, kneeling between his legs and rubbing up his thighs. He bends down, sucking the head of Dean's cock into his mouth and the sound that comes from Dean's lips is something almost inhuman. His eyes roll back in his head as Cas sucks him down again and then it's too much and he pushes himself up, lifting Cas' head to kiss him.

"Holy shit."

Cas huffs a soft laugh and rises up to kiss him. "I want you more than anything, Dean. Ten years I waited to see you again and if you think something like having to work for this relationship is going to scare me away, you're wrong."

"I'm yours," Dean breathes. He wraps an arm around Cas' neck, pulling him back into a deep kiss and when Cas pulls away, he's still smiling.

"You get sappy, post-orgasm."

"Shut up." Cas pushes himself up from the floor, leaning down to help Dean up and dean frowns at him. "What are you doing?"

"You can stay here if you like, but I was going to have a shower. I thought you might want to join me."

"You didn't come."

"That wasn't the point." Cas holds his hand out again and Dean takes it grudgingly, pulling himself to his feet.

He follows Cas down the hall to his bedroom, and he waits while Cas starts the shower, checking the temperature before stepping in himself. He pulls Dean in with him, kissing him soundly and pulling
the door shut behind them. Cas grabs the shampoo bottle from the shelf - one of Dean's that migrated upstairs at one point - and he squirts a small amount into his hand, even without breaking their kiss. He works it into Dean's hair, massaging his head as foam drops onto Dean's forehead and Dean laughs softly against his lips, pulling away to wipe the soap from his face.

Cas' cock bumps against his leg as he tugs Dean forward again and Dean slips a hand down between them, running his fingers up the length of Cas' erection. The response he gets is good and he repeats himself, pressing more firmly this time and Cas moans softly against his lips.

"Fuck me," Dean breathes, pushing his nose against Cas' cheek.

"I thought you were tired."

"I'm tired as hell," Dean grins, "doesn't mean it won't still feel good." He strokes Cas slowly, rubbing his thumb over the head of his cock and Cas groans softly. "You're hard baby, let me help."

Cas' hands slide down his sides, still soapy, and he turns Dean slowly, holding his hips and pressing his forehead between Dean's shoulder blades. He kisses him softly, pressing his hips up so his cock slips between Dean's cheeks and he rocks up slowly.

"Are you sure?"

Dean pushes back against him and Cas' fingers press into his hips. "When was the last time I didn't want you to fuck me? I'm sure."

Cas shifts, pressing his cockhead against Dean's hole and he rubs against him a little, one hand sitting firm on Dean's hip. Dean's still slick and when Cas presses into him, it feels good. It's a little sensitive, but Dean just had one of the best orgasms of his life, and he's not surprised by a little oversensitivity. He likes it, honestly and as Cas fucks him, he presses up against the wall of the shower, letting Cas push him against it.

Cas drapes himself over him, wrapping his arms around him to hold him close and Dean's loves it. Even if he's too exhausted to come again, it feels good to get fucked like this, with Cas around him, warm and possessive and encompassing him entirely. Dean reaches up, pushing his fingers back through Cas' hair and tugging gently. He moans as Cas slams into him and if he was capable of coming again today, this would do it.

Cas' hips stutter and Dean squeezes around him, drawing a low moan from Cas before he pulls out suddenly. Dean drops to his knees, turning Cas to face him and he pushes his hands off his cock, taking him into his mouth instead. He sucks hard and Cas jerks forward, muttering a stuttered fuck as he pushes against the roof of Dean's mouth. His fingers curl into Dean's hair and Dean shifts, taking him down deep just as Cas comes.

Dean swallows him down, sucking hard and Cas is shaking before he pulls off. He's hauled up immediately and Cas pushes him against the wall, kissing him hard. There's still paint in their hair when they finally get out of the shower.
Friday is Dean's last day of work and as much as he's dreading his upcoming decision, it's a damn good day. Benny comes out to help him and Charlie with the work and although it's only minor stuff that still needs to be done - polishing cars, tidying the barn - they end up taking the whole day to do it. When they finish, it's bittersweet and Dean's not really sure what to do with himself; they already have each others' contact information and Benny and Charlie know better than to ask about what Dean's doing now, so it ends up being a quick see you later and then he's back in the Impala heading for home.

It doesn't even take the full drive home for Dean to consider what he has to choose between and by the time he gets into the condo, he's worked himself up to the point where he's totally miserable. He slips inside quietly so Cas doesn't hear him and goes to his room, dropping his things on the bed and plopping down next to them. He looks around and takes in the room, wondering whether he'll think of it when he goes home, because that's what he has to do.

There's no other option; he can't ask Cas to let him stay when he only has a tenuous and no means of supporting himself and he can't find somewhere else to live. Kansas isn't that far away, maybe they'll still be able to make it work - maybe somewhere down the line Dean will finally have his shit together and he can move to LA to be with Cas, but until then, he's made his decision. All that's left to do is to tell Cas.

For a long time he just sits on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands. He's still in his work clothes and he's dirty and he wants to shower, but he can't work up the energy to move because all he can think about now is going home and how the hell he's supposed to tell Cas. What if Cas doesn't want to make things work after all? What if he sees Dean going home as a sign that he's not willing to put in the work and so neither is he? That's not the case, not at all, but Dean can't help think about it anyway.

It's past eight now and Cas knows he's home, he has to. Even if he'd gone out for dinner with Benny and Charlie he would have made it home by this point, but still, he sits and thinks and wishes there was some way to make this easier. He's been over each and every option - even the ones that aren't really valid - at least three times when Cas finds him. There's a knock on the door and Dean can't hide anymore - he has to tell Cas he made a decision.

"Come in," he mumbles, forcing himself to sit upright and scrubbing both hands over his face.

"Hey," Cas says softly, pushing the door in, "is something wrong? I didn't hear you come in. Thought you might have gone out considering it's your last day."

"Nah," Dean shrugs. "We didn't want some big sappy goodbye."

"How was it?"

"Good. Benny worked with us all day - we could have been done a few hours ago but we got sidetracked." He forces a smile and Cas crosses the room to come and sit next to him.

"Are you sure everything's okay?"

Dean exhales slowly, tapping his fingers against his knee. "Actually, no, I have to talk to you about something." Cas waits patiently and Dean has to look away from him again, measuring his breaths. "I can't stay, Cas. I need to start figuring things out because I have to go home, but I don't want to
lose you-

"Dean," Cas interrupts, resting a hand on his knee. Dean just shakes his head.

"I know long-distance relationships are hard and I know I won't be able to travel, but I don't want to give up on us. I want you to know that - I'm not giving up. I want to be with you, I just have to find a way to make that work from Kansas, and I know.-"

"Dean," Cas repeats, more firmly this time and Dean shuts up. "We always knew this had an ending, but just because you're done your project doesn't mean you have to go home."

"I can't afford to live here. I have no job, I have nowhere to go-"

"Then stay. Stay here, stay with me."

Dean's stunned and it takes him a good five minutes to stumble over, "I can't afford to." Cas slides closer to him on the bed, running his hand up Dean's leg.

"I'm not asking you to pay rent. The condo is paid for, all I pay is a property tax and whatever other bills. You can help out when you can afford it. Or," he smiles, "you could stay home and take care of the place when I'm at home."

"Like a housekeeper?" Dean bedpans and Cas laughs.

"I was thinking more like a live-in boyfriend who doesn't work. Or does, if you want to, but you don't need to if you don't want to, I can afford-" Dean's eyes prickle and he can't listen to any more of this. He can't imagine anyone wanting him around this much and he tips forward, pressing his lips to Cas' before he has to figure out what to say. Cas allows him, kissing back softly and sliding his hand over Dean's cheek. When he pulls back, he's smiling softly and Dean's chest aches at the thought of leaving him.

"Does that mean yes?" Cas asks and Dean huffs a soft laugh, ducking his chin.

"Yeah," Dean breathes, "yeah, Cas I don't know what you see in me, but I'll stay."

"I love you," Cas whispers, tipping Dean's chin up to face him. "I know this is sudden and it's a little rushed, but if anyone can do it it's us." Dean frowns, disbelieving, but Cas just smiles at him. "And Sam's coming out for school in September, right?"

"Yeah." Dean tips forward, pressing his face into Cas' shoulder. Cas lies back on the bed, tugging Dean down after him and he lets Cas bundle him up in his arms, pressing his nose into Cas' chest. "I'm gonna have a lot of stuff to do."

"Like what?"

"Go home, get all my stuff, bring it all back here. Convince my friends I'm not insane for moving in with you after two months?"

"How about we start with ordering in and getting some sleep? You can figure out what to say to your friends and Sam in the morning."

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In the morning, Dean thinks about his plans in the shower. He decided last night that he'd wait to drive back to Lawrence, but now that he's considering it, he already doesn't like the idea of being
away from Cas - and he hasn't even left yet. He washes his hair and thinks about driving home this afternoon if he'd be able to make it home by Monday. He smiles to himself at the thought of home, but the idea of getting there in time seems unlikely. Dean's trying to work out the amount of time he has before Monday versus the time it would take just to get to and from Lawrence when Cas sneaks into the bathroom.

The shower door pulls open and Cas slips in, pressing up against Dean's back. They talk about it for a few minutes and come to the conclusion that Dean's plan leaves him less than twenty-four hours to get all his shit together once he gets back to Lawrence and that just isn't enough time.

Cas convinces him to wait until Monday and Dean agrees reluctantly before being pushes up against the tiled wall and Cas makes it very clear that they're done talking for the moment.

Before noon, Dean makes up his mind to drive out to Kansas that day; after everything that's happened in the last few months, he's ready to try and find some sort of stability - both in himself and with Cas - and he doesn't want to wait any longer. He doesn't let himself think about what he's going to say to his friends or what they might have to say about his decision, because he doesn't want to worry himself needlessly; his mind is made up and maybe this thing with Cas won't last forever, but for now Dean's going to give it all he's got and no one is going to convince him otherwise.

He leaves just before two in the afternoon and Cas kisses him goodbye in the parking lot and tells him to give his best to Sam. The drive is long, and Dean's a little antsy to start off with, but when he gets onto the open road, he feels free. For the first time in a long time, he has something just for him. Sure, he's still technically unemployed, but he has a home and he has Cas and when he gets back to LA, he'll figure everything else out.

He drives all day and stops for the night at a motel in Grand Junction when he can't keep his eyes open any longer. He texts Cas to let him know where he is and to say goodnight and then he flops onto the bed and passes out without another thought. The next morning, Dean's up early again and the only stop he makes is for coffee, before driving home.

Dean crosses the border into Kansas just after noon and the anxiety sets back in around the same time. He turns the radio up and rolls the window down, trying to distract himself from the upcoming conversation, but he's still worrying when he pulls into the driveway five hours later. He sits in the car for a few minutes, going over what he has to tell his roommates, before grabbing his backpack and climbing out of the car.

When he knocks on the door, his hands are shaking, but Sam is the one who answers, smiling brightly at him, and Dean forgets for a few minutes about everything else. Sam pulls him into a warm hug and Dean huffs a laugh as he lets himself be pulled into the house.

"I didn't expect you back so soon," Sam grins. "D'you need a hand with your stuff?"

"No, um." Dean pauses, exhaling slowly. "I need to talk to you about something. Are Jo and Aaron home?"

"Aaron's home, Jo's out with friends. What did you have to talk about?"

Dean considers waiting so he can tell them all at once, but this is Sam and if anyone deserves to know first, it's him. "I'm moving in with Cas."

"Wow. That's..."

"It's quick, I know." Dean shrugs. "I've been waiting ten years for him, I don't wanna wait any
"I have the money that I owe you, plus rent for next month 'cause I know I'm kind of screwing your guys."

"No," Sam shakes his head, smiling. "You're not. We'll be okay and we've been talking about September anyway because I won't be here either."

"But, hey, you'll be closer to me, right?"

Sam just smiles and rolls his eyes, turning back to the kitchen to find them dinner.

Having told Sam, Dean feels much better about his plans and after hanging out for a couple of hours, he heads to bed early. He's exhausted from the drive, but as hard as he tries, he can't sleep, so he gets up and gets a head start on packing.

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Sunday afternoon, Dean tells Aaron and Jo. They're considerably more surprised than Sam was, but they're happy for him, and Dean went into this expecting everyone to be shocked. For a while, the four of them work together to pack as much of Dean's stuff as they can, but Dean slips out just before two.

Meg meets him outside the tattoo shop and Dean looks up at the sign and then back at her before she pushes him forward. They walk through the door together and the woman behind the counter looks up as the approach.

"I uh," Dean starts, "I have an appointment for 2:30."

"You must be Dean?" she asks and when he nods she smiles. "I'm Tessa, nice to meet you." She shakes his hand over the counter and after asking more questions than Dean can keep track of, she goes over the process and has Dean sign a form before directing him to a small cubicle behind the counter.

Dean shoots a final, hopeful smile back at Meg and she grins at him. "Just think of what Cas is gonna say."

He grins and he can feel the blush creep into his cheeks even as he ducks his head. She's right and he knows it and his heart beats a little quicker thinking about what Cas’ reaction will be. He isn't nervous, not really, but as Tessa leads him into the back, he talks himself through it mentally; he's never gotten a tattoo before and he's not really afraid of the pain, but there's a certain amount of anxiety attached to having something inked into your skin forever.

Cas is worth it, though. Even if they don't stay together forever, this will be a reminder of who he can be, who everyone else believes he can be. As he thinks about it, he calms down, and by the time Tessa has him seated and she's ready to start, he's feeling really good about it again.

"So," Tessa says, "tell me more about the tattoo, where'd you get the idea?"
"My partner is an artist, it's from one of his paintings." He says it without meaning to and it's nothing but a simple pronoun, but it's terrifying and exhilarating to say it out loud and when Tessa grins back at him, relief floods through him and Dean can't help but smile back.

Dean spends the entire rest of the day staring at the bandage over his arm and Meg just laughs at him though Dean suspects she's happy for him. He says goodbye to her after they eat lunch. They're standing on the sidewalk outside her cafe and Dean really wishes they had reconciled years ago because he's really going to miss her now.

"It's not forever," she reminds him and Dean shrugs. It's not, he knows that, but he can't promise when he'll be back again. Moving out there is the easiest part, then he has to live.

"Yeah, but you'll find a job. Benny said he'd help, right?"

"Yeah," Dean agrees.

"And then you can save your money and come back and visit me. Bring Cas next time."

"I'll see what I can do," Dean chuckles.

"Gonna miss ya, Winchester."

"Me too." Dean pulls her into a hug, holding her close for a second before stepping back.

"Don't be a stranger. I gotta get back to work."

"Seeya Meg."

Dean watches until she disappears back into the cafe, waving a final goodbye through the window, and he turns and heads back down to the parking lot. He texts Cas as he climbs into the car, letting him know he'll be back sooner rather than later, but it depends on how long it takes to pack his things.

By the time he gets back to the house, his arm is feeling a little sore, but he ignores it in favour of getting things done. The sooner he gets his things together, the sooner he gets to be back with Cas and show him the tattoo - and that's enough to keep him going for hours. Aaron is the only one home, and he comes up to help Dean organize.

"What do you need help with?" he asks and Dean looks around his room, frowning at the mess that's covering ninety percent of the room.

"Uh..."

"I could pack up your closet?"

"Yeah, that'd be awesome."

They're not as productive as Dean would hope because they keep getting caught up talking or one of them will find something that brings up a memory and that will distract them for a while. When Sam and Jo get home, Aaron goes down for dinner, but Dean's not really feeling it. It doesn't take very long for Sam to come looking for him. Dean's sitting on his bed when the door pushes in and he looks up, pulling up a half-smile for Sam.

"Hey."
"Hey," Sam echoes. "How's the packing going."

Dean sighs, "not bad, I guess. I don't know how I'm gonna get all this stuff in my car."

"Don't worry too much about it. Jess and I are hiring movers when we go so if there's anything you don't need, we can bring it for you in a couple months."

"Thanks."

"How're you doing?"

Dean shrugs. "It's weird, kinda surreal y'know? Maybe it would have been easier if it hadn't been so quick - maybe not. I just felt so good when I was with Cas, it just feels right to stay but coming home, I- it's just harder than I expected."

"Yeah," Sam agrees. "We're all happy for you though," he throws an arm around Dean's shoulder and Dean doesn't even try to worm his way out of it. "We're all gonna miss you, but we're happy for you. I'm happy for you."

"Thanks, Sam."

"I mean, it helps that I'll see you again in what? Three months?"

Dean chuckles and Sam pushes himself up off the bed. "You sure you don't want anything to eat?"

"Maybe later."

"We're gonna watch a movie later, I'll give you a shout."

"Alright. I should probably get back to work."

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Between the four of them, they fit a surprising amount of stuff in the Impala and other than a few boxes he's leaving for Sam to take, everything is packed and ready to go by 10 am on Wednesday. It's later than Dean was planning on, but he's happy about it too because it means spending more time with Aaron and Jo before he goes, not that they've been doing much but packing and organizing.

Saying goodbye - even temporarily - is always hard, but he's not expecting it to be as difficult as it is. He hugs Jo and Aaron and Sam very nearly crushes him, but then it's done and it's over and he's climbing into the car like he's on autopilot. It doesn't even hit him that this is the last time he'll see them for a while until he's well over the border into Colorado.

Dean drives for as long as he can manage before stopping to sleep and he gets into LA the following evening. He makes the now-familiar drive back to the beach, to Cas, to his new life, and when he gets there, he sits in the car for a little while, thinking. He doesn't regret his decision and he knows once he settles in everything will be like it was before, only this time he won't have to choose. Aaron and Jo will still be in Lawrence though, Meg will be in Lawrence, all his other friends will be 1500 miles away and a twenty-four-hour drive separates them.

He texts Cas to let him know he's there, because he's already behind schedule and he doesn't want him to worry, but he needs a few minutes before he's ready to go up. Cas comes to him instead. He's smiling when he steps out of the elevator, but his expression falls when he sees Dean and he comes around, opening the opposite door and sliding into the car next to him.
"Everything okay?"

"Yeah, just... I don't know. I'm good."

"Do you want to come upstairs or do you need some time?"

"No, I'm good. Can we uh, bring all this shit up tomorrow though?"

"Of course." Cas smiles at him. Dean only grabs the few things he needs. He already has enough stuff upstairs that he doesn't need to worry about the rest of it for tonight, and he follows Cas into the elevator. He slips up next to him, winding their fingers together.

"Thank you for this," he breathes and Cas just rounds on him, pressing him into the wall and kissing him softly. The bell rings just as Cas pulls back and if the doors didn't open on people he knows to be Cas' neighbours, he might not let him go. Everything is going to be just fine, he realizes. Everything is going to be perfect.

They say a quick hello back and forth as they slip past each other and Dean trails behind as they head for the apartment. When they get inside, Cas moves past him to lock the door and he smiles at Dean.

"Make yourself comfortable. There's wine on the island, pour us a couple of glasses and come upstairs?"

"Okay," Dean grins.

"I love you," Cas breathes. "Don't take too long."

Dean doesn't need to be told twice. He waits for Cas to turn around and makes for the kitchen, as promised there is a bottle of red wine on the island with two glasses and a note. Cas is a sap, but Dean only loves him more for it. He reads the note and quickly tucks it into his pocket to put with the rest - not that he'd ever let Cas know he kept them.

With the wine poured, he shrugs out of his jacket and heads upstairs to find Cas. The light is on in the bedroom so Dean bumps the door open with his hip and shuts it a little louder than necessary to let Cas know he's there. When he doesn't get a response, he sets the glasses down on the dresser and pushes the bathroom door open.

"Babe?"

"Come in here."

Dean slips through the door to find the entire bathroom lit with candles and he stops, staring at Cas and trying to figure out what to say. "Cas, I-" Cas just shakes his head and smiles up close, curling his arms around Dean's waist.

"You had a long drive out here, I thought you might like to relax."

"Thank you."

"Mmm," Cas hums, "you can thank me later." He tugs at Dean's belt, tugging it off when he gets it undone and pushing his jeans to the floor. Cas kisses him, lips moving softly against his own and he only stops to tug Dean's shirt over his head. In just a few short days, he didn't think he could miss someone so much, but when Cas pulls away, Dean chases after him. Cas presses a palm to his chest, holding him back and he lifts an eyebrow at him, glancing back at his shoulder.
"What's this?" he asks, tracing a finger around the line of the still-fresh tattoo.

"You saved me too, Babe." Cas laughs softly, even as he presses his lips to Dean's again.

"And you said I was a dork."

"Mm, you are." Cas kisses him again before getting Dean out of his underwear and drawing back to strip out of his own clothes.

Dean climbs into the bath, slipping into the water and letting himself relax into it. Cas slides in behind him, gently pulling Dean back against his chest and Dean just shuts his eyes, listening to the soft sounds of the water and the rhythmic thud of Cas' heartbeat. Ten years ago, if he'd been told this is where he'd end up, he probably wouldn't have believed it.

"I'm glad you decided to stay," Cas hums, pressing soft kisses into Dean's hair.

"Me too. I think I could really like it here."

"Yeah? You could?" Cas asks.

"I could be persuaded," Deans agrees, turning to smirk up at him. Cas quirks an eyebrow at him and Dean grins wider, leaning up to kiss Cas' jaw before settling back against him. Cas shifts, sinking deeper into the bath and his hands come to rest on Dean's stomach.

"And just what might I have to do to persuade you?"

"You're smart," Dean quips, "I'm sure you'll think of something." Cas' hands slip up his chest and Dean arches up into the touch, biting his lip as fingers brush over his nipples. He huffs a quiet laugh, pushing his arms up and wrapping them around Cas' neck. Even after just a few days, he missed being with him, he doesn't know how he ever survived ten years.

One of Cas' hands moves up, resting on the side of his neck and Dean leans into the touch, humming softly and he doesn't realize where Cas' other hand is going until it's sliding up the length of his cock. He jerks forward with a groan, but Cas just slips his hand up over his shoulder and tugs him back down with a soft, huffed laugh.

"You like that?" he asks and Dean knows it's a comment on the fact that he's hard already, but how could he be blamed. Cas is hot as sin and Dean's hasn't so much as touched himself for almost a week and despite having gone much, much longer than that without sex in the past, it's a lot harder knowing there's someone a few states over who would gladly fuck your brains out at any given opportunity.

"Yeah. I missed you," Dean huffs, stuttering just a little as Cas' fingers tease the head of his cock. He cups water in his hand, bringing it up over Dean's erection and letting it trickle down his length.

"Did you think about me?" Cas hums and Dean chuckles, turning to press his cheek against Cas' chest.

"Yeah. I thought about you a lot. Busy, though, didn't have time to do much about it, y'know?"

Cas nods faintly and dips to kiss Dean's head. "Not really," he breathes, "I was home alone. I had a lot of free time." Dean groans in desperate frustration and the hand that was on his neck slips down to hold him against Cas' chest.

"Not fair," Dean mumbles.
"No? Let me make it up to you." He dips down, catching Dean's lips in a soft kiss and he runs his hands up his chest, pressing firmly into his skin. Dean just manages a quiet okay before Cas' hands are on his dick again and he stops trying to resist the feeling. He settles back, pushing his hips up as Cas' fingers wrap around him. Up until now, it's been light, teasing touches, but Cas grips him hard this time, pulling from the base to the hip and sliding down again.

"Ooh-" he groans, pressing up into Cas' hand and arching off his chest. Dean spreads his legs as far as he can in the confined space, shifting his hips and when he does, he presses back against Cas' cock, hard between his cheeks. "Thought-" he huffs, "thought you had a lot of free time?" Cas rocks up against him, slowly pushing against his hole and Dean's eyes flutter shut.

"That doesn't stop me from being attracted to you. It doesn't make you any less sexy when you're naked and wet-" Cas groans as he presses into Dean's neck, kissing him firmly and nipping at his skin. He keeps his hand around the base of Dean's cock, holding him close as he rolls his hips against him. Cas sucks at his neck and all Dean can do is arch off his chest, whining at his inability to move. All he wants is for Cas to touch him again, for just a little bit of friction, but all Cas gives him is the smooth, unhurried roll of his hips that only makes him want more. If he presses back enough, Cas' cockhead catches on his rim and the bathwater is slick enough that it just feels good.

Dean drops his head back onto Cas' shoulder with a strained sigh, shifting his hips back so Cas just presses into him. If he had it his way, he'd let Cas fuck him right here in the bath, but they don't have lube and he can't imagine it would be very comfortable for Cas. Cas' hand moves up the length of the Dean's cock, slowly, holding him firmly and Dean's hips snap up to follow the touch. Water splashes against the side of the tub and out onto the floor and Cas chuckles as he wraps his arms around Dean's stomach.

"Maybe we should get out," Dean breathes and Cas sits up, pulling Dean back against his as he moves.

"Maybe we should," Cas hums. He kisses the back of Dean's neck, slipping his hand over his cock again and Dean's hips jerk unintentionally again. "Okay," Cas huffs, chuckling. He pushes himself back and helps Dean to his feet. Cas steps out of the bath, turning back to help Dean out and he pulls him close, kissing him and walking backwards toward the bedroom.

They drip on the floor as they make their way to bed, but Cas just keeps Dean close, squeezing his ass and rolling his hips against him. It takes three times as long to get into the bedroom, but whenever Cas stops or presses Dean up against the wall, Dean doesn't even consider stopping him. When he gets pressed up against the bedroom doorway, Dean groans, tipping his head back to give Cas more space as he kisses up his neck, under his jaw.

Cas moves down, running his hands over the swell of Dean's ass and crouches down in front of him, kissing a line down his stomach. The soft press of his lips, moving lower and lower, is enough to make Dean's cock ache and he whimpers as Cas' fingers brush along the underside. Dean shuts his eyes, pushing off the wall with his shoulders and when Cas' lips press around him, he nearly loses his balance.

Cas steadies him, sliding his hands up his thighs and he mouths at Dean's cock, flicking his tongue against the head and licking his way up from the base. Dean just runs his hands over Cas' shoulders, resisting the urge to snap his hips forward and fuck into his mouth.

"Mmm," he breathes. "Mph, baby I want you." Cas just hums around him and sucks so hard Dean can barely breathe. "Fu-uck, Cas." Cas chuckles softly as he pulls off, kissing the tip of Dean's cock before pressing his legs apart and sliding closer. He mouths at the inside of Dean's thigh, sucking little marks into the sensitive skin as his fingers wrap around his dick again.
Dean's legs are shaking and he's leaking pre-come all over Cas' hand when Cas pulls back. He tries to sink down to Cas' level, to push him down to the floor and return the favour, but Cas is already moving and when he gets to his feet, he turns Dean toward the bedroom, pushing him gently in the right direction.

Dean climbs up onto the bed, turning to kiss Cas as he approaches and even as Cas' lips move against his own, he's being pushed down and when they separate, Cas laughs softly as he pushes Dean down into the mattress.

"Have I persuaded you yet?"

Dean crosses his arms under his head, turning back to look at Cas. "Not yet," he smirks, "you're gonna have to try harder than that." Cas doesn't skip a beat before hauling Dean bodily across the bed and climbing up after him. He pushes his hands up the backs of his thighs and Dean is just turning to see what he's doing when his ass is spread open and Cas' tongue is pressing into him.

Dean reaches a hand under himself, stroking his cock slowly as Cas slides into him. He flicks his tongue against Dean's rim as he pulls out and Dean presses his head into the bed, jerking himself in short, stunted motions. It's not as much as he wants, but it keeps him from losing his mind with Cas' tongue in his ass. He lets Cas lick and suck and play with his hole until he's panting into the sheets and whimpering Cas' name.

Just when he thinks Cas is about to stop, he doesn't; Cas' thumb presses against his hole and when Dean moans, he just pushes harder, pressing into him. Dean pushes his hips back to encourage him and Cas appeases him, stretching his hole before teasing the rim with his index finger. When Cas draws away, Dean shifts his hips to chase the slick heat of Cas' mouth and for a moment, Cas relents, mouthing at him and tongue-fucking him before abruptly rolling him onto his back.

He pushes Dean's knees up, holding them against him as he leans down to kiss him. It's quick and chaste, the position making it difficult for much more, but Dean's breathless when Cas pulls away again. Cas shifts and Dean keeps his eyes on him as he moves to kneel next to him; his eyes drift down to Cas' cock, just inches from his face, but before he can move, Cas leans away. He kisses Dean's him, runs his hands all over him, but Dean just keeps thinking about his cock and the way it feels against his tongue.

"C'mere," he huffs and Cas looks up at him with dark, hooded eyes. He smiles darkly as he moves and Dean leans up, taking the head of his cock between his lips. He licks at the head, running his tongue along the underside and Cas' fingers tighten where he's gripping Dean's hip. He pushes forward and the sounds that drop from his lips go straight through Dean. His cock jerks and he rolls his hips expecting nothing, but his cock bumps Cas' palm and he groans as he ruts against him.

He sucks hard, hollowing his cheeks against Cas' shaft and pulling back slowly; Cas twitches against his tongue and then he's moving again, but he doesn't pull away. His palm slides down the length of Dean's cock, cupping his balls and squeezing lightly before pressing a finger against his rim and slipping inside. It's a little dry, but Dean's quick to grab the lube and as Cas slicks him up, Dean runs a hand up over his ass, forcing the roll of Cas' hips. He pulls back, sucking at the head of Cas' cock before pulling off completely and he looks up at him, eyes fluttering shut as Cas presses deeper into him.

"Fuck," Dean huffs and Cas chuckles, dipping to bite his lower lip. He thrusts into him steadily and Dean wraps his arms around Cas' neck, kissing him hard.

Cas doesn't relent, fingering him harder, faster and Dean rocks his hips in time, pushing Cas' finger as deep as he can manage. When Cas hits his prostate, Dean freezes for a second, curling in on
himself with a gasped oh and Cas pulls back, leaving him wanting. When he pushes back into him, it's with two fingers this time and when Dean moans loudly, Cas' cock twitches where it bumps against his side.

Dean rolls over with Cas' fingers still inside of him and when Cas pulls out he groans at the loss, but then Cas is moving again, shifting to lie beside him and Dean pulls him down on top of him. He wraps his arms around Cas' shoulders, holding him tight as he rocks up against his cock. Cas rolls them over, holding Dean against him as his other hand moves down between his cheeks. He pushes into him, fingering him steadily as Dean's hips jerk, snapping against Cas' and rutting against his cock.

Dean's achingly hard, pushing his hips down to keep Cas as deep as possible and with every thrust his cock jerks between them, soaking them both in pre-come. He wants to come and he can feel the pressure building, the coil of heat tightening inside him, but as he speeds up his thrusts, Cas holds him back.

"Steady," he breathes, "you don't wanna come just yet do you?"

"Oh, baby if you don't fuck me soon, I'm not gonna have a choice." He presses his nose into Cas' collarbone, kissing him softly and Cas pulls back, running his hands down Dean's stomach before flipping him unceremoniously onto it. He doesn't wait any longer, slicking up Dean's hole and pushing into him just briefly before replacing his fingers with the head of his cock.

It's only been a week, if that, but he'd forgotten how good it feels to have Cas inside him. He's thick and just the initial push is enough to have Dean's cock twitching in the sheets again. Cas stills before sliding deeper, but Dean pushes onto him, reaching back to push Cas' hips forward; he wants him deep, grinding into him until they're both breathless and coming hard. Cas, seemingly, is more than happy to oblige.

He pushes himself deep, pulling his knees up on either side of Dean's hips and he leans down, fitting himself flush against Dean's back as he fucks into him slow and hard. Dean's cock leaks under, spurting against his stomach and seeping into the sheets; Cas is relentless, keeping a steady rhythm that keeps Dean right at the edge. Cas slips his arms under Dean's, pushes up to wind their fingers together and he presses his face against Dean's spine, panting and moaning into his skin. He nips at his skin and the sensation sends a jolt straight through Dean. He tightens his grip on Cas' hands, clenched tight as he pushes his hips back off the mattress.

He presses his forehead into the sheets, trying to steady himself but Cas hits his prostate with every thrust and he can't hold back. All it takes is one well-aimed thrust before Dean's (resolve) crumbles and he whimpers as his cock jerks under him, spilling into the sheets. Cas fucks him through it, keeping his thrusts short and deep as Dean comes.

Cas pushes Dean's knees apart with his own, and he kisses his neck, sucking softly at the skin on his shoulders as he rocks into him. Dean pushes his hips back reaching down to jerk himself and Cas slams into him hard, speeding up until Dean's can't even hold himself up anymore, collapsing into the sheets as Cas fucks him.

Just as Cas comes, burying himself deep, Dean's fingers slip along the underside of his cock and he comes again, moaning loudly and rocking into the wet spot in the sheets. It lasts longer the second time, running through him like electricity and as Cas pulls out, he ruts between Dean's cheeks and dean can feel where he spills onto his back.

Cas collapses on top of him when he's finished, leaning to one side to kiss Dean's hand. He hums softly and Dean turns his head to kiss him, pulling one hand free to run through Cas' hair.
"Love you," he mumbles, a dopey smile pulling up across his face. Cas laughs softly and rolls off of him to one side. He reaches up, pushing Dean's hair back off of his face.

"Love you. Thank you for giving this a chance."

"Well," Dean grins, "you are pretty persuasive." Cas chuckles and pulls Dean in against him, curling around his back. Dean leans back into him, shutting his eyes to focus on the warm puffs of breath on the back of his neck. Cas only lets him relax for a few minutes before dragging him back into the bathroom. Dean's tired and he wants to sleep, but he can't really complain too much, especially when Cas pauses in his task to kiss the complaints from Dean's lips.

When they're clean and dry, Dean wobbles back to bed. He moves to lie down, but Cas stops him, spinning him back to face him and hauling him up into his arms. Dean protests, but when Cas carries him downstairs to his old room, he appreciates the clean, dry bed and when Cas curls up with him in his arms, Dean considers staying in this bed forever. Dean settles in, shutting his eyes and pressing back into Cas. He's warm and safe and happy and after only a couple of hours, he can't imagine having made a different decision. He's just drifting off when Cas' breath wakes him up again and he turns back to face him, questioning.

"Welcome home, Dean."

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